

**Putting the Public in Public Art Galleries:  
The Insurgent Curator and Visual Art as a Critical Form of Creative Inquiry**

by

Scott Kerwin Marsden

A.O.C.A., Ontario College of Art, 1987

M.F.A., York University, 1990

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of the Requirements of the Degree of

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## **SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE**

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Dr. Michael Emme, Supervisor

(Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

Dr. Robert Dalton, Department Member

(Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

Dr. Catherine McGregor, Department Member

(Department of Education Psychology and Leadership)

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Dr. Michael Emme, Supervisor  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Dr. Robert Dalton, Department Member  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Dr. Catherine McGregor, Department Member  
Department of Education Psychology and Leadership

## **ABSTRACT**

My research explores the concept of visual art as a form of critical inquiry and the gallery as a site for critical dialogue and social change. I argue that art galleries can be spaces of change and can be used to mount a critique of contemporary society's dominant narrative of neoliberalism that is being incorporated into our public and private lives. Art galleries are public spheres for civil society that offer citizens opportunities to engage in debate on contemporary issues, where we can expose ourselves to new ideas, stimulate our minds, and explore other ways of knowing and becoming agents of change.

My investigation takes the form of researching, developing, and presenting an exhibition of selected photographs as part of the exhibition, *Open Conversations*. This exhibition explored the art practice of Canadian photographers Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, who have developed an artistic process that involves direct collaboration in the production of art employing a participatory, socially engaged framework.

I claim the role of “insurgent curator” (a person who challenges the current state of affairs) through my attempt to locate my inquiry within my current praxis as curator, that is, within a critical form of creative inquiry.

As an insurgent curator, I attempt to insert alternative histories and perspectives in a public art gallery as a means of offering different ways of knowing contemporary society.

The concept of critical inquiry and the use of dialogical aesthetics underlie my concept of insurgent curatorial practice. I propose that the use of dialogue has important implications in helping to situate art galleries as public spaces that invite participation, dialogue, and community, and thereby have a profound impact on visitors' meaning making. Through the use of critical creative inquiry, I ask how this research can generate individual transformation and help create progressive forms of social action.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*Truth is not to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction.*

(Bakhtin, 1984, p. 110).

As the gap between rich and poor widens and a growing number of environmental crises grip the public, the need for members of civil society to have public and open spaces to explore contemporary issues is becoming more critical. Over the last few decades, society has been going through major changes; worldviews, values, social and political structures, the arts and institutions are all changing.

My research explores the concept of visual art as a form of critical creative inquiry and the gallery as a public site for critical dialogue. Based on my research, I assert that art galleries can be spaces of change and should be used to mount a critique of the dominant form of contemporary thought called neoliberal fundamentalism. A working definition of neoliberalism consists of a series of policies that provide unrestrained access to free market capitalism regardless of the harm this will cause to the majority of society. Neoliberalism also calls for the reduction of government regulation on everything from protecting the environment, safety on the job, public transportation, water regulation, and natural resources. Neoliberal policies have also resulted in the selling of publicly owned enterprises and key services such as banks, railroads, highways, electricity, and the wholesale transfer of natural resources to private investors. Neoliberalism includes eliminating the concept of responsibility to community and replacing it with individual responsibility, putting pressure on the poorest and most vulnerable to find their own solutions to lack of health care, education, and social security.

Robert McChesney provides insight into the effects of neoliberalism on the public sphere:

[T]o be effective, democracy requires that people feel a connection to their fellow citizens, and that this connection manifests itself though [sic] a variety of nonmarket organizations and institutions. A vibrant political culture needs community groups, libraries, public schools, neighborhood organizations, cooperatives, public meeting places, voluntary associations, and trade unions to provide ways for citizens to meet, communicate, and interact with their fellow citizens. Neoliberal democracy, with its notion of the market *über alles*, takes dead aim at this sector. Instead of citizens, it produces consumers. Instead of communities, it produces shopping malls. The net result is an atomized society of disengaged individuals who feel demoralized and socially powerless. (McChesney, 1999, p.43)

I assert that contemporary society has incorporated this version of neoliberalism into seeing and understanding contemporary art and that this has become a dominant narrative in many North American art galleries. I propose that art galleries need to be open, public spaces where we can explore alternative perspectives to the neoliberal agenda that dominates our contemporary subconscious and society. Art galleries are positioned to become public spheres that can offer the public opportunities to debate contemporary issues. Art galleries are spaces where we can be exposed to new ideas, stimulate our minds, and explore other ways of knowing and becoming agents of change.

My research incorporates Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concept of dialogue, a process in which dialogue and collaboration are used as forms of socially engaged practice. Kester (2004) argues that dialogical aesthetics could be viewed as a kind of "locus of different meaning, interpretations, and points of view" (Kester, 2004, p. 12).

In Chapter Two, I investigate how Bakhtin's concept of meaning making between speaker and listener, as applied by Kester, relates to the relationships between artists, exhibitions and curators, and viewers. I utilize Bakhtin's concept of dialogue and his theory of how incorporating other people's thoughts in daily conversations reveals conflicting voices and makes visible varied and opposing worldviews. As part of the research for this dissertation, I collaborated on an interactive artwork that explored dialogue and communication and incorporated an interview process as one of the essential elements of an art practice that is based on "a new aesthetic and theoretical paradigm of the work of art as process" (Kester, 2004, p. 12).

In Chapter Three, I apply Bakhtin's (1981) concept of dialogue to the creation of a collaborative site-specific photo-narrative and demonstrate how this project uses a process of connecting with others and creating a potential for community engagement. Such processes will help then make connections with others, explore the concept of dialogue as a form of socially engaged practice, and encourage a process of creative learning.

Chapter Four explores how Condé and Beveridge's use of visual art as a creative form of critical inquiry and their art practice utilizes participatory action as a means of establishing a dialogue with the community they work with, the public space they use to articulate alternative contemporary narratives and make links with artistic and non-art audiences.

Chapter Five examines my findings on how an insurgent curatorial practice that uses dialogue and collaboration can explore alternative approaches in working with art galleries. It is also possible to discuss how the art gallery can function as a site for multiple ways of knowing and understanding our contemporary world.

In Chapter Six, I propose the development of an insurgent curatorial strategy that asserts that art making is a legitimate form of inquiry that provokes the viewer to rethink personal assumptions. As an insurgent curator, I explore how art galleries can be situated as public spaces where members of the community meet to explore contemporary issues. By introducing dialogue into curatorial practices, marking an emergence of cultural institutions' engagement in diversity and opening a space for public voices, this dissertation explores how an insurgent curatorial strategy is marking the emergence of a cultural institutions engagement and opening a space that can provoke artists, curators, and other stakeholders to broaden their understanding of each other and explore their participation and responsibilities in contemporary social, cultural, and political issues.

I propose that art making is a process that involves the voices of other artists, art histories and the learning process in becoming an artist, and a series of conversations that are an essential part of the art-making process of the work. An awareness of the content and the context of the artwork can be actively cultivated in the audience and should not be separate from the viewer. Kester asserts that engagement with audiences is a dialogical process and makes assumptions about the relationship between art and the broader social and political world, and about the knowledge that aesthetic experience is capable of producing.

Visual artworks are products of culture and represent the perspectives of the artist but as inventions, in the sense that Bakhtin describes, they can also reflect the issues of the contemporary world of the artist and become part of dialogue.

### **The Problem**

I assert that the private interests and personal tastes of the upper classes of contemporary society have influence on how some public art galleries function within the modernist notion of the art object as autonomous and separated from the everyday world. Some in the traditional museum establishments have given themselves the right to define what is to be seen and experienced by the segment of the population that is served.

Carole Duncan (1995) writes that,

to control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and its highest values and truth... exhibitions in art museums do not of themselves change the world.... But, as public spaces, they constitute an arena in which community may test, examine, and imaginatively live both older truths and possibilities for new ones... Art museums are at the centre of this process in which the past and the future intersect. (p. 8)

The reviewed literature reveals how some art galleries are beginning to make a fundamental shift away from their traditional roles as a voice for dominant culture towards being a public space for community dialogue and the ongoing construction of meaning. My curation included the commissioning of new work, and interview. My research combines participation and observation to explore the emergent field of social practice as an art process and considers how small art galleries can be used as sites to explore a wide range of issues such as community activism, and participatory art practices. I argue that both galleries and artists need to be open to re-defining their roles within contemporary society.

More will be said about these trends in the literature review where I make the link between how our way of understanding the world is influenced by the words of other people in our lives and our natural connection to and moral obligation to each other.

### **Art Galleries and Issues of Class**

The role that class plays in the field of art depends on the distinction between ‘high art’ and ‘low culture.’ The foundation of high art goes back to Immanuel Kant’s notion that the purpose of aesthetics is to cultivate notions of taste and the idea that issues that deal with social and political concerns are excluded from traditional notions of aesthetic contemplation. This idea that the focus of art works is only the issues of aesthetics has influenced many areas of artistic production, including audience, artists, and the gallery. This ideology has heavily influenced how art galleries structure their exhibition spaces and the gallery is a space that is set apart from any concerns other than art. The class background of those in the field of art is a fundamental part of the creative process. Many artists from middle or upper middle class backgrounds tend to reproduce the artistic values and interests of those who are socially and economically advantaged. These values include concerns with notions of beauty, form, aesthetics, and mediums. Issues related to political and social concerns are in most cases absent from the process of art making and eventually form art galleries.

### **Dialogic/Insurgent Curator**

My interest in this research comes from my time as a political activist and cultural worker/artist who engaged for many years in protests, public interventions, and cultural activities focused on class, power, and equity. These experiences led to my current role as an insurgent curator, exploring questions of art making as a critical form of creative inquiry and investigating the forms of knowledge that aesthetic experience is capable of producing. My research was

specifically designed to engage viewers in processes of critical meaning-making involving critical dialogue and social change.

I see myself as an insurgent curator because my use of dialogue as a collaborative process of creative inquiry is a radical form of intervention that is an attempt to disrupt the dominant power relationship between the curator, artist, viewer, and cultural workers. In subsequent chapters, I attempt to reflect on the events and circumstances that led me to pursue my proposed research. This research will be a step toward developing a theoretical analysis of the artist's situation in today's society—a theory of and for the practice of art making.

### **Curatorial Process**

An insurgent is an opportunist who takes advantage of gaps in power to cause change. As demonstrated by the exhibit, interviews, and commissioned work that make up a major part of the contribution of this project, as an insurgent curator, I look for artists, exhibition ideas, and approaches to engagement that can radicalize the gallery's relationship with a broad community. My curatorial practice is part of an emergence of social art practice as a form of engagement in art galleries and offers a public space for critical dialogue and discussion.

### **Research Questions**

My case study focuses on the work of two Toronto artists, Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, who, for over thirty years, have developed an art practice based in aesthetic dialogue with working-class organizations, activists, and community groups. The case study investigates how Condé and Beveridge contextualize their art practice within contemporary society as a critical form of creative inquiry, one that involves both a collaborative social interaction with the public and an important challenge for art galleries. Focusing on these two artists will create a reference point that will help clarify my analysis of art museums' current practices that perpetuate conventional ways of seeing and experiencing visual art.

The case study method is well suited to investigating the experimental knowledge that will allow me to pay special attention to their cultural, social, and political influences. Robert Stake (2008) states that the use of the case study “is defined by interest in an individual case, not by the methods of inquiry used, and that the object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system” (p. 443 & 445). My choice of Condé and Beveridge as my one case study will provide a richer and more in depth study of their art practice as it relates to the focus of my research on dialogue and collaboration.

My role as researcher combines the work of an observer, curator, project facilitator, and participant. By engaging with and reporting on the complexity of the social activities of these two artists, I hope to reveal the larger cultural and communal significance behind the creative processes of Condé and Beveridge, whose unique art practice represents a complex investigation of contemporary issues and articulates the artists’ commitment to the use of dialogue and community collaboration.

As a researcher, I admit my own bias towards Condé and Beveridge and their role in advancing a particular political agenda which is a shared belief in the advancement of making marginalized voices and alternative perspectives visible in public spaces such as art galleries. As will be analyzed in the review of literature, the museum world is built around power relationships between institutions, benefactors, curators, artists and the community. Condé and Beveridge’s art practice is recognized for how it identifies and questions many of those power relationships. By investigating the specific, diverse strategies Condé and Beveridge use to analyze contemporary social, cultural, and political issues and by dialogically engaging them through interview, curation, commissioning of work and observation of their process with community collaborators, I hope that this study will enhance my understanding of museum practice and its impact on community.

## Research Questions

In the case study, I will pose questions, analyze information, and even engage in political action, since the creative critical inquiry that is used by Condé and Beveridge takes the form of socially engaged art practice. Research questions for this study include:

- 1) Is dialogical aesthetics used implicitly or explicitly as a strategy by Condé and Beveridge in their artwork?
- 2) In the community work and exhibition of Condé and Beveridge, what is the relationship between process as methodology and product as findings, and how are these elements made visible to the viewer?
- 3) How does my role as a dialogic insurgent curator disrupt or enhance the art practice of Condé and Beveridge?
- 4) As reflected in Condé and Beveridge's process for this study, what are the implications for helping to promote critical reflection in making artwork more accessible to diverse communities?
- 5) What is the role of participating cultural workers as collaborators in the creation of Condé and Beveridge's artworks?
- 6) How might the assumptions and practices in Condé and Beveridge's work be used to encourage change in gallery practice?

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review examines class disparity and problems related to art galleries. The chapter then looks at Bakhtin's concept of dialogue as a possibility for change. My research explores Kester's use of Bakhtinian dialogue as a strategy for dialogical aesthetics art practice dedicated to addressing marginalized voices and the need for change in the context of contemporary art practice. Finally the literature review tracks the place of collaborative community practice in the gallery, arguing that dialogical aesthetics might serve the need to address class disparity in the gallery world.

### **Class Disparity and the Museum and Art Gallery**

The public museum developed over the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and was used as a public space to educate mostly the working and middle classes of the public about morals, manners and the belief system of the elite. Visitors were seen as receivers of knowledge who needed instruction on how to live in a civilized society. Tony Bennet (1995) states,

the conception of the museum as an institution in which working classes -- provided they dress nicely and curbed any tendency towards unseemly conduct -- might be exposed to the improving influence of the middle classes was critical to its construction as a new social space. (p. 28)

To be rendered serviceable as a government instrument, then, the public museum attached to this exemplary didacticism of objects an exemplary didacticism of personages in arranging for a regulated commingling of classes such that the subordinate classes

might learn, by imitation, the appropriate forms of dress and comportment exhibited by their social superiors (Bennet, 1995, p 28)

The upper class of society saw the potential of turning public spaces into places for their own social, cultural and intellectual class interests and gave themselves the authority to define what is to be consumed or circulated by the population it represents.

Bennett (1995) writes,

In practice, museums, and especially art galleries, have been effectively appropriated by social elites so that rather than functioning as institutions of homogenization, as reforming though they had envisaged, they have continued to play a significant role in differentiating elite from popular classes. (p. 28)

Traditional public art galleries have always been influenced by the private interests and personal tastes of the elite who sit on the boards of these institutions for many years. Many art galleries still function within the modernist notion of autonomy, in which the art object is celebrated as something in and of itself.

“Museums and art galleries and exhibitions helped play the role of civilizing agent of the state within the formation of modern government. “ (Bennett 1995, p. 66) A traditional view of the gallery reinforces the notion of “isolating” the art object so that so nothing from the outside world will intrude and/or interfere with the aesthetic viewing experience

The authority of the museum and art gallery comes from the history of being a repository of official culture used as agent of identity formation. The upper class of society views the purpose of museums and art galleries as spaces of reflection and contemplation, and sees visual art as separate from the everyday world and from a significant section of the population in contemporary society.

To the extent that art and museum experiences are esoteric, requiring exclusive resources to gain access, their meanings are class-specific. Rather than being guided by philanthropic and educational missions, many museums contain economic, social and cultural interest groups behind closed doors including boards of directors, corporations, wealthy benefactors, and affiliated dealers and art collectors from other art galleries both private and public.

In the early part of the last century, many museums turned from programs that stressed the social and moral benefits of art appreciation to programs that stressed the pleasure of viewing.

Benjamin Ives Gilman's book, *Museum Ideals of Purpose and Method* (1918) maintains that, the first obligation of an art museum is to present works of art as just that, as objects of aesthetic contemplation and not as illustrative of historical or archaeological information. (p. 86-87)

More recently, the art critic Donald Kuspit (1992) suggested that some museums see their galleries as sacred spaces and the quest of immortality is the central theme of museums. Kuspit argues that some museums promote the traditional concept that art works will provoke feelings of contact with immortality and give the viewers sense of spiritual-like renewal. For Kuspit, "the success of this transaction depends on whether or not the viewer's narcissistic needs are addressed by the art she or he is seeing." (Duncan, 2005, p. 138n. 29) Many contemporary visual artists as well as others in the art world have the traditional view that art is for art's sake and should be seen as independent from everyday life. Some art galleries reinforce this notion by "isolating" the artwork so nothing from the outside world will intrude and/or interfere with the aesthetic viewing experience. Even in art museums that attempt education, the practice of isolating important originals in aesthetic chapels or niches but never hanging them to make an historic point undercuts art education efforts (Duncan 2005).

A traditional way of seeing a museum or art gallery is as a sacred space, a place of sanctuary removed from the outside world. The museum as shrine leads viewers to give meaning to objects totally unrelated to their original function. Art objects are prioritized over ideas and dialogue. The expertise provides the museum with the rationale that museum objects are authentic masterpieces expressing universal truths in an established canon or standard of excellence. As a shrine, the museum protects its treasures and is a ritual site influenced by church, palace, and ancient temple architecture.

In his sociological survey, Pierre Bourdieu (1969) argues that art museums are chiefly about the maintenance of class distinctions. Bourdieu (1969) asserts that “access to cultural works is the privilege of the cultivated class. Art and cultural consumption are predisposed, consciously and deliberated or not, to fulfill a social function of legitimating social differences.” (p. 37).

Despite museums having existed for more than 200 years, there is no consensus or clarity about what people get out of visiting them, or even about the terms in which the experience could be discussed. “Coffee (2007) also states that art galleries are seen as places for the most educated and well-off citizenry elite and cater to society’s elite—an obstinate characteristic of museums that continues to undermine the public’s perception of and value ascribed to museums. Art galleries have the opportunity to situate themselves in the public sphere but until recently have done little in the way of being fundamental agents of change and advancing the public good. (Coffee, 2007, p.384-385). While contemporary culture is bound to larger social and cultural realities in modern society, more often than not cultural products have been separated according to media and/or discipline, and examined from the perspective of the individual artist and/or the art market. Lucy Lippard

argues that, “this has resulted in an emphasis on objects of culture that has diminished the value of human subjects, increasing the emphasis on individual artists while denying the collective dimension of cultural production.” (Lippard, 1985, p.9) The need for re-framing the contemporary world-view and its assumptions in order to forecast the next step for society has been recognized in many professional spheres.

### **An Analysis of the Contemporary Art World**

Many museums and art galleries have focused their primary mission on developing business plans to generate revenue. The museum and art galleries position themselves as tourist attractions that exhibit blockbuster shows for viewers’ entertainment. The public moves quickly through the galleries to see the great masterpieces and then purchases reproductions of what they saw, in the form of greeting cards, coffee mugs, posters and tea towels. To provide these facilities, many museums and art galleries have undergone extensive building campaigns to construct reception areas, restaurants, shops, bookstores, children’s wings, educational centres and theatres. Some of these museums and art galleries have borrowed ideas from cinema and theme parks to become spectacles that engage all the senses that provoke an aesthetic experience, historical context or as another form of entertainment.

Museums have marketed their authority as tastemakers with great success. Some of their best customers have been corporations, who have generously underwritten major art exhibitions across the country. The motives of these sponsors vary from dedicated public service to putting more gloss on their image and products. Taking art off the pedestal and having it respond to contemporary issues of the time makes museums and corporations uneasy. Museums and corporations can sell art more easily if it stays on that pedestal. By presenting artwork as separate from daily needs, most museums and art galleries encourage consumption for the sake

of consumption revealing deep, abiding interest in dissimulating class distinction behind a system of consumption. (Werner 2005) One of the objectives of neoliberalism is to create a population of consumers whose quest for endless consumption includes contemporary art as an other commodity for future investment and as a form of entertainment and a way to escape from the realities of everyday life.

In most cases, those who attend art galleries are from the upper middle classes and are highly educated (Hill, 2012). A study done by Hill (2010) found that people who decided to become artists tended to be from the middle or upper-middle class and tended to reproduce the artistic values and interests of the socially and economically advantaged. These values included a search for esoteric issues such as beauty and universality. As described in this study, issues related to political and social concerns are rarely explored by those who are the beneficiaries of the status que

The traditional idea that the purpose of art is to lift us to a higher plane of existence through the aesthetic experience has influenced many areas of artistic production including audience, artists, and the gallery. It has also heavily influenced how art galleries structure their exhibition spaces and has contributed to the belief that galleries are spaces set apart from everyday concerns other than art.

Much of contemporary art practice is focused around the modernist concept of the formal appearance of physical objects. Modernist visual art has a long tradition of seeing the artist as a genius who creates masterpieces for the benefit of society. Artists are considered beyond the understanding of most of the population. This perception situates visual art as being separate from the everyday world through a process of mystification.

Kevin Coffee (2007) further asserts,

Museums perform a special role in communicating and legitimizing predominant social relations and the ideological views that reinforce those relations in society. The narratives conveyed by museums are generally viewed as definitive and authoritative, while the objects displayed are presented as emblematic of normative culture. (p. 435)

Likewise sociologists Bourdieu and Darbel (1969) have argued that art museums are chiefly about the maintenance of class distinctions. They assert, “Access to cultural works is the privilege of the cultivated class; however, this privilege has all the outward appearances of legitimacy.” (p. 37)

Bourdieu and Darbel go on to state that

“if this is the function of culture, and if the love of art is the clear mark of the chosen, separating by an invisible and insuperable barrier, those who are touched by it from those who have not received this grace, it is understandable that in the tiniest details of their morphology and their organization, museums betray their true function, which is to reinforce for some the feeling of belonging, and for others the feeling of exclusion.

(Bordieu and Darbel, 1969, p. 112)

The collaborative approach I explore in this research challenges traditional definitions of object making and the role art galleries play in contemporary society. I assert the art making process is social in nature and involves the creation of process-oriented approaches such as collaboration, and participation.

Janes (2009) writes that,

[A]ll museums specialize in assembling evidence based on knowledge, experience, and belief and in making things known - the meaning of ‘bearing witness’. Museums, as

public institutions, are morally and intellectually obliged to question, challenge, or ignore the status quo and officialdom, whenever necessary (p. 384)

Modernist artists reproduce particular values by focusing on aesthetic issues with limited reference to theme and content. In this tradition, a focus on purely aesthetically-based art making situates the gallery as a space only for contemplation and reflection.

Bourdieu and Darbel (1969) suggest that there is a direct connection between class, education, occupation, and culture. They argue that there is a systematic connection between working, middle and upper class educational systems and institutions of artistic and intellectual culture. This connection ensures that particular cultural tastes, interests, and abilities are transmitted along class lines to help perpetuate class and social differences.

Duncan (1995) writes;

[E]xhibitions in art museums do not of themselves change the world... But, as a form of public space, they constitute an arena in which a community may test, examine, and imaginatively live both older truths and possibilities for new ones. It is often said that without a sense of the past, we cannot envisage a future. The reverse is true: without a vision of the future, we cannot construct and access a useable past. Art museums are at the centre of this process in which the past and the future intersect. Above all they are spaces in which communities can work out the values that identify them as communities.” (pp. 133-134)

My research examines the nature of the public sphere in which galleries and museums operate and investigates how the authority of the gallery/museum as a contested site plays a simultaneous role as a voice of dominant culture and a public space for opinion and meaning-making. This research proposes questions around the process of how art galleries and museums

can begin to move away from its self-appointed cultural authority toward and more holistic concept of multicultural exchange with an emphasis on dialogue and on-going construction of meaning.

The museum and art gallery can become a community space for sharing memories and stories — a multiplicity of versions of history offered in the public sphere with the intent of community building. Inviting participation, dialogue and involvement, and constructing community are all essential elements of becoming a non-exclusive public sphere. The case study I examine in this dissertation offers an alternative view of the function of art and issues of form, theme, and context are essential components of a more holistic understanding of art and the function of art galleries as public places of discourse.

Hooper-Greenhill argues that over the last half of the twenty century many museums have undergone a huge change in how visitors interact with the institution. Hooper-Greenhill (2008) claims,

visitors who went museum were there to be instructed and absorb knowledge given to them. The reconceptualization of the museum helps to situate the viewer as an active participant in understanding different process of interpretation and who can participate inside the museum in creation of knowledge and experiences. (p. 125)

## **Bakhtin and Dialogue**

### **Self and Others: The moral dimensions of dialogue**

According to Bakhtin (1981), almost everything we use in our speech can be implicitly or explicitly linked to someone else's words and thoughts. In each of us, there is an ongoing struggle between our own words and the words of others, which have become part of our inner voice (p. 343). Bakhtin argues that dialogic discourse—any cultural expression built on

multiple, even conflicting voices in conversation with each other—can reveal deeper social truths and contradictions precisely because it rejects a single, absolute authoritative voice.

Bakhtin proposes that the meanings of words, objects, and images are dependent on the words, objects, and images around them. The audience who interprets them utilizes these conflicting voices to construct their ideological consciousness.

Bakhtin (1981) defines ideology as a worldview or system of ideas that frames the way in which a given social group sees reality. He states, “The ideological becoming of a human being is a process of selectively assimilating the words of others” (p. 341). These ways of thinking constitute our consciousness and how we identify our own subjectivity. Each individual is constituted by internal voices—various subject positions—that have been incorporated into a person’s thoughts.

There is always “a set of conditions, social, historical, meteorological, or physiological ones, that will ensure a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 428).

By revealing other possible meanings and the ideologies behind dominant discourse, new interpretations and change in points of view can be examined. Every historical moment has its own language, which represents various perspectives about the world.

Bakhtin (1981) argues that people’s everyday speech and dialogues are what others talk about, remember, comment on, argue about, and in some cases assume as their own words and worldviews. His dialogical discourse reveals an anti-ideological, anti-hierarchical politics, which is linked to everyday language, used by ordinary people and can be understood as an expression of marginalized voices. Bakhtin places the voices of others and their discourses at the centre of his theory of how people develop their own ideologies.

He proposes that we learn and grow as we interact with and assimilate the voices of those around us into our consciousness. “Each of these voices and points of view should be represented in subtly different languages that are identifiable in terms of the close relationship between content, ideological orientation, style, compositional structure, and even speech setting” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 60).

When we assimilate others’ discourses, there is a significant effect on how we develop our own ideological make-up (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). The words and thoughts of others may influence how we interact with each other and define the world around us. Some forms of discourse may be designed to suppress the destabilizing aspects of language use by seeking to uphold a particular sanctioned point of view in what Bakhtin calls authoritative versus persuasive discourses. He argues that we struggle to assimilate these two distinct categories of discourse. Authoritative discourse may be defined as:

[T]he word of the fathers. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past. It is a prior discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it among other possible discourses that are its equal. (p. 342–343) The transmission and representation of the authoritative discourse frame it as important and demanding that we acknowledge it, make it our own, so that it persuades us internally. These struggles are required to come to a new understanding. The struggle with another discourse is a key influence on ideological consciousness and becoming. (Bakhtin 1981,p. 342)

Bakhtin also argues that at any given moment of its historical existence, language represents the coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past,

between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles, and so forth, all given a bodily form.

These “languages” of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming a new socially typifying “language” (p. 291). This process juxtaposes different perspectives of the same thing to create an in-between-ness, a space where new interpretations can be created.

Bakhtin (1981) describes, “open-ended dialogue” as “the single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human life.” (p. 287). He states that language in the form of conflicting discourses constitutes us as conscious, thinking subjects and enables us to give meaning to the world and act to transform it. The familiar ways in which we talk to others in our everyday affairs and talk about the world constitutes an idea system, an ideology.

By acquiring language through the words of others, a foundation for particular ways of thinking is laid. This also constitutes a consciousness and the positions with which we can identify a sense of self and subjectivity. Our experience is given meaning in language through a range of discourse systems of meaning, which are often contradictory and constitute conflicting versions of our social reality and which in turn serve conflicting interests.

This range of discourses and languages supports social institutions and practices that are integral to the maintenance and contestation of dominant forms of social power. I suggest that those conflicting voices, the assimilation of others’ words, and the meanings that dominate social institutions can be explored inside art galleries as spaces for ideological struggle and contestation. By understanding what dominant ideologies represent, it is possible to examine the contradictions within the social constructs between the conscious self and the constructed self.

Bakhtin claims that if we are aware of these conflicting voices, we will be able to see other subject positions, which could resist and explore fixed discourses and other subject positions.

How we struggle with the assimilation of discourse will affect how we develop our view of the world and our system of ideas. Bakhtin (1981) describes

internally persuasive discourse that one can learn from another and not be oppressed by an authoritative voice... The struggle and dialogic interrelationships of these categories of ideological discourse, that is, authoritarian and internally persuasive discourses, are what usually determine the history of an individual ideological consciousness. (p. 342)

It is important for the reader to understand how Bakhtin conceptualizes the functions of dialogue. Bakhtin (1984) uses the term “dialogue” to describe a primary characteristic of human life: “Dialogic relationships permeate all human speech, and all relationships and manifestations in life in general, everything that has meaning and significance” (p. 40). In this next section, as I explore these ideas I draw significantly from art historian Grant Kester’s work, largely because he incorporates Bakhtin’s theories in his own study of dialogical aesthetics, a theory of dialogical aesthetics focusing on community and social issues, according to Kester.

Bakhtin asserts that each human is at the centre of relationships with other human beings, and events in the world and that all are interrelated to each other through our use of the words, thoughts and beliefs of others. What makes each one of us unique is how we interpret and incorporate the influences that make up each of us.

Bakhtin also argues that the act of creativity is connected to life, is related to human beings and that we are all answerable to life and have responsibilities to each other and that we have a moral obligation to each other that can be performed through creative interactions.

Deborah Haynes, in her book *Bakhtin and the Visual Arts*, (1995) provides a foundation for Bakhtin's theory and visual art. According to Haynes, Bakhtin sees artwork created by the artist having the same function as 'an utterance' that expresses something about an event, place or person and begins a dialogue with an audience. Haynes writes that, "An utterance can never be abstract, but must occur between two persons; speaker and listener, creator and audience, artist and viewer" (p. 296). She asserts that just as in Bakhtin's notion of dialogue, where we can know other persons, the world, and ourselves, in the same way an artist begins a dialogue with images and shares a creative form of critical inquiry about the world.

Using Bakhtin's theories of answerability, chronotype, and unfinalizability, helps make links to moral values of creativity. The subjectivity of the viewer is critical in "constituting and defining the aesthetic object" and giving meaning to the artwork (Haynes, 1995, p. 152). Bakhtin's concept of answerability describes the creative act for artists as part of life and of lived experience of artists.

### **The unfinalizable self and the place of art in dialogue**

Bakhtin's concept of the unfinalizability of human beings represents the open-ended nature of dialogue, and that ideas live in dialogue where they develop, change, and contest one another. As Rule explains: "There is no final word because each word is an answer that poses another question and as humans we are incomplete and unfinished and are in a permanent state of searching" (Rule, 2009, p. 10).

Haynes goes on to say that, "Perhaps, the most significant contribution of Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas to contemporary aesthetics, art theory, and art history is his affirmation that art must exist in an integral relationship with life." (Haynes, 1994, p. 301).

The concept of unfinalizability as a process that is in a constant state of flux and change can be incorporated as a curatorial strategy into museum context that supports the establishment of an on-going process of dialogue with the viewer in the museum. Unfinalizability proposes that the art-making process is constant, exists in relationship to life, and is connected to a dialogical process that requires viewers to be actively in an on-going dialogue.

Haynes observes that, “the creative process is in a constant state of flux and change and can be used as a model for change in society. (Haynes, 1994, p. 300).

Unfinalizability proposes that creativity, the creative process and works of art are ultimately unfinalizable. “Unfinalizability gives us a way to speak about the problems of representing the changing world through the artistic lens of our diverse and ever-changing subjectivities.” (Haynes, 1994, p 300.)

Using Bakhtin’s theories of answerability, outsideness and unfinalizability, we can make links to moral values of creativity. The subjectivity of the viewer is critical in “constituting and defining the aesthetic object” and giving meaning to the artwork (Haynes, 1995, p. 152).

Through these concepts we construct reality and human society. As Bakhtin writes,

“Aesthetic activity humanizes nature and naturalizes the human.” Bakhtin’s theories make a connection to the relationship between the creator, the artwork and the viewer.

Bakhtin also states that there are ethical implications of the creative act and the artist is an active agent and is central to the artist’s cultural function. (Haynes, 1995, p 157).

Bakhtin’s concept of unfinalizability allows one to explore questions about whether an artwork can ever be finished, and whether the audience’s reception of the artwork can ever be completed. Likewise, Haynes discusses unfinalizability where she states that both art and life are open-ended. Even though a person’s life is finalized in death, that person’s work lives on, to be

extended and developed by the words of others and providing insight into important historical artworks.

Haynes goes on to state that “The creative process, too, is unfinalizable, except insofar as an artist says, ‘I stop here.’ But because it is always open to change and transformation, artistic work can be a model for the possibility of change in the larger world outside the studio.”

(Haynes, 1995, p.300) Haynes’ exploration of Bakhtin’s concept of aesthetics is based on phenomenology and “the unique human being, located spatially and temporally and thus having a particular relationship to all other persons, objects, and events in the world” (Haynes, 1995, p. 294).

Bakhtin’s most important contribution to contemporary aesthetics is that art must have an integral relationship with life in order to reach the potential of creative voice and vision (Haynes, 1995). Bakhtin explores how we need to see beyond the individual’s perspective is to engage with the world from a participants’ consciousness rather than an observing one. He advances the idea of empathetic insight as a necessary component of a dialogue. The awareness of the content and the context of the artwork are actively cultivated in the audience and are not meant to be separate from the viewer. Bakhtin (1981) states that:

The artist is in fact someone who knows how to be active outside lived life, someone who not only partakes in life from within practical, social, political, moral and religious life, and understands it from within, but someone who also loves it from without, loves life where it does not exist for itself, where it is turned outside itself and is in need of a self-activity. The divinity of the artist consists in partaking of this supreme outsideness, but the situatedness of the artist outside the event of other people’s lives and outside the world of this life is, of course, a special and justified kind of participation in the event of

being. To find an essential approach to life from outside is the task an artist must accomplish. In doing this the artist and art as a whole create a completely new vision of the world, a new image of the world, a new reality of the world's mortal flesh, unknown to any of the other culturally creative activities. (p. 174-191)

Berger, Gonzales and Wilson (2001) write about dialogue as a convergence of languages:

Dialogical expression refuses to accept the arrogant assumption that there is one language, one image, one isolated story through which the absolute truth must be articulated. It acknowledges the conditional nature of representation—that the meaning of any utterance or object or image is ultimately dependent on the words, objects, and images around it and on the reader who interprets it. It brings the various languages and codes of culture into relationship with each other in an effort to reveal the contradictions and complexity of human existence. (p. 13)

From their perspective, the voices of the artists, their influences and perspectives, all contribute to the creation of dialogue that needs to be seen through an aesthetic, thematic, and contextual lens to be fully understood and appreciated.

According to Rule (2006):

The goal of dialogue is creative understanding. This understanding is “created” in the sense that it is new, dynamic and provisional—rather than “given” in the sense of a confirmation of what already exists. Creative understanding necessarily involves differences and “outsideness”: our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are others. (p. 84)

### **Chronotope and Dialogue**

According Haynes definition of chronotope “there is no experience outside of space and time, and both of these always change” (1995, p. 166). Struggling to find meaning through the

exploration of diverse perspectives of the world, shaped through many languages, experiences, and concepts of time, can be read as developing one's chronotope. Museums and art galleries are ideal public space where the concept of chronotope can be explored through artworks that explore collaboration and participation and encourage engagement with the artworks.

Our subjectivities are made up of many discourses that reveal many subject-positions that open the door for resistance to authoritarian and fixed positions. Thus, from Bakhtin's perspective, human knowledge is constructed from personal experiences and is a reflection of the mind as well as of nature. The authority of discourse may influence our ideological relationship with the world and affect our behaviour in the world. The authoritative word demands that we make it our own. It enters our consciousness and we confirm or reject it because it is connected with political power, or an institution, a person and it stands or fails with that authority.

Human beings are shaped by the words they use because consciousness develops when they learn a language that they take from others. The fact that each individual's chronotope is constituted by more than one discourse that reveals many subject positions opens the door for resistance to one fixed position and the possibility of other positions.

The complexity of our chronotope can accommodate reversals of meaning and enables the subject to speak in his/her own right. The concept of chronotope is illustrated in the artwork *Calling the Shots* by Condé and Beveridge. This photo narrative examines the anti-globalization protests from various perspectives including the protesters shown in television to a world trade press conference. The images of the protestors shift from a peaceful form of dissent to the violence of police confrontation as seen by the mass media.

In *Calling the Shots*, Conde and Beveridge examine the anti-globalization movement from the perspective of the activists, police, and media. The message sent by the media is one of

many perspectives that artwork examines around issues such as globalization. The protests are staged for the media as much as the media attempts to reconstruct them as spectacles of violence.

The violence of protest is contrasted with the duty of police to protect private property and preserving the peace. The characters represented in the photograph represent different interests regarding one issue. As a complex tableau, *Calling the Shots* is both a single story and the meeting of many stories. From a Bakhtian perspective there are many contradictory chronotopes here that a viewer is compelled to engage in the spaces of the gallery and the space within the image itself over time. The image encourages discourse, but resists an authoritarian single meaning.

### **Calling the Shots 2002**



I am using Bakhtin's (1981) concept of multiple and conflicting voices to help art galleries/museums explore the potential of becoming spaces where the public can come and sharing stories, of histories. I am suggesting that Bakhtin's conception of dialogue can be used in art galleries to help visitors engage with that they see, and explore possibilities of connecting with others and create community. Through the incorporation of conflicting voices and through the words of others, I propose that art galleries can become sites where visual art's potential to interrupt the dominant mainstream narrative and offer different ways of seeing can be examined and tested. I think the concept of dialogue is an important part of the art-making process, and can lead to new engagements in art galleries with artists, communities, and the public. Bakhtin's concepts provide the basis for the re-conceptualization of art making that stimulates debate and exploration both inside and outside art galleries and museums (Kester, 2004)

In my case study, in this dissertation, I utilize the concept of dialogical aesthetics to reveal a complex and interdependent network of artists, images, words, and different ways of understanding the world that involve individual perspectives, diverse cultural and community narratives. The meanings the viewer could construct from the exhibition *Open Conversations* were subjective and comprised of the experiences, knowledge, attitudes, and values of viewers. Subjectivity is constantly being reconstituted in dialogue each time we think and/or speak. As we acquire language, we learn to give meaning to our experience according to particular ways of thinking and speaking which predate our entry into language.

Robert Stam (1988) writes about Bakhtin's theory: "dialogism refers to open-ended possibilities generated by all discursive practices of a culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances in which the artist text is situated" (p. 191).

Stam asserts that Bakhtin's dialogism applies simultaneously to everyday speech, to popular culture, and to the literary and artistic traditions. He goes on to say that the idea of exploring culture through a "diffuse dissemination of ideas" has implications for contemporary art galleries as "conceptual space[s] to examine many cultures and millennia of artistic production" (p. 191). Bakhtin's theory embraces and celebrates difference and "calls attention to all oppressive hierarchies of power, not only those derived from class but also those generated by gender, race, and age" (Stam, 1988, p. 234).

Bakhtin's detractors call his theories over-simplified complex theories on relations and social condition as utopian and understated (Ramlo, 2014).

"Dialogism calls attention to the issues of power and oppressive hierarchies, and is appropriate for an analysis of oppressive and marginalized practices. " In reality, the dominant voice will continue to dominate despite its willingness to engage with oppositional voices." (Cavell-Back, 2003, p. 25- 26).

For Bakhtin, dialogue like this comes out of mixing many social voices, ideas and world views. Art galleries have the potential to become public forums for cultural diversity for under-represented voices – sites where dominant discourses can be critiqued by juxtaposing competing voices and where the subordinated narratives chronotopes that have always been there can be articulated. Concepts such as unfinalizability and chronotopes can help situate art galleries as public spaces that instigate on-going dialogues.

## **Grant Kester and the Concept of Dialogical Aesthetics**

### **The role of dialogue in artistic production**

Bakhtin describes dialogue as a process in which dialogue and collaboration are used as forms of socially engaged practice. His theory provides the basis for American art historian

Grant Kester's (2004) concept of dialogical aesthetics, a form of creative critical inquiry, which is beginning to stimulate debate and exploration both inside and outside art galleries and museums. By revealing other possible meanings behind the dominant discourses such as neoliberalism, new interpretations and alternative perspective are possible. My research explores Kester's (2004) concept of dialogical aesthetics, the importance of the ethics of artistic production, and interpretation of artwork as part of a collaborative artistic process.

Kester (2004) has played a significant role in identifying an aesthetics embedded in the quality of the dialogue and communication of an interactive work. He writes of "a new aesthetic and theoretical paradigm of the work of art as process" (p. 12). This concept of dialogical aesthetics, which he has traced as a movement with its own historical roots, underscores the importance of the collaborative element. Kester suggests that combining Clifford's (1997) idea of "the power of individuals to act or create effect" (p. 192) with Bakhtin's argument for heteroglossia, autonomy of voices in text, together represents the potential for collaboration with individuals, artists and community members.

Bakhtin and Kester each examine the capacity of individuals to take part in dialogue that can effect both individual and societal change. Kester (2004) claims that subjectivity is formed "through discourse and intersubjective exchange itself" (p. 112), where galleries are potential sites for mixing different ways of knowing and where people with diverse viewpoints can analyze dominant discourses. Hutchison and Collins (2009) propose that a conceptual link could be made between the idea of dialogue and the contact zone toward "collaboration and dialogue" and meaning-making. I used these concepts in my examination of how art galleries can become contact zones, creating spaces for many voices to interact with each other in a "dialogical process of making artwork with communities" (Hutchison & Collins, 2009, p. 92).

According to Kester (2004),

The artist may well recognize relationships or connections that the community members have become inured to, while the collaborators will also challenge the artist's preconceptions about the community itself and about his or her own function as an artist. What emerges is a new set of insights, generated at the intersection of both perspectives and catalyzed through the collaboration production of a given project. (p. 95)

Hammersley (2009) describes Kester's socially engaged art practices as using "conversational ideas and methodologies as central modus operandi" noting that "these artworks provide context rather than content" (p.176).

Hammersley suggests that Kester sees the "dialogism of Bakhtin as the foundational theory model of these activist art practices" (p. 176).

Both Kester and Bakhtin have a shared commitment to phenomenological engagement with the viewer through dialogue. I claim that Bakhtin's theory on dialogue and Kester's concept of conversation provides the basis for the development of concepts of collaboration, for artists, community members and the public to create a participatory and contemporary form of visual and curatorial practice.

Loraine Lesson (2009) suggests that,

[A] more radical idea than this is the concept that it is not the artist, or the critics, who create art or determine its meaning, but any individual who interprets it. Originating out of the theorist Roland Barthes' notion of the death of the author, which removes the limits of a text and makes its meaning infinite with possibilities, artworks can allow not just for shared participation but also shared reception. (p. 16)

The collaborative process explored in this research proposes to situate the artist and gallery workers as co-participants in the creation of new ways of exploring dialogue through creative inquiry. This was done through collaborative participation in the creation of a dialogical artwork that explores a new concept of understanding of dialogue used to create a new collaborative artwork.

Kester (2004) argues that dialogical aesthetics could be viewed as a kind of conversation, a “locus of different meaning, interpretations, and points of view” (p. 10). He states that “participatory art is not a thing, but a process of and believes that artworks created with a dialogical aesthetic are not isolated objects on pedestals but ones that are created through the actions of multiple individuals” (p. 10).

Kester further clarifies the process, (2004) stating,

“In dialogical practice, the artist whose perceptions are informed by his or her own training, past projects and lived experience, comes into a given site or community characterized by its own unique constellation of social and economic forces, personalities, and traditions. In the exchange that follows, both the artist and his or her collaborators will have their existing perceptions challenged.” (p. 95)

The idea of dialogical aesthetics, as described by Kester, is not simply about collaboration. It is concerned with ethics. Anthony Downey (2009) examines issues of ethics versus aesthetics and suggests that in many collaborative art projects, there seems to be more concern with theme and context rather than the artistic form used to investigate the project. Downey examines collaborative and participative art practice as a way of helping to define an alternative aesthetic that makes links to ethical issues, the many voices of viewers and community concerns.

Community-based dialogic collaborations emphasize process, and inclusion of people from a wide variety of community groups resembles dialogic collaboration, which focuses primarily on “the creative orchestration of dialogical exchange” (Kester, 2004, p. 189).

Downey (2009) argues,

“We need, in sum, a theory of collaboration and participation that employs an ethics of engagement, not as an afterthought or a means by which to deconstruct such practices, but as a way of re-inscribing the aesthetics as a socio-political praxis. “ (p.603)

Kester’s works were crucial to helping frame the collaborative and participatory project *Public Matters* photo-narrative that served as a focal point for both the curatorial and research elements of this study. *Public Matters* explored the relationship between the process of art making and the dialogue with the cultural workers as co-collaborators to propose a new meaning making process in an art gallery and establish a dialogue with the public to begin to re-define cultural issues and the connection to the broader community.

### **The Role of Artist in Social Commentary**

The introduction of dialogue into museum practices marks an emergence of cultural institutions’ engagement in diversity and opens a space for public voices to enter gallery spaces. This process is an essential part of contemporary museum and galleries practice if curators are interested in the way a visitor constructs meaning through the examination of categories of meaning. Learning in galleries and museums is a process of making meaning that offers visitors the opportunity to draw connections, explore new ideas, and create endless storylines through visual art and historical exhibits situate museums and art galleries are sites where dominant discourses can be critiqued through diverse points of view.

Drawing heavily on Bakhtin, Kester makes assumptions about the relationship between art, the broader societal issues, and the potential impact on the political world. Kester (2004) also

“they define themselves as artists through their ability to catalyze understanding, to mediate exchange, and to sustain an on-going process of empathetic identification and critical analysis” (Kester, 2004 p. 118)

The function of art as social commentary has roots in the nineteenth century with artists such as Goya who deliberately challenged the political and religious systems of the day.

I assert that one of the roles of dialogical aesthetics is to explore how artists and their co-collaborators pursue a creative project that is of mutual interest in transforming society and creating community among the participants in the project. This assertion is articulated by the process used in the creation of *Public Matters* and the exhibition, *Open Conversations*, examined later in this research.

There are a significant number of visual artists who have defined their art practice around the facilitation of dialogue among communities and who are exploring the concept of dialogue as a form of social engaged art practice. These artists include Suzanne Lacy, Loraine Lesson, and Fred Lonidier, who have all defined their art practice around the facilitation of dialogue among diverse communities and networks (Kester, 2012). Fred Lonidier is one of the leading pioneers of the arts and trade union movement in the USA. His work explores the possibilities of photography applied to trade union campaigns for social justice, labour history, and social change. His work has recently focused on workers’ rights and cross-border labour struggles and solidarity between U.S. and Mexican workers.

Many contemporary artists see one of the role’s they play is to reveal the contradictions unpleasant truths and have a critical view of society. One of of Lonidier’s ethical commitments as an artists is to work is to help articulate the links between issues of class, social justice and

broader societal change that will challenge traditional beliefs about working class issues and help make visible the economic and social complexities of contemporary society.

The use of dialogical aesthetics in this research was used to explore the ethic of art-making practices using forms of dialogue with artists and creative collaborators from diverse communities in museums. This was used as means of facilitating social change.

To explicitly address the relationships inside art galleries and their collective sense of their responsibility to communities, the concept of dialogical aesthetics in this research went beyond the creation of an artwork and offered the viewing public opportunities to become involved in a collaborative and participatory dialogical process.

Kester (2004) examines collaborative and participative art practice as a way of helping to define aesthetic and ethical issues.

“In the exchange that follows, both the artist and his or her collaborators will have their existing perceptions challenged. The artist may well recognize relationships or connections that the community members have become inured to, while the collaborators will also challenge the artist’s preconceptions about the community itself and about his or her own function as an artist... What emerges is a new set of insights, generated at the intersection of both perspectives and catalyzed through the collaboration production of a given project.” (Kester, 2004, p. 95)

For Kester, the ethics and aesthetics of artworks and how they interact with the viewer are critical. He writes, the “creative possibilities of mediated intersubjective exchange. The goal is a transformation of human consciousness in a way that enhances our capacity for the compassionate recognition of difference, both within ourselves and in others” (2012, p. 185).

Kester (2012) claims that

[a] closer analysis of collaborative and collective art practices can reveal a more complex model of social change and identity, one in which the binary oppositions of divided versus coherent subjectivity, desiring singularity vs. totalizing collective, liberating distanciation versus stultifying interdependence, are challenged and complicated. Dialogical practices do challenge some traditional assumptions about the status of the ethical in modernist art. (p. 89)

Kestor's position, and the one I am embracing, has its critics. Charnley (2011) describes dialogical aesthetics as a compromise built on encouraging an activist art that is ethically grounded while at the same time needing use of the definitions and categories of 'art' in order to achieve politico-aesthetic aims.

Charnley claims that,

Activist art, if it is to remain close to its political aims, requires at the very least a double address: on the one hand there is the attempt to work towards an egalitarian form of social relation, on the other the basic exclusivity of the term 'art', when viewed in sociological terms. This exclusivity, to put it crudely, attracts money and prestige, attracts participants, and requires a particular type of language. (p. 52)

I would propose that the artworks in the exhibition *Open Conversations* are not only looking towards a solution but are demonstrating how activist art based on collaboration and participation attempts to establish a dialogue with viewer and can identify with and understand the issues explored in the artworks and have nothing to do with making money or becoming part of the art market. Meban (2009) reinforces the complex convergence of interests in contemporary art galleries by suggesting that they can begin to reconceive art practice as a "site of transformative education and the possibility, in which the ethics of self and other relations,

socio-political activism, and the reinsertion of art into the concerns of everyday life become paramount” (p. 38).

Charnley (2011) writes that Kester defines this type of work as “an engagement with the audiences, which is dialogical in nature and makes assumptions about the relationship between art and the broader social and political world, and about the knowledge that aesthetic experience is capable of producing.”

Lesson (2009) suggests that the interaction between ...artist and individual and actions of multiple individuals acting in a shared authorship redefines the relationship between viewer and artwork and the redefining authorship has the potential to disrupt the concept that it is not the artist, or the critics, who create a work or determine its meaning, but any individual who interprets it... This on-going and unending process, which allows viewers and readers to speak and respond to each other both within the artwork and outside of it to interpret its meaning. (p. 16)

### **Dialogue and Contact Zones**

Kester’s concepts explore how the use of dialogical aesthetics can engage the artists, artwork and viewer. I utilize Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue as part of a foundation for how art galleries can become spaces or contact zones for members of the community to engage in dialogue and debate. As public spaces, art galleries can help facilitate the sharing of individual memories and stories—multiple versions of history offered with the intent of building community.

Because the concept of dialogue is expanded from Bakhtin’s focus on literature to become a wider metaphor with Kester’s focus on visual art and mine on the museum, its promise

of mutual engagement becomes more complex. In the polymedia context of visual art and museum spaces it implies multiple and conflicting voices can reveal many ways of knowing.

Hutchison and Collins (2009) explore James Clifford's theory of the "contact zone" to examine the power dynamics represented in museum collection. I suggest that art galleries can become "contact zones" and democratic spaces for everyone. Art galleries can be open spaces for many voices to interact with each other in a dialogical process that encourages a community based collaboration and participation.

The exhibition *Open Conversations* explored this concept by bringing together artists, project and collaborators, as well as me as researcher/curator/participant, to establish contact by participating in the creation of site-specific artwork and presenting it along with a similar photographic narrative in a public exhibition. The participants in this project created a collaborative contact zone and established a relationship between the art gallery, a community of cultural workers and the public.

Kester (2004) elaborates:

In conventional aesthetic experience, the subject is prepared to participate in dialogue through an essentially individual and physical experience of liking... It is only after passing through the process of aesthetic perception that one's capacity for discursive interaction is enhanced. (p. 112)

I suggest that the use of dialogical aesthetics is an attempt to invigorate the art community through creativity and empathy. The concept of dialogue provides an important process in the development of a new engagement between the art gallery and the viewer to the gallery.

Hammersley (2009) writes that Kester's concept of dialogical aesthetics "within the context of conversational and discursive art practices and dialogical arts practices contributes to an understanding of dialogue. " Hammersley (2009) is also suggesting, "Kester sees dialogism of Russian Literary theorist Bakhtin as the foundational theory model of these activist art practices" (p. 176).

Kester states that, " a dialogical aesthetic suggests a very different image of the artist, one defined in terms of openness, of listening, and of a willingness to accept a position of dependence and intersubjective vulnerability relative to the viewer or collaborator." (Kester, 2004, p. 110)

I claim that dialogical aesthetics can be used to explore contemporary issues, the artists' commitment to the use of dialogue and the incorporation of community members and an obligation to critically respond to the world through a creative form of collaboration and dialogue.

## **Collaborative Social Art Practices in Art Galleries**

### **Art Gallery as Mediated Space**

In my research, I explore the idea of reconstituting the function and purpose of the museum as an open space to stimulate active and collaborative social interaction, dialogue, debate, and exploration of contemporary issues that are relevant to society. Community-based dialogic collaborations emphasize process, and inclusion of people from a wide variety of community groups resembles dialogic collaboration, which focuses primarily on "the creative orchestration of dialogical exchange" (Kester, 2004, p. 189).

Like relational artists, dialogic collaborators focus their practice on facilitating interactions among people; but they are especially interested in fostering dialogues among

diverse communities. Because they are interested in resisting forms of commodified social interaction, they depart from traditional object-making to utilize process-based and/or performative approaches. Dunn states that: “they are ‘context providers’ rather than ‘content providers’” (as cited in Kester, 2004, p. 1).

In the 1980-90 a wave of activist artists, including such collectives as Gran Fury, the Guerrilla Girls, REPO-history, Tim Rollins with KOS, and Group Material, reacting to issues of race class, gender, and sexuality, developed innovative approaches to community-based artwork. (Roberts, 2009). While these groups remained concerned with the creation of objects and exhibitions, other activist artists have worked in what Suzanne Lacy (1995) called *new genre public art*, creating projects situated within specific communities and contexts that focused more on collaborative processes capable of generating transformative experiences.

In the 1990s, some politically engaged artists who worked outside the typical art world settings of studios, galleries, and museums began to call their interdisciplinary community-based practices *interventions*. These artists, working collaboratively in groups such as subRosa, Critical Art Ensemble, and The Yes Men created work that combines politics with a light-hearted approach, intent on agitating for social change. One goal of these groups is to unite participants in an experience that provides another, perhaps transformative, perspective on everyday life. Many of these collaborative efforts have made use of the internet and other forms of mass media to accomplish their goals.

Myers (2006) states that:

exhibitions are real-life organizations of resources, imagination, and power—in short, social practices.... In approaching these activities of circulation as cultural production, one can understand exhibitions as instructive, transformative, educational—as

interventions on/in culture and not simply repetitions... Through such events, exhibitions constitute a site of political dialogue that recombines distinctive identities with a social space. (p. 510)

The use of dialogue can help situate galleries as having the potential to become community spaces for sharing different perspectives. By engaging in a conversation about what the viewer sees in the museum, they can begin to understand other perspectives. My research examines how the curator, artists, cultural workers and viewers engage in a mean-making process that blurs the line between those involved in the production of the exhibition and the viewer who is experiencing the artworks but had no involvement in the creative process.

In this research, I have explored how a dialogue-based process of inquiry can incorporate community participants, artists, me as the researcher/curator and the viewer as part of an insurgent curatorial practice. Dialogical aesthetics is based on the possibility of breaking down the conventional distinction between artist, artwork, curator, and audience and attempts to establish a relationship that allows the viewer to talk back to the artwork and indirectly to the artists and becomes in effect a part of a curatorial process. The process used in this research attempted to situate the viewer as an active participant and was intended to engage the viewer in an on-going narrative, grounded in a creative process of dialogue in exploring the cultural relations with the cultural workers and the public, and within an art gallery context.

Artworks created for the research were reflexive and invited the viewer to question our assumptions, how we see, and perceive as a process of dialogue and inquiry. Participation and conversation by the viewer are critical to the concept of collaborative, socially engaged dialogue. Participation by the viewer is actively sought as a process that would help democratize the art

world and beyond. Participation has many meanings and has connection to an open democratic process.

The meaning viewers construct in the viewing process are subjective and are made up of the experiences, knowledge and ideas, attitudes and values of the viewer. I am proposing that art galleries could be considered open spaces for the construction and contestation of ideas. Art galleries can fulfill this role by its potential to become a public forum that is accessible to all, where large numbers of people gather to participate in events, exhibitions, programs, and discussions. The process of meaning making in some museum is the process of the visitor making sense of experience, of explaining and interpreting the world to themselves and to others through exhibitions that are dialogue driven.

Hooper-Greenhill (1994) asserts,

[T]he role of the museum in the process of meaning making entails understanding the museum as a site for negotiating cultural borderlands and a space to create contact zones where different identities, people, art works and artefacts can discover new possibilities to develop a cultural remapping, to rewrite cultural borders and empower the museum visitor. (p. 12–13)

Coffee (2008) goes on to assert that “there continue to emerge museum initiatives in the contemporary period that reflect the world views of cultures or people who have been marginalized or suppressed by the dominant social and political forces.” (p. 444)

Pierroux (2006) examines the experiences visitors bring to museums, the meaning-making processes, and how visitors use their experiences to interact with what’s on display in the museum. Pierroux examines the work of Bakhtin and his theory of dialogue as an another strategy to of understand the function of art galleries and museums in contemporary society.

Pierroux further examines how museum research in visitor interaction is exploring how, “visitor’s agency within museum’s may be understood in terms of a mediated, dialogical relationship between visitors and national museums in a larger cultural context.” (Pierroux, 2006. p. 222)

The traditional gallery’s mission was fundamentally an aesthetic one, offering pleasure to passive consumers; this traditional view of the gallery serves the interests of a narrow segment of population. Some art galleries are beginning to make a fundamental shift away from traditional their roles as a voice for dominant culture to public spaces where artists, community members and viewers are engaged in dialogue and on-going construction of meaning.

Contemporary galleries offer the potential to create community spaces for sharing private memories and stories where multiple versions of history can be offered in the public sphere with the intent of community building. Art galleries can offer opportunities for dialogue as a process of transformation and by engaging in a conversation around what visitors see in the museum, they can enter into a subjective dialogue and can connect with others and the community. Many art galleries are now introducing community-based practices into more traditional areas of collecting, conserving and exhibiting. Research of this type is important because concepts such as dialogical aesthetics can help re-situate art galleries as public spaces that invite participation, dialogue, involvement, and have the potential to actively involve gallery visitors in personal and social transformation.

Pierroux (2007) states, “mastery is a term [that] describes knowing how to use historically and culturally developed narratives and forms of knowledge, and points to how people’s skills in reproducing this knowledge renders them legitimate participants in social systems.” (p. 220) Pierroux (2007) further asserts that through an understanding of dialogical

discourse, visitors to museums can develop processes of meaning making, and further, museums should look at social media as a means by which “to shape museum discourse in the public sphere.” (p. 223) In his words, “contemporary museology needs to develop a concept of interiority grounded in a sociocultural concern with the connections visitors make with objects, stories and experiences in museums and how these experiences interest [people] outside of the museum.” (p. 223) Tony Bennett (1995) asserts that

it is imperative that the role of the curator be shifted away from that of the source of an expertise whose function is to organize a representation claiming the status of knowledge and towards that of the possessor of a technical competence whose function is to assist groups outside the museum to use its resources to make authored statements within it. If the space of the museum is to become more fully dialogic, and if such statements are not to be framed within—and so, potentially, recuperated by the official voice of the museum, the principle embodied in such experiments needs to be generalized, thereby, in allowing the museum to function as a site for the enunciation of plural and differentiated statements, enabling it to function as an instrument for public debate. (p. 104)

### **A Critique of Dialogical Aesthetics and Relational Social Practice**

There are two main concepts that are used to explore the art gallery as a space to stimulate social interaction and to create relationships. I compare these two concepts as a means of providing a rationale for why I have chosen to use dialogical aesthetics in my research. These arts practices have been conceptualised by two leading cultural theorists, Nicolas Bourriaud and Grant Kester. Each provides a useful framework for thinking about different concepts of social art as practice.

Bourriaud (2002) suggests that relational aesthetics is less concerned about the object and making of the object than with the direct communication and interaction between artist and viewer. He defines relational aesthetics as “aesthetic theory consisting of judging artworks on the basis of the interhuman relations they represent, produce, or prompt” (p. 112).

Nicolas Bourriaud published *Relational Aesthetics* and described it as a model that emphasizes the artist-to-viewer process to a two-way communication between artist and audience. Bourriaud (2002) defines relational aesthetics as “aesthetic theory consisting of judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations they represent, produce or prompt” (p. 112). Bourriaud suggests that relational aesthetics is less concerned about the object, and more about direct communication and interaction between artist and viewer.

Bourriaud also states that: “relational artworks are a set of art practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space” (p. 113). According to Bourriaud, the meaning of the artwork emerges not from the artwork itself, nor the value placed on it by the artists, curator, or institution, but through an encounter between exhibition space and viewers.

Grant Kester (2004) defines participatory art as a dialogical engagement with the audience, which invites participants to respond directly to artistic frameworks. Bourriaud’s emphasis, on the other hand, is on the artist’s importance. Kester (2004) argues that dialogical art practice can be seen as a kind of conversation, “a locus of different meaning, interpretations, and points of view” (p. 10).

This type of art practice makes assumptions about the relationship between art and the broader social and political world, and about the knowledge that aesthetic experience is capable of producing (Kester, 2004). Both Kester and Bourriaud believe in the need to go outside of the

studio. Bourriaud asserts the supreme ambition of changing the world by creating ways of living and being in the real world through small individual actions.

Kester argued that dialogical aesthetics could be viewed as a kind of conversation, and points of view [while dialogue and communication of an interactive work forms] a new aesthetic and theoretical paradigm of the work of art as process.

Differences between relational and dialogic art practices include the reasons for using either one of these aesthetic processes. Relational aesthetics focuses on the creation of a model of social interaction within the artwork whereas dialogical aesthetics seeks to address specific social, cultural and/or political issues within a community and a transformation in thinking.

The form used in dialogical aesthetics is flexible and consists of interaction and dialogue and may include an art object. Relational aesthetics consists of an event or situation and focuses on being together. Both relational and dialogical aesthetics are process oriented.

Authorship in dialogical aesthetics is initiated by all participants including artists who may still own or document the artwork. Relational aesthetics is not concerned with authorship but within the art world it is usually credited to an individual. Relational aesthetics involves interaction and is more or less democratic whereas dialogical aesthetics see all interaction as essential and democratic.

Both relational and dialogical aesthetics blur the line between the maker of the work and the viewer but an art object or performance may be presented for the viewer to examine. Unlike artists who create object-based *art for art's sake* and relational artists who work within an art world setting and avoid particular political issues, dialogical artists frequently take as their subject matter specific social, cultural, and/or political causes.

I chose to work with Kester's dialogical aesthetics because this concept explores the possibility of transforming the communities and the concept of dialogue provides an important process in the development of a new engagement between the art gallery and community.

Art galleries have the potential to allow visitors to actively construct their own interpretation of what they experience based on their own knowledge and life experience. Current research into the dialogic process of the art gallery visit is essential to the improvement of accessibility and inclusion, but also in developing a broader understanding of how we acquire knowledge (Coffee, 2007).

I propose that art galleries explore the educational role they could play in embracing the perspectives of visitors, who come to museums with their own subjective experiences, perspectives, learning abilities and interests. Art galleries that utilize dialogue in their curatorial practices can reveal diverse ways of seeing the world and have the potential for telling multiple versions of history in public art galleries.

Art galleries are ideally placed to engage in critical dialogue, as well as individual and community participation in the exploration of contemporary issues. Art galleries also have a potential impact on the lifelong learning of the community, and the active engagement of art galleries is an important part of community identity. I am utilizing dialogical aesthetics that involves the visitor in a dialogic process in an art gallery or museum context to explore participation, dialogue, and the construction of community. One of the roles of art galleries and museums are to explore the concept of cultural borderlands as Hooper-Greenhill state, "where a range of possibilities is a potential, and where diverse groups and sub-groups, cultures and sub cultures may push against and permeate the allegedly unproblematic and homogeneous borders of dominant cultural practices." (2000 p. 140)

## **The Dialogical Process and Informal Learning**

The dialogical process as proposed by Bakhtin and extended by Kester describes how our consciousness is constructed and how our own subjectivity is formed through acquiring the words and ways of thinking from others. Each individual is constituted by internal voices—various subject positions—that can be incorporated as inner thoughts. This allows for the possibility of resisting dominant narratives, and opens the door to other positions. There is always “a set of conditions, social, historical, meteorological, or physiological ones, that will ensure a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 428).

In Paulo Freire’s (1970) terms, “consciousness evolves through voice and in dialogue with others, and as learners begin to see themselves as knowers in relation to the world, and as part of an evolving, changing world” (p. 40). Freire developed a self-reflexive, critical process by using his concept as a model of learning in which he proposed that the process of transformation is an ongoing one.

Freire writes, “Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality” (1970, p. 40). Individual growth occurs within a social and historical context, with how the individual influences the social world, and with how the social world influences the individual. The voices of others, their discourses, take a central place in this theory of how people develop their ideologies. What each person thinks for him or herself, what ultimately is persuasive to the individual. As we form our own ideas, we come into contact with the discourses of others and those discourses enter our consciousness much as authoritative discourse does.

We need to see beyond our own perspectives to understand and empathize with another person's consciousness. Freire (1970) states that dialogue is essential to communication: "without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education." (p. 81) "Dialogue is something that characterizes authentic human beings and their relationships as they strive to become, as they engage in their ontological vocation of being human. Dialogism is a requirement of human nature." (Freire, 2000, p. 92)

Education in museums should be concerned with the construction of identity through knowledge and experience. Museums can begin to fulfill their potential for individual and group empowerment. Dialogue as a form of creative inquiry can help situate art galleries as public spaces that encourage participation, dialogue, involvement, and explore alternative ways of knowing that offer a profound learning experiences as well as a means for community reflection and individual transformation. The individual is always the site of conflicting forms of inter-subjectivity.

As we acquire language, we learn to give meaning to our experience and to understand it according to particular ways of thinking, and speaking. These ways of thinking constitute our consciousness, and the positions with which we identify our sense of our subjectivity and ourselves. Each individual is constituted by internal voices that we have incorporated in our thoughts that represent various subject positions. These internal voices are for resistance to one fixed position and to the possibility of other positions. These concepts of Bakhtin and Freire are explored in my case study of Condé and Beveridge. They were also explored in the process of creating the photo narrative, *Public Matters* and the exhibition, *Open Conversations*.

What Bakhtin and Kester share in common is a belief in the worth of individuals to take part in dialogue that can effect both individual and societal change.

The photograph *Class Maintenance* (2003), commissioned by the Edmonton Art Gallery is a good example of how to utilize dialogue as an alternative conversational model and see dialogism as the foundational model for activists art practices. Condé and Beveridge co-created this photo narrative with elementary and secondary school custodians in CUPE, Local 474. The union members acted out stories they wished to tell in workshops intended to research their working lives. The main story that evolved from the workshops was the sense of responsibility and commitment the workers had towards the children for whom they maintain the schools.

**Class Maintenance (2003)**



## **Conclusion**

The literature reviewed in this chapter provided the foundation for my exploration of dialogical aesthetics as a concept that can help situate art galleries as public spaces that invite participation, dialogue, and involvement. This review examined curatorial practices that explore the concept of dialogue and that have the potential to actively involve gallery visitors in personal and social transformation. The review also explored the use of dialogue as an important element

in the development of a new engagement between the art gallery and the public. Art galleries can become spaces for dialogue and the exchange of ideas if there are opportunities in place that allow viewers to be active participants in meaning making.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY—A CRITICAL FORM OF CREATIVE INQUIRY AND PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH**

### **Qualitative Paradigm**

Methodologically, my research utilizes an arts-based practice as a form of creative inquiry. I focus on an insurgent curatorial practice to explore how the viewer as cultural participant engages in ideological and cultural meaning making through a dialogical process. I do so intending to provoke and change individual perspectives. This form of creative inquiry is situated within a methodology that focuses on political activism and ethical responsibility that includes everyone in the community (Findley, 2005). My research explores how dialogical aesthetics can change the function of art galleries and museums to become open, public spaces for civic engagement. I also examined how mainstream narratives can be critiqued and diverse alternative perspectives are explored. I explore how artists, exhibition collaborators and Curators can become co-creators within the art gallery as part of a creative/learning process.

### **Curation as Method**

In this section, I explore how critical inquiry creates meaning and misunderstanding, furnishes belief and disbelief, and provokes knowledge. Thought, dialogue, analysis, and critique are all are elements of radical, transformative political action. As curator, I explored the use of a collaborative art process as a legitimate form of creative inquiry that questions assumptions, social, cultural, and political structures, and provokes the viewer to rethink personal assumptions. I worked with Condé and Beveridge who utilize an informal participatory action research (PAR) as part of their creative process with community groups, working class organizations, and cultural workers in examining their history, collective understanding, research, communicative power and collective capacity building.

The making of exhibitions requires a significant amount of preliminary research, including viewing, appraising, and situating bodies of work. Creative inquiry should underpin the curatorial voice. The work of curation operates through the initial definition of a field and the identification of key questions for inquiry, through the selection of works to be exhibited, and using accompanying materials to contextualize the project and the works of individual artists. Art as creative inquiry comes into its own when an exhibition has been carefully thought through and contributes substantially to knowledge within a particular field. This type of curatorial work provides for self-reflection, self-expression, and communication between the artists, co-collaborators and the public. The ultimate objective is to reveal and provide a platform for articulating other forms of knowledge and to help change the participants and their worldview.

### **Critical Form of Creative Inquiry**

I propose that there needs to be a fundamental shift in the way visual arts is understood by both the art world, academic world as well as the public. The concept of visual arts practice as a valid form of research is debated within the academic world and the art world and is relatively unknown within public discourses. Recently the *Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada* completed and evaluated a new pilot project, *Research/Creation in the Fine Arts*, and discovered that terms such as ‘research’, ‘artist-research’, and ‘research as creation’ did not accurately represent the process of art making identified by artists participating in the program. The *Canada Council for the Art* has recently made changes to the grant application for individual artists that include the category of research. (Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2007)

In *Art Practice as Research* (2005), Graham Sullivan proposes a framework for theorizing visual arts practice and argues that art practice can be a legitimate form of research and inquiry. Sullivan writes,

Artwork carries its own status as a form of knowledge and the research of art communicates new insights into how art objects carry meaning about ideas, themes and issues. As an object of study an art work can be used to represent ideas and can be examined as a source of knowledge. The relationship between the art work, the artist and the viewer provides potential for meaning making that might result from experiences with works of art. (p. 80)

The paradigm of art as research has been examined in the journal *Qualitative Inquiry* for two decades in numerous articles. In a special issue, Lincoln (1995) identified three commitments of this new paradigm:

- 1) to make interactions between the participant(s) and the researcher more meaningful;
- 2) to ensure that the actions improve the professional, personal and political lives of the participants, and;
- 3) to work towards projects that focus on social justice, community, civic society and diversity.

Susan Findley (2011) argues for a critical arts-based inquiry that situates the artist as research or researcher as artist in a new form of research that is committed to finding a just, democratic and ethical form of inquiry (p. 435)

In his book, *The Enlightened Eye*, Eisner (1997) articulates seven organizing premises that define his concept of arts-based research. I have adapted these concepts to reflect my proposed form of creative inquiry:

- 1) There are multiple ways in which the world can be known. Visual artists and curators and community participants have important things to say about the world.
- 2) Creative forms of inquiry can lead to different forms of knowledge that are in a process of development and not discovered.
- 3) The terms artists and curators use to represent their conception of the world have a major influence on what they are saying about the world and different ways of knowing the world.
- 4) The effective use of creative inquiry can offer many ways of knowing the world.
- 5) Creative inquiry is a more complete and informative process and has a wide range of ways in which to describe, interpret, and see the world.
- 6) Forms of creative investigation in the educational research community are political in that they may challenge dominant and traditional forms of knowledge.

Through my creative inquiry, I propose a process that will offer another way of seeing the relationship between contemporary art and art galleries. Ultimately, this process helped to contextualize curatorial art practice as a legitimate form of creative inquiry. I assert that this process can help unravel social, cultural, and political structures, reveal ideological messages, and provoke the viewer to rethink personal assumptions. The process I utilized in my activist arts-based inquiry, insurgent curation, resulted in an exhibition designed to engage the artist, art-subject and viewer in critical meaning making.

### **Curatorial Case Study**

The case study was in the form of an exhibition, interviews and the creation of a collaborative photo based artwork as a form of creative inquiry. All three were components of the exhibition *Open Conversations*, and were examples of contemporary visual art as a critical form of creative inquiry meant to articulate new ways of engaging the broader community to

support new understandings of contemporary issues. The exhibition demonstrated, through selected artworks, how Condé and Beveridge engaged in dialogue through a creative orchestration of collaborative encounters and conversations.

The exhibition, *Open Conversations*, explored this creative process that brought together artists, project collaborators, and me as the researcher/curator/participant in the creation of site-specific photographic narrative in a public exhibition. The participants in this project established a relationship between the art gallery, a community of cultural workers and the public. This process provided a space to explore possibilities that emerged from encounters between the artists, collaborators, the researcher/curator/participant and the public.

*Open Conversations* examined the relationships between members of the public in Richmond from within the gallery space and the community at large. The exhibition offered a temporary space of potential understanding that emerged from encounters with different ways of knowing, within a context of mutual respect and willingness to explore new possibilities.

My research involved working with the artists, and interviewing them regarding their artworks in *Open Conversations*. I observed, investigated and had discussions with Condé and Beveridge over a short period of time. In the interviews, I explored their art practice and the process they used to create their art photographic works in the exhibition, *Open Conversations*.

I investigated how Condé and Beveridge contextualized their art practice within contemporary society as a critical form of creative inquiry that interacts with the public. I focused on the art practice of Condé and Beveridge as a involved collaborative reference point to help clarify my analysis of current practices of how some traditional art museums perpetuate conventional ways of seeing and experiencing visual art. I saw my role as being actively engaged

with the public in challenging the dominant neoliberal agenda and explored dialogue, collaboration and participation in an examination of contemporary social issues.

## **Target Population**

I utilized a dialogical and participatory form of research and sought cultural workers from four organizations at the Richmond Cultural Centre. The cultural workers collaborated on a site-specific photo-narrative that was integrated into the exhibition at the Richmond Art Gallery. The target population consisted of seven cultural workers. My interviews explored cultural workers' roles in the community, asking: how these roles might change in the future; what role these cultural institutions played in people's lives; and how these cultural institutions could help people become more engaged, critical and empowered in their community.

This project enabled and empowered the cultural workers from the Richmond Cultural Centre to create a collaborative work of art that representing their perspectives within the context of their staff roles. Some of the questions asked were: Are cultural workers seen as a customer service? How does technology affect the work of cultural workers? What issues do cultural workers face? What do cultural workers do? Are there parallels between yourself and other cultural workers? What do you do for the City of Richmond? What do you collectively do for the City of Richmond?

## **Ethical Considerations**

My research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Department at the University of Victoria. The research subjects (participating cultural workers in the *Public Matters* project and the two participating artists) all agreed to participate in the research and all signed consent forms. The relationship I had with participants was professional in nature and I did not coerce them into participating in the interviews and observations, nor did I have any control over the

participants' decisions to participate or not. My role during this project was as a visiting guest curator and the Richmond Art Gallery did not employ me.

As a researcher, my interest was in presenting the work of Condé and Beveridge and their exploration of dialogical aesthetics. I worked collaboratively with the art gallery to secure the funding, develop the exhibition and related activities, and to propose and present the exhibition, which was all separate from my role as researcher. I also interviewed Condé and Beveridge in their studio in Toronto, Ontario and at the Richmond Art Gallery in Richmond, British Columbia.

### **Portraits of the Participating Cultural Workers**

The participants ranged in age from mid-twenties to late fifties. They ranged from working class to upper middle class. Recruitment of the participants was via e-mail and consisted of an invitation to participate in a research project and visual art exhibition. The first phase of this project was focused on observation, interviews, and analysis of the lives and artistic activities of the two artists, in order to gain insight into their specific art practices.

The second stage consisted of researching, producing and presenting a public exhibition that creatively contextualized an important focus of my research: to re-engage viewers of artwork through pedagogical strategies relevant to the presentation and reception of the visual arts. The discussions with the cultural workers and artists helped lay the groundwork for a new artwork, *Public Matters*, and shaped the context of the participants' workplace. The material from the discussions served as a textual introduction and component for the new art project.

I interviewed the participants and recorded their responses using a video camera. The questions were listed on the proposed research questions sheet. The questions in the

questionnaire were answered during the interview process. I observed and recorded activities related to the cultural workers participation in the exhibition. I interviewed the cultural workers at the Richmond Art Gallery in Richmond, British Columbia over a ten-day period.

## **Dialogue as PAR Process**

One of the foundations of the PAR process was to agree that of the all project participants were to be treated and respected as equal partners. The process used to establish a dialogue provided a space for trust, mutual respect and collaboration. The discussion focused on the participants' work experiences that formed the starting point for the research and development of the photo-narrative, *Public Matters*. This project also attempted to “establish a community of researchers” to collaborate and co-author the research process (Cahill, 2007a, p. 299). After the first few meetings, a dynamic developed among the participants and the group felt an ownership of the photo-narrative.

## **The Process**

In order to begin building the collaborative and participatory processes, the artists Condé and Beveridge began asked the participating cultural workers what they could learn from each other. The artists and cultural workers explored different ways of working together on the collaborative project as a collective group of community researchers. Condé and Beveridge were interested in stories of actual encounters that the cultural workers had on a daily basis. These stories could then be translated into images that told the stories of each of the cultural workers in each of the cultural institutions at the Richmond Cultural Centre. The challenge was discovering and developing the stories that would work in the photo narrative. During the interviews, the artists encouraged participants to relate their own stories. Condé and Beveridge discussed the process they used in the project with the participants. Condé and Beveridge examined the work

the participants did in their respective institutions and the complex issues (from community outreach to funding), and focused on a core concept.

Condé and Beveridge asked general questions by e-mail to help shape the viewers' understanding of social, cultural, and political contexts. The e-mail interviews focused on stories and anecdotes about interactions with the public, whether directly in the institutions or in outreach.

Condé and Beveridge also held two-hour workshops with all the participants and shot a series of preliminary photographs of each cultural worker posing for the camera. The first hour was used to finalize the stories, and to present their concepts based on the participants and the research. The second hour was a visual workshop to determine images for these stories -- in part, how people would be posed for the final image. The second hour only involved those willing to pose for the final image, but could have included others interested who had the time. In all cases, the cultural workers posed in front of the camera and created gestures that would represent what they did in their jobs, as well as their interactions with the public. The participants portrayed themselves at work and interacting with the public. Condé and Beveridge added additional persons from the Cultural Centre to be photographed and also incorporated the rotunda as the setting for the photo narrative. They used props and artefacts selected by the cultural workers to be included with their portraits or cut into the photograph later in the process. The artists reviewed the emailed stories and used them to conduct workshops which were used to select the final stories as a group and then to create images around them. This involved the participants role-playing different characters in poses that would visually convey the story. Finally, the artists photographed the participants role-playing themselves in the story; they posed portraying their

jobs, with other characters/actors used to help finish telling the story. The artists also used actors to play members of the public in the final image.

### **My Role as Researcher/Collaborator**

My role as researcher was to explore how critical forms of creative inquiry could transform art galleries into spaces of dialogue where viewers could be active participants in meaning-making. I collaborated with participating cultural workers and artists Condé and Beveridge in the creation of the photo narrative, *Public Matters*. I also organized and participated in discussions with participants on how to involve them in the project and how to tell their stories. During this process, my role as researcher became blurred when I invited the cultural workers to become co-collaborators in the development and creation of the photo narrative.

### **The Curatorial Process as Dialogical Co-creation**

The insurgent curatorial process of inquiry was socially engaged and based on dialogue and collaboration. This critical and creative intervention was aimed at creating a public space where many voices can be heard, accepted, and authenticated.

The co-creation of *Public Matters* offered the cultural workers a process that explored the issues and that explored their issues and concerns at the Richmond Cultural Centre. Community collaboration was critical to the making of this photo-narrative because those who were the subjects of the artwork also become engaged participants and active collaborators in the process of inquiry. The participating cultural workers all wanted to explore the connection they had between the work they do inside their institutions and the role they play within the context of the City of Richmond. The cultural workers reflected on what was learned during the project and the opportunity to share experiences with colleagues in the field.

I used participatory action research as a means of investigating a number of issues facing the participants, the artists, and myself as the researcher. The cultural workers organized themselves into a co-constituted participatory action research group, who participated in a form of advocacy on how the public views and values the cultural institutions at the Richmond Cultural Centre. The cultural workers shared workplace experiences with the community, artists, art gallery visitors, and the public.

The collaborative process used in this project was context specific because the project was structured and determined by the motivations and needs of the participants. These motivations often went beyond what is generally included in traditional artistic practice. By working together over time, the group developed a shared practice and learned from their interactions with each other.

They strove for a common voice and collaborative and participatory creativity. Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) claim “that the use of participatory action research [aims] to investigate and to transform the world.”(p.579). My use of a collaborative curatorial approach presented challenges to the traditional practice of displaying art objects for contemplation; I explored a process-oriented approach that used collaboration and participation to create dialogue and explore inter-subjectivity as opposed to individual and self-expression.

### **Collaborative curation as a new creative process**

Participatory action research was used as part of the process of participation encouraged everyone’s perspective and was open to experimentation and collaboration as an important part of the creative process. As researcher/curator, I helped to establish a process of dialogue that encouraged multiple voices and subjectivities to help facilitate a process of collaboration, and exchange, between the artists, the participants and myself. My use of dialogue as a form of

creative inquiry and PAR was part of a curatorial strategy that was explored in this exhibition and provided an important collaborative process in the development of a new engagement between the art gallery and the community. The use of PAR was critical to making this photo-narrative because those who were the subjects of the artwork were also engaged participants and active collaborators in the development of this art-making process.

My reason for using PAR is based on its use in social justice movements and projects that investigated issues from members of the communities affected by issues. The use of PAR also serves as a critique of the idea that only experts have the answers and that community-based knowledge is a not valid form of knowledge.

Using PAR suggests that the possession of knowledge is used as means of controlling knowledge and setting up a control of access to knowledge attainable only to experts. PAR suggests that the production of knowledge should be a partnership with those involved with the issues. Recent developments in contemporary museum practice include the idea of community collaboration and the formation of community advisory groups that work at various levels of museum operation.( Cameron, 2006, Kester 2004 , 2011, Lesson, 2009) PAR was used to help marginalized and disenfranchised members of the community, to engage them as they were invited to create their own process of inquiry. Mark O’Neil (2006) argues for,

A broad epistemology, combined with an integral theory of justice—one which supports object-based, visitor-centered, flexible, and storytelling displays—has the potential to enable museums to contribute even more than they have hitherto to the creation of a culturally rich, humane, just and tolerant society. (p. 114).

PAR helped community members examine their own knowledge, life experiences, skills and values as part of the knowledge creation process. PAR provided a framework for the cultural workers and members of the Richmond community to engage with the art gallery. PAR is a process that can challenge traditional ways of seeing and experiencing art galleries and push the boundaries of traditional curatorial practice.

Art galleries can promote and encourage a participatory gallery experience and encourage meaningful dialogue and genuine participation that can lead to a transformation of art galleries and their role in society.

An example of this type of display can be found in Condé and Beveridge's collaborative photo work, *The Fall of the Rebel Angels*. This work is based on the politics of water and Pieter Bruegel's 1562 painting, which depicts the struggle between the Archangels and Lucifer. The characters representing the archangels in the Bruegel painting are activists in the fight against the privatization of water. In the middle, replacing Saint Michael, is an Andean indigenous woman, who represents the fight against water privatization in Cochabamba, Bolivia. On the left side is a South Asian woman struggling against the damming of the Narmada River in India. On the right is a Canadian environmentalist defending Canada's water resources. There are other activists and cultures that have replaced the remaining eight angels.

This project utilized a PAR methodology which brought together community activist to work together to develop a series of stories using a several creative process that would combine specific community knowledge, and real life examples of a corporate strategy to privatize the use and control of water at a local, national international level.

**The Fall of Water (2006-2007)**



## **CHAPTER FOUR: INTERVIEWS AND FIRST ANALYSIS**

### **Condé and Beveridge Interview**

#### **Context**

In this interview, I sought background on Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge's use of dialogue as a form of participatory action research (PAR). I elicited their insights into the creative process and asked how the artists used their art practice as a critical form of creative inquiry. I explored how their art practice was a form of communication that articulated commonalities and differences in society. For Condé and Beveridge, visual art is a means of self-expression for those who have been marginalized and disenfranchised.

My analysis of the interview examines the artists' use of dialogical aesthetics, collaboration, and participation. I am hoping this analysis will provide greater insights into the use of dialogue and collaboration in museums and into the possibility of connecting with others and creating a sense of community. The interview is organized into sections, and provides analysis that references Bakhtinian theory.

In order to understand the foundation of Condé and Beveridge's art practice, it is important to provide a brief background of how their experiences led them to where they are today. Their early work was grounded in the conceptual art movement of the late 1960's. Within a year of meeting one another, they both were working towards exhibitions of their minimalist artworks and had sold works to major Canadian museums. A visit by New York critic Lucy Lippard convinced them that they should seek fame and fortune in New York City (Condé & Beveridge, 2008)

Over the next five years, Condé and Beveridge pursued what they thought was their dream of getting an art dealer in New York City to sell their work. In 1972, at the urging of Lippard, Condé joined the Ad Hoc Women's Committee, an activist group focused on the under-

representation of woman artists in the Whitney museum. During this period, Condé and Beveridge began to explore personal issues related to competitiveness in their relationship, their work, and the art scene. They soon became disillusioned by the realities of the highly competitive art market in New York which they felt only valued issues of formal ambiguity over meaningful content (Condé, & Beveridge, 2008).

Through their friendships with Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden, they became involved with collaborative Art and Language. They also became involved with *The Fox* magazine leading to the creation of the artwork *It's Still Privileged Art* that changed the direction of their art careers.

The artists' interest in community art grew out of a critique of the mainstream art world that was dominated by market values. They became involved in various leftwing and activist organizations in New York. They also questioned the extreme individualism and elitism that prevailed in the arts. Condé and Beveridge recognized a need to examine a collective basis of cultural expression, and to reconnect with the communities where they lived (Condé & Beveridge, 2008).

In 1977, Condé and Beveridge decided to return to Canada and became involved with left political organizations. They produced silkscreen prints inspired by labour issues for the trade union movement. In 1979, they produced a documentary photo series on migrant farm workers in the tobacco fields of southwestern Ontario for the Canadian Farmworkers Union. These projects set the stage for their involvement with the labour movement, community organizations, cultural politics and the development of their contemporary art practice (Condé, & Beveridge, 2008).

By the late 1970s, Condé and Beveridge's art practice had changed significantly. It focused on social issues, which they explored through a process that allowed their subjects to become participants in the work. Condé and Beveridge have been working as collaborative

artists with art galleries, trade unions, and community organizations for more than 30 years. Their work has addressed issues ranging from free trade to health care to anti-globalization, with each project involving intense research and collaboration with grassroots organizations, labour unions, and community members.

Condé and Beveridge's art practice developed at the same time as the rise of a new neoliberal economic order dedicated to the "elimination of all forms of collective or public resistance to the primacy of capital" (Kester, 2011, p. 5). Their art production and exhibitions have represented a complex creative process that has brought together artists, community members and activism, as a commitment to the social responsibility of telling the stories and revealing the realities of disenfranchised and marginalized communities.

It is important to acknowledge that I have had a long-term professional relationship with Condé and Beveridge. I conducted interviews with the artists after their residency at the Richmond Cultural Centre in their Toronto home over a three-day period (See Appendix D for interview transcript). I gave them the questions prior to the interviews. The interviews examined their participatory, socially engaged artistic process of direct collaboration in the production of community-based art.

We also discussed the exhibition *Open Conversations*, which I curated as part of the research for this dissertation. The interviews explored how the artists utilized a dialogical approach to art making that resulted in a series of photographic narratives or visual 'conversations' that were constructed within the language of mass communication and engaged social messages.

## **Analysis**

I draw on Bakhtin's literary theory to analyze and understand Condé and Beveridge's perspectives, and learn what has motivated and influenced their art practice. This analysis can help the reader understand the internal and ongoing dialogues that changed the art practice of these two artists. Condé and Beveridge defined their roles as artists working with communities as building relationships with communities educated themselves about contemporary issues. They chose to direct their art practice toward engaging with the labour movement in order to establish a collaborative process aimed at advancing class politics within a contemporary art context.

The following questions explored how Condé and Beveridge developed a socially engaged art practice that engages viewers through development of visual art/art education strategies that encourage social, cultural, and political analysis.

### **Can the assumptions and practices of your work and your collaborative approach be reinterpreted as a critical reflection on the accessibility of artwork to diverse communities?**

Condé: Usually, Karl and I decide what the topic will be, if it's going to be on healthcare, or if it's going to be on nuclear, if we've been active around a specific area that year, and been out to a demonstration or something along that line, after that experience, then we come back and talk about who it is that we'll actually contact, if it's a union or if it's a community, then we'll contact that group.

Beveridge: In the beginning, it was more formal, because we were just meeting people and becoming involved in things.

Condé and Beveridge identified with and actively involved themselves in the trade union movement. They articulated the various positions of the union movement they identified with and maintained a close relationship. This process of participation helped them identify with the participants in their projects and gave voice to communities they are working and helped determined their identification with various social, cultural, and social political movements.

Condé and Beveridge located themselves within an oppositional culture against the backdrop of neoliberalism. In terms of one's understanding of the world, our ideology is shaped through both language and experience. Bakhtin also asserts that we as individuals are constituted by more than one authority's voice revealing many different subject positions, which opens the door for resistance to dominant voices and to the possibility of examining other points of view.

Conflicting subjectivities have provided Condé and Beveridge with voices and given meaning to their lived experiences so that they could develop particular ways of thinking and seeing.

The use of language in the form of an ideology is the way individuals are governed by state apparatuses in the interest of the ruling class such as social systems, law, and the apparatuses of the police and the army that back the political and educational systems (Althusser, 1971). According to Althusser (1971), "each ideological state apparatus contributes to the reproduction of capitalist relations of exploitation in the 'way proper to it' and the means by which it is determined is through language" (p. 146).

Condé and Beveridge have attempted to incorporate many voices, words and dialogical discourses into their art, albeit using their own language and perspectives. During my interview with Condé and Beveridge, they told me that their relationship with the Labour movement needed to be arms-length from the very beginning, in order to protect and maintain their own separate identities and subjectivities. From within these dialogic interactions, Condé and Beveridge could begin to think about ideas, and construct new understandings, perspectives, and ideologies.

### **Connecting with Community**

Beveridge: There is a kind of form of community arts where people, as Carole says, kind of parachute into a situation and undertake a project and then move on to something else. Whereas we have always maintained practice within a particular sphere and particular

community as a kind of sustainable development. Because it is not only producing a project, it is also opening up the whole issue of cultural politics, cultural discussion, to that community. Meaning that that community become active in the process of democratizing cultural institutions, cultural process, that sort of thing.

In their artwork, Condé and Beveridge conducted visual workshops to help demystify and address the art making process and address the division of labour between wage work and creative work. This type of art practice helped situate the workers as active participants, and was intended to engage them in the construction of an ongoing narrative.

These workshops also intended to help to reveal contradictions of the art making process and encourage and define issues of work and class.

Beveridge: When we have conversations with people and we talk with people about the topic that we are dealing with, whether it is nuclear energy or women's rights or the environment, we also talk about culture. So it is not just people talking about their experience to us, and we are just like these receptors, we also talk to them what our experience is as cultural producers and what the issues are in culture. So the conversation is not only about their political experience or issues, it is also in a sense about our political issues in terms of culture. And part of what you are talking about is what the problems with cultural representation are.

Condé and Beveridge have adopted a language and worldview of progressive and left-wing organizations. The juxtaposition of languages of heteroglossia contradicted each other to form new socially typifying "languages" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 291).

Condé: So you usually start with a communications officer who is actually, his job or her job is actually to be active in the community, and from that process they then move you down till you get to the local level, and you either go to their workshops, or you go to their conferences, so you hear the stories they're telling and then from all that information you piece together your own passion for the issue, plus the involvement now of the individual people who are struggling to get that.

Condé's subjectivity is in a constant state of process and is being reconstituted in dialogue each time she thinks and/or speaks. As per Bakhtin (1981), "the ideological becoming of a human being, in this view, is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others" (p.

341). In Condé and Beveridge's artwork, the authoritative word is the rhetoric and positions of left-oriented social movements they have chosen to identify with and work for.

The authority of discourse may influence our ideological relationship with the world and affect our behaviour. The authoritative word demands that we make it our own. It enters our consciousness and we must affirm it or reject it because it is connected with political power, an institution, or a person and it stands or fails with that authority.

Condé: Within the left, there is always something that people are struggling to get their right that is where you are going to be active at that year and that involvement. So if it's around nuclear, if it is around going to the Quebec Summit. Or in the case that is slightly different than that, we did for almost 4–5 years stuff on healthcare.

Condé and Beveridge's commitment to left wing social and cultural activism has challenged neoliberalism. Their photo works, banners, posters, and cultural texts helped advance a grassroots social movement of community activists, working people, students, and cultural workers. Condé and Beveridge's political position has been clearly articulated in their art practice and their ideology has informed their artistic practice.

Ideology represents a body of ideas that reflect the social needs and aspirations of the individual, group, class, or culture. 'Ideological becoming' is the development of ideological subjectivity within which an individual lives. Ideological becoming refers to how we develop our way of viewing the world and our system of ideas (Bakhtin, 1981, p.341)

Condé and Beveridge's focus in their art projects was an analysis of the struggle of cultural workers, community activists, and working class organizations. The influences that have shaped Condé and Beveridge, including family, trade union movement, art world, and their own class and cultural background, are all ideological structures that influence how they relate to their world.

Condé: Karl was very ill and from that experience of having homecare and having hospital care, from that experience we then did three major pieces around healthcare. That after this that we started doing more orientated from our own perspective, so that would be like the history.

Bakhtin (1981) refers to ideology as a worldview or system of ideas that frame the way we see reality and that is not limited to a political ideology. His definition of ideology pertains to the way in which members of a given social group view the world.

One's understanding of the world is shaped through language, experience, and concepts about time, and may be read as developing one's chronotope. Artists engage in dialogue with the world around them and share a form of knowledge and perspective of the world. A work of art is created within a particular time, context, and society, has relationships with, and answers to places and situations.

The words Condé used to describe a situation in her life conveyed her own interpretation of this historical event. By retelling her personal story in the interview, she began to reconsider her point of view. As we develop our own ideologies, we struggle with official authoritative discourse, as well as everyday discourse.

For example, Condé said: "So therefore you are involved with the issue. You go down to the strike. You see all the things that are happening, and then you actually end up finding a way to visualize it. So you can be a participant in groups."

Condé's subjectivity is a product of her view of society and culture and can shift and change within the range of discourses that constitute herself. As Condé acquired language through the words of others, her particular way of thinking took shape. This also constituted her consciousness and the positions with which she identified her sense of self and her subjectivity.

Condé's experience is given meaning in language through a range of discourse systems which are often contradictory and constitute conflicting versions of her social reality and which in turn serve conflicting interests.

Condé: When we went down to Quebec, we went on a bus with autoworkers. So the whole trip there and back was with autoworkers out of locals in Toronto and Brampton. So already we were framing within that context and the conversation was underway there and all that sort of stuff. People understand the larger context of their own particular situation, why plants are closing down here, why people are being laid off, why jobs are being shipped to the developing world.

Beveridge: Some subjects more than others. This history of the union, we actually read material, we go into archives, we do all sorts of research as well as talk to the retirees and people who were involved in that history. In terms of things like the environment, around water, we read all sorts of material, met and talked with all sorts of people, from the people at the Polaris institute, the Council of Canadians who are involved in water issues. So we met with activists as well as doing the research, reading the books, all that sort of stuff so that you gain information on that.

The experience of working on *Public Matter* helped shape the cultural workers involvement with the participating cultural institutions but also provided an opportunity to participate in a creative process through dialogue and collaboration. The cultural workers participation in this project explored a variety of different voices and points of view, expanded a dialogue with visual art and the art gallery, and began a process of democratization of public art spaces.

### **Fine Art vs. Activism as Art Practice**

**What are the aesthetic research strategies used by Condé and Beveridge as they create their artwork and how can these strategies be used to help interpret the artist works and art practices?**

Condé and Beveridge utilized an arts-based form of inquiry to explore issues of activism, social justice, and solidarity to help change the worldview and behaviour of viewers. Their art

practice has condensed meaning into innovative visual strategies that invite identification with particular communities, and demonstrate how contemporary visual art can promote social change through examining the social and political issues of our time.

Kester's (2004) concept of dialogical aesthetics suggests dialogue as a process that can catalyze understanding, and mediate exchange through an ongoing process of empathic identification and critical analysis. Subjectivity is formed through dialogue and intersubjective exchanges. Kester (2004) sees dialogical aesthetics as a process through which a dialogue and collaboration with the audience takes place.

Condé and Beveridge have worked with unions and activists as part of a larger collective process to change those perception and points of view within the context of a neoliberal agenda. They have attempted to reveal through their art projects how political and economic systems benefit the dominant class.

Underlying Condé and Beveridge's artworks is a series of questions that analyze concepts of ideology, power, and control and offer alternative points of view that are open to dialogue. The foundation of Condé and Beveridge's creative methodology is their commitment to collaboration and participation and the use of an "ethics of engagement" (Downey, 2009, p. 593).

Beveridge: I wanted to raise the issue of the notion of empathy. In a certain sense there is the Brechtian notion, which is basically against a kind of empathetic reading. And basically, shocking people—would be the term that he uses. And we use certain elements of a kind of Brechtian non-naturalism, in order to sort of make a point. So, I don't know if our work is empathetic in ways that other work is. Ours more is about foregrounding the composition, the construction, the argument, rather than naturalizing it in, as I understand empathy to be. Sort of like you identify with a character, which functions through naturalism, which to me is one of the main pieces of corporate culture.

Condé and Beveridge's explained that the fundamental principle in their art practice is that art is a social transaction that becomes a participatory and collaborative process within a

community context. Condé and Beveridge's used their collaborators voices to present diverse perspectives of community members that articulate Bakhtin's theory about the voices of many reveal a more complex and holistic definition of a community.

Beveridge: Culture is an expression of the shared experience of a community, and maybe of multiple communities within a particular geography if you look at it in an ecological sense. A culture is an expression of the life and beliefs of the people, and the spirit of the people. You have to actually work with those communities to be able to understand, know, express, and share what those things are. So your responsibility is to basically articulate the broader community. In terms of the fine arts, the responsibility in artists' field is basically to art itself. And the curious thing is that all art is collaborative practice. The issue is that most artists work within the arts community and it is a collaborative practice within the confines of the arts community and its institutions.

Beveridge: What the larger project that you're involved with is working towards a kind of true democracy. And that people have basic equality. So what you're looking at is situations of inequality in its various forms.

Condé and Beveridge have worked in the trade union movement for 30 years and have developed an ongoing relationship with that community. Their practice has also entailed developing a cultural politic within the union movement. Condé and Beveridge have developed a self-conscious autonomous activism by which artists produce and distribute an independent political culture that uses institutional structures as resources.

Condé and Beveridge developed a program designed to rupture and re-appropriate both corporate and union institutional power for specifically political purposes.

### **Dialogical Aesthetics and Community**

Condé and Beveridge's art practice realizes its purpose through a process of dialogue and collaboration. They are concerned with how people connect with each other and create community.

**In the art processes of Condé and Beveridge what is the relationship between processes as methodology and product as findings?**

Condé: Equally so, I think when you actually work in a community, you are very aware of how isolated the art world is from the people that you are working with. The language that's being used, whether it be 'dialogical aesthetics' or whether it be making some abstract shape, and then you're putting it in front of somebody who's been growing up on TV and ads, and that's their concept of visual storytelling.

Condé's reaction to the phrase dialogical aesthetics was one of suspicion. She saw the phrase as one that is used by intellectuals to confuse and hide the real meaning of what she and Beveridge have tried to explore in their art practice. Condé saw intellectual forms of discourse as a way to advance particular sanctioned points of view in what Bakhtin calls authoritative versus persuasive discourses.

Condé determines that the development of her idea system, her conflicting inner voices and ongoing dialogue are persuasive. Condé's modes of understanding depend on her access to everyday forms of discourse that constitute her experience.

Beveridge: The conversation continues in two ways: one, through the work, that's true, and how people see and understand the work. The other one is that the conversation continues past the work into, and, like a lot of the people who we worked with ended up becoming involved in kind of cultural initiatives within the trade union movement, and these sorts of things, such as Mayworks, such as the Workers Heritage Centre. One of the people who we did the classwork project with was a labour council president outside of Toronto, started a small Mayworks in her own community, and encouraged artists there.

Beveridge: So in a certain sense it is not just the production of images, it is a larger involvement with the community that has all sorts, and hopefully has different kinds of results. And particularly to begin to build a kind of sustainability of culture within the communities.

Condé and Beveridge saw themselves as artists working in collaboration with social movements (sometimes identified as 'community arts'). They saw artwork, as they do all work, as collective in nature and as an expression of collective meanings. Condé and Beveridge have

worked with different networks that include the arts (especially the artist-run and public sectors) and labour and social movements.

Condé: To me if you're going to have people taking up issues—that comes from the person themselves, that comes from the teaching in the school, it comes from a belief that the issue that you're fighting, whether it be around Israel, whether it be around Palestine, whether it be around nuclear, whether it be—whatever the issue that impassions you, and you're an artist, then you have those issues that you're going to be talking about. It's not dialogical aesthetics that is going to do anything to promote it. It has to do with the activist, who is also artists, who believe there are stories to be told about the community that is being screwed around.

The organizations Condé associated with play an important role in her particular way of thinking. According to Bakhtin, we use the discourse or words of others in our speech without knowing it. This was clear in Condé's participation in established discourses:

Condé: [F]rom a belief that the issue that you're fighting, whether it be around Israel, whether it be around Palestine, whether it be around nuclear, whether it be—whatever the issue that impassions you, and you're an artist, then you have those issues that you're going to be talking about.

Condé discussed her motivations with colleagues and adopted her own ideological concept. The ideological becoming is an evolving process that has become a core part of her sub-consciousness because of the way she assimilates dialogue.

It is within these dialogical interactions that Condé can begin to think, reinterpret language, understand the persuasive tensions and authority of others, and construct new understandings, perspectives, and ideologies for herself. Each of us is struggling with these conflicting voices and ongoing dialogue.

Condé and Beveridge's identities are made up of an accumulation of memories, conscious and unconscious thoughts influenced by the words of others, their current subject position, and psychic and emotional structures. Condé's consciousness, expressed in her use of certain words, revealed an attitude that can be seen as her statement of fact. Most of Condé and

Beveridge's work has been with or related to labour organizations, as a way of sustaining a long-term relationship with the union and activist movements.

Condé: So you have to move from being as we were, sculptors and painters, into being someone who is actually now trying to find a language that is readable to a public around the issues that they are involved in. Otherwise, who are you doing it for? In the art world, things are supposed to be obscure, just as they are when you read some intellectual's writing. It's supposed to be obscure because it's only readable by that little small group. It's not going to be read by the guy on the auto line.

Condé and Beveridge's art practice have investigated a range of visual cues and contradictions that challenge the viewer to think critically. They have utilized evocative images and oral history, and incorporate references to contemporary social and political issues related to the concerns of working people and social activists.

Condé suggested that much of contemporary visual art reflects the dominant class and represents visual art as conceptual or theoretical and separate from most people's lives. To the extent that many art exhibitions are based on esoteric and exclusive knowledge to access their meaning, they have become class specific.

Condé also asserted that many contemporary visual artists and others in the art world have the traditional view that art is for art's sake, and they reinforce this notion by isolating the artwork so nothing from the outside world will intrude and/or interfere with the aesthetic viewing experience.

Beveridge: Basically, you are not only challenging the kind of conventions of the fine arts in terms of its kind of abstraction, and ambiguity and those sorts of things, but you also need to challenge the media. In other words, what most people see as culture, you have to challenge those assumptions too. So in a certain sense, you're developing a dual thing, where you're working in a critical relationship to the arts community but you're also working in a critical relationship to what would be called popular culture.

Beveridge: We've used religious imagery a lot. Because when you're looking for a language that is understood and a symbolism that is understood, it ends up being religious

symbolism that is commonly understood. Most people can, even people who are not Christian, know what those symbols are.

Beveridge: Because the interesting thing about religious symbols despite the entire overlay that goes on that and the problems with that, they also point to certain kinds of values. And certain kinds of beliefs.

Condé and Beveridge's art practice has been both participatory and collaborative, and has reconnected aesthetic values and ethical responsibility. Condé and Beveridge's art practice has been radically different from the conventional arts practice in which the validation of artworks is mediated through art markets, the academy, or peer recognition.

As Declan McGonagle (2008) writes,

These artists who engage in social processes and see no contradiction in their practice being validated as art, a view that, in my opinion, is perfectly consistent with a contextual reading of art's relations within human society. This dialectic is fundamental to the practice of Condé and Beveridge because it is the dynamic through which the non-artist engages in the making of meaning as metaphor for the possibility of transformation from consumer to participant, thereby gaining purchase on the production of meaning and value in social as well as cultural space." (p. 35)

### **Answerability**

In order to begin to explain the concept of answerability, Hayes goes back to Bakhtin's belief that we all have a moral obligation to one another through our acts and that creativity is bound by the "profound moral obligation we bear toward others" (Haynes, 1995, p. 295). Within the concept of answerability, both art practice and art theory must be answerable to life and society as a whole. Artists do not act alone and must be engaged in the world around them and they have an ethical responsibility to respond to the world through their creative acts.

Beveridge: Culture is an expression of the shared experience of a community, and maybe of multiple communities within a particular geography if you look at it in an ecological sense. A culture is an expression of the life and beliefs of the people, and the spirit of the people. You have to actually work with those communities to be able to understand, know, express, and share what those things are. So your responsibility is to basically articulate the broader community. In terms of the fine arts, the responsibility in artists' field is basically to art itself. And the curious thing is that all art is collaborative practice. The issue is that most artists work within the arts community and it is a collaborative practice within the confines of the arts community and its institutions.

### **The Artists Ethical Responsibility to Community**

Beveridge: In most, pretty well all the projects we've done are working people. The thing that comes across the sense of responsibility people have around their job. Whether it's healthcare workers, autoworkers or cultural workers at the Richmond Cultural Centre, etc. is people have a sense of responsibility to their job and to the larger society for whom they're working in a certain sense. And the thing that healthcare workers express is at the needs of the patient is the most important. Similarly in cultural centres it's about serving the public, etc. etc. So the sense of social, how does that apply to arts? Well, artists have in a certain sense, a social responsibility to the communities they live and work. Because basically culture. It involves a larger issue of how do you see culture.

Beveridge talked about how his and Condé's art projects have focused on exploring positive and accessible images of working people and community activists that simultaneously present the nature of work in our contemporary society. There are many stereotypes of working class people as fat, lazy, or of community activists as anarchists ready to destroy private property and cause widespread looting (Butsch, 2003).

Condé and Beveridge utilized mainstream religious iconography and visual strategies used in advertising to invite identification with particular communities. Their strategy incorporates contemporary visual art as a means of promoting a critical and multi-layer perspective of social and political issues in contemporary society. Condé and Beveridge art process makes the assumption about the relationship between art and the broader social and political world, and about the knowledge that is created from this juxtaposition.

The role of the artist is to not to represent real life but to “stage the conflicts inherent in hetroglossia, the coincidences and competitions of languages and discourses” (Stam, 1992, p. 50).

For Kester (2004), the ethics and aesthetics of art and how viewers interact with the art and artist are critical in the process of dialogue. Artists like Condé and Beveridge “They define themselves as through their ability to catalyze understanding, to mediate exchange, and to sustain an ongoing process of empathetic identification and critical analysis” (p.118)

## **Interviews with Selected Cultural Workers**

### **Context of Public Matters**

The process I used to interview the selected participants explored issues, including the cultural workers’ roles in their institution and in the community and how these roles established users of the participating cultural institutions. This process helped cultural workers articulate their stories to the public through a critical form of creative inquiry and provided an important opportunity for people working in culture institutions to expand their appreciation of contemporary art. The participants also explored, local cultural and political structures, and begin to formulate a cultural politic democratization of cultural resources for the public.

### **The Participating Cultural Workers’ Collaborative Process**

*Public Matters* examined the cultural sector and their relation to the public. *Public Matters* investigated definitions of intellectual/cultural work and examined the role each institution played within the context of the City of Richmond. The artwork examined:

- relationships between the cultural workers;
- their workplaces (art gallery, archives, library, and museum); and
- the people who used these cultural institutions.

Condé and Beveridge discussed the creative process with project participants and laid the groundwork for research and development of the artwork, *Public Matters*. The material from the discussions served as a textual component of the art project.

I interviewed the participants about their working process over a five-day period at the Richmond Art Gallery in Richmond, British Columbia. I used a video camera for the interviews. I observed and recorded their working processes and their participation in the exhibition.

As the researcher/curator of *Public Matters*, I organized three group discussions with the participants. The participants focused on issues of work relations, workplace and community. The participants used the discussion to create text and images. The cultural workers, the work they did at the centre, and the local social and cultural contexts were the artist's primary concern. I coordinated the discussion groups in consultation with the artists and the participating organizations. These discussions helped inform the artists' work and helped the participants understand the context of the workplace and the representation of the public.

*Public Matters* involved individual conversations with each of the participants, a workshop in which visual ideas were discussed and finally each of them played themselves in the final image along with actors who played the public characters. The process was structured to nurture open conversations and develop a spirit of collaboration.

### **Questions for Cultural Workers**

- 1) What do you do?
- 2) What do you do for the City of Richmond?
- 3) What is the value in informal learning?
- 4) Why does it matter?

- 5) Who are our users?
- 6) What are their expectations and ours?

### ***Public Matters: A Brief Description***

*Public Matters* is a composite photograph created by Condé and Beveridge in collaboration with the cultural workers from the Richmond Cultural Centre. There are three series images that are layered within the photo-narrative. The first series of images is the portrayal of the workers. An archivist is retrieving materials for a research student with a long list of requests. To the side of them is an archive volunteer.

A librarian is helping a woman navigate the web who in turn is presenting a small gift in appreciation to the librarian. At the top of the stairs, a coordinator for the community studios (Arts Centre) is welcoming an excited child and a quilting group member.

The second series of images depicts the Museum Educational Programs Coordinator is explaining cranberry harvesting (Richmond is the cranberry capital of Canada) to a group of children, one of whom is flying a paper airplane (a reference to the Vancouver Airport located in Richmond). The gallery curator is encouraging a woman to visit the gallery despite the posturing of an art connoisseur. Finally, the coordinator of the Richmond Cultural Centre and her assistant are serving people at the reception desk who are waiting in line for information and directions.

The third series of images portrays the public engaging institutions: a protest in support of the arts and public services; a petition; a political debate; and a board meeting and a public protest outside the Richmond Cultural Centre. Throughout the set, members of the public are reading the history of Japanese Canadians in Richmond, returning books, or bringing their artwork to the gallery. The photographer at the top of the stairs is Condé.

The third series of images depicts an elderly Asian woman who worked in a fish cannery in Steveston (a part of Richmond) who is donating her uniform and boots to the Museum Program Coordinator. A gallery staff member is showing a young boy a photo of himself wearing the donated boots, portraying the idea of learning by walking in someone else's boots. The photo is based on Jeff Wall's *Backpack*, an image of a young boy. Behind the narrative characters is a plinth on which additional artefacts from the fisheries are displayed. Against the back wall, to the left of the side pillar, is an archival photo from the 1940s of two women fishery workers wearing boots. The finished image was digitally constructed using actors and employees of the Richmond Cultural Centre.

## Public Matters



### Analysis of Cultural Worker Interviews

Condé and Beveridge began the workshop with a series of questions and explained the process they would be using to the participants. They collectively agreed to focus on actual encounters that the cultural workers had with members of the public on a daily basis and, in particular, on stories that could be translated into the photo work of each of the participants. This

was the process used in creating the *Public Matters* photograph: a mixing of the voices of the participants, the artists, and the researcher/curator.

The photograph demonstrates how dialogue can be used as a collaborative form of creative inquiry, and how this process can effect change in the participants and the public perception of the role of cultural institutions in Richmond. The public had opportunities to add their voices and perspectives by viewing and interacting with the photograph. Some members of the public recognized the familiar faces of those who worked at the Richmond Cultural Centre in the photo-narrative *Public Matters*.

Peter Harris, exhibit, and program coordinator, one of the project participants stated:

I really enjoyed the experience of being involved in the exhibit, and felt honoured to be amongst those recognized for what we do in the cultural sector. Carole and Karl were delightful to work with. The whole experience offered a new concept, for me at least, of what art could be. I love their commitment to giving the community a voice, as opposed to the usual self-expression that is all the rage. Public response for me has been amusing. Since I appear easily recognized in the foreground of the large image, I have nearly achieved local celebrity status. Other comments have all been positive about the exhibit.

Lynn Bevis, Executive Director at the Richmond Art Gallery stated:

Which is why it's really nice to have the museum and the archives and the library and the arts centre and everybody all in one space. Therefore, we get a lot of shared visitorship, which is lovely. We get a certain amount of tourists so people are obviously coming here specifically to experience the work here. We get quite a lot of people who come in from Vancouver and quite often—even people from other galleries, other directors, and curators come to see what we are doing here.

Kathy Tycholis, education and public programs coordinator at the Richmond Art Gallery said:

The whole process helped all the staff better understand what each organization does. Whenever we did meet, it led to many conversations about the similar hurdles we face and how each organization copes with changes to our community, political scene, and financial climate.

Rebecca Forrest, curator at the Richmond Museum said,

I think overall the exhibit was very well received and it appears as if it started a lot of dialogue and conversations at the opening. As part of the insurgent curation of this

project, I explored Grant Kester's notion of dialogical aesthetics as a means to involve the participants, the artists, and myself as the research/curator in a process of mutual learning.

The use of dialogue is based on the possibility of a relationship that breaks down the conventional distinction between artist, artwork, and audience—a relationship that allows the viewer to respond to the artist and is part of the participatory process used by viewers. Kester argues that socially engaged artworks are rooted in encounters in which the subjective positions of artist, community collaborators, and viewers are challenged and potentially transformed. The process of dialogue used as part of the art-making process can provide the foundation for productive relationships between works of art and the broader social and political world. Viewers are encouraged to engage with artworks that utilize a dialogical approach,

According to Rebecca Forrest, community accessibility was critical to her as an active collaborator:

I think first we are here to serve our communities. In addition, that does not change if you are looking at the arts centre, the art gallery, the front desk, or the archives. We are all here to serve the community, and I would say for the art gallery, archives and myself, parts of our, what we do is about collecting and preserving Richmond's culture.

Forrest goes on to state:

I think the best thing I have gotten out of it is, despite all us working in this building, is that we do not often work together. Therefore, it has been wonderful to actually sit down with the art gallery, archives, art centre, administration, and talk about who we are, what we do, and what is ultimately important. Because when it boiled down to—what I was hearing from everyone, it came down to the community, people's stories, their experiences, and engagement with the community, and working with the artists has been fun actually. Especially seeing everyone kind of mime out what they do. It does bring us back down to the core of what we do. Which is interesting because sometimes we are side-tracked by phone calls, emails, and requests that sometimes have nothing to do with your job? So to bring it back down to the core is interesting.

The dialogue came out of a conversation but promoted an opportunity for exchange between the participants. The dialogue used is part of a process of collaboration that involved an

exchange between how the artists were able to accept the participating cultural workers involvement in the art-making process used in this project.

Lesson (2009) suggests,

The interaction between artist and individual and actions of multiple individuals acting in a shared authorship re-defines the relationship between viewer and artwork and has the potential to disrupt the concept that it is not the artist, or the critics, who create a work or determine its meaning, but any individual who interprets it. This is an ongoing and unending process, which allows viewers and readers to speak and respond to each other both within the artwork and outside of it to interpret its meaning. (p. 16)

In terms of the dynamics between the artists and participants,

Bill Purver, put it this way:

I didn't really have expectations. As I initially said, I had initial trepidation and a little bit of worry, which certainly I do not have now. But I think what happened generally for me is there was a dynamic working and the relationship that Karl and Carole managed to develop with everyone put them all at ease. In addition, it is almost as if in my mind, "hey I've done my part," my expectation is this will be a very interesting work of art that is created, but it is up to the artists now to create it. Therefore, my expectation simply is, 'oh I'm looking forward to see what they do.

After the photo narrative, *Public Matters*, was completed and the exhibition was open to the public, I had a series of discussions with the participants from three of the cultural institutions. I started by asking the archivist, gallery director, and museum curator how they would define concepts of intellectual/cultural work. I also asked how they would define the role of Richmond Cultural Centre workers and how they would describe their own roles, and how would they establish a dialogue with the public?

Bill Purver, the archivist at the Richmond Archives described what he did for the City of Richmond:

So in archives for example, the definition of a record, of an archival record, is a document, whether in any media, it could be a photograph, it could be textual records, maps, whatever, but any media that is created naturally by a creator, in the course of that creator's natural event. It isn't created for posterity. It's very important for people to learn the past, but it's very important for people to learn there is a basic, raw material to understand the past. That you can't make up your facts. You can't change history by changing the facts. And the facts only exist as evidence in documentation, in the original documentation that's carried out in context.

Purver also defined the value of learning within the context of archives:

The value of learning has so many different values. There is sort of an aesthetic goal; there is a value just inherent in knowing something about the past—and in particular the past of your community where you live. We do share that kind of thing. There's a relationship to trying to let people learn about the past. Here, ours is an undiluted past; in the museum it's an interpretive past, the museum interprets the past and then does it through exhibits and displays and programs. Are archives socially constructed institutions, the nature of history and evidence, of notions of memory and truth and the production of knowledge?

Archives are located in specific contexts and settings with unique stories to tell. The physical place or location of a cultural institution historically shapes the focus, content, and message that an archive shares with the large community.

What draws the public to a specific, local, cultural, and the historical place where they can ask questions such as, 'Why does this place matter?' and 'How does understanding this place give meaning to my community and myself?' Local stories often provide powerful windows into larger cultural, historical, and/or social themes (Taylor, 2010)

Richmond Art Gallery director, Lynn Bevis, focused on what she saw as role of the art gallery in people's lives. Bevis talked about how the art gallery could help people become more engaged, critical and empowered as citizens. Bevis asserted that art galleries provide opportunities to construct meaning and engage in a process of making meaning that offers

visitors the opportunity to draw connections, explore new ideas, and create endless storylines through visual art and historical exhibits. Taylor (2010) says that cultural institutions offer places where the community explores and revises its values, where complicated conversations occur, where complexity and controversy are embraced and engaged, where, in effect, the intellectual commons is modeled and enacted through events, programs, and chance encounters in a space that is hospitable, comfortable, and accessible to all. Taylor (2010) goes on to state that,

Although context shapes the framework and the content of the opportunities for learning within cultural institutions and much of the learning is collaborative in nature, cultural institutions are also sites of contestation, framed by community challenges over whose story is told. For example, the politics and power dynamics of a community create institutions and structures that in turn shape the community. (p. 9)

Bevis saw art galleries as uniquely situated public places for civic engagement and spaces for informal learning. For Bevis, art gallery programming offers the community a way to validate and recognize its own cultures and appreciate other ways of seeing. Art galleries function as places where people learn to explore their own identities in relation to others, to reflect on how people are different, and to acknowledge the similarities that bind people together.

Purver, on the other hand, saw archives strictly as places that preserved historical records—facts for the community—and only dealt with objective and fact-based materials. There is no interpretation or use of narrative exhibition strategies in the archives because, according to Purver, archival material represents what took place in the past.

Bevis believed that art galleries have the potential to provide visitors with the means to re-contextualize meaning and the significance of visual images, and to see exhibitions as a series of interim statements. Bevis asserted that the role of the art gallery in the process of meaning

making entails understanding its role as a site for negotiating cultural borderlands and a space to create contact zones where, as Hooper-Greenhill (1994) states,

[D]ifferent identities, people, artworks, and artefacts can discover new possibilities to develop a cultural remapping, to rewrite cultural borders, and empower the museum visitor. The meaning that is constructed grows from an individual's previous knowledge and experience and supports the formation of interpretive communities to which an individual is a member. (p. 13)

Rebecca Forrest, curator of Richmond Museum and Heritage Services described her job:

As specifically related to protect the artefact collection and to make accessible Richmond's material culture and in essence, that is what the core of a museum is. So through our exhibits we're able to make that accessible to the public. So for us it's about collection, preservation, and then making that collection accessible and making history—it's cliché but—"come to life" and has more meaning than just an object sitting on a shelf. And we do that in a number of different ways, through exhibits, through public programming.

Forrest proposed that engagement with the public is a way of exploring meaning making by drawing connections and creating continuous storylines through presenting contemporary and historic objects in exhibitions. This combination has the potential to create new meanings and interpretations. Forrest suggested that meaning making is the process of making sense of experience, of explaining and interpreting the world to ourselves and to others.

Forrest stated that engaging with the public is a means of establishing a kind of dialogue.

I think the best example of public engagement is something we do here at the museum with contemporary collecting. Why would you collect new or recent objects? Well, who

better to tell our own stories than the people using these objects today? Who knows more about them than the people using them today? And we've been able to use them in exhibits to demonstrate change over time. And I think that's important for the public. In the museum, narratives and exhibitions about the community are created from the museum's material culture collection while the archival collection comprises facts about and for the community that has been compiled over years.

Hooper-Greenhill (2007) says that "the displays of artefacts and the visual and textual narratives produced and reproduced in museums have the power to produce meanings that work towards constructing specific social formations" (p. 41).

An integrative artistic collaboration, where the participants were striving for a common voice and intersubjective creativity, was firmly rooted in equality and interdependence. In the process of collaboration, *Public Matters* places importance on equality, mutual respect, and consensus. In this type of collaboration, the workers contribute their content and critical perspectives while the artists guide the development of an intertwined process.

Talyor (2010) states,

Another layer of contestation in addition to how these institutions present their collection and who and what is included is recognizing that visitors bring their own positionality and contextually situated perspectives when making meaning (individually or in groups) of the local narrative or exhibit. (p. 11)

Condé and Beveridge were better able to tell their stories and illustrate social issues important to the cultural workers offering community members an opportunity to identify with the cultural workers at the Richmond Cultural Centre.

## **Interpretive Activities**

*Open Conversations* presented a series of public programming initiatives to help community members better understand the issues explored in the exhibition, and to share the results of the exhibition with the broader community. These initiatives included the following:

- Artist talk.
- Lunch with the Curator.
- Public discussion.
- Film screening of the documentary of Conde and Beveridge.
- Panel discussion with Richmond Cultural Centre workers.
- Development of a school art program.
- Activities for children.

The interpretive materials such as wall texts and extended labels invited community members to identify with the art works and helped viewers ask questions about how we see, and perceive. In order to understand the exhibition, viewers needed to more fully understand the art images—their themes and contexts.

All the activities were all intended to encourage viewers to examine their own subjective experiences and perspectives in relation to the themes being presented in this exhibition.

The interpretive materials of *Open Conversations* played an important role in conveying the perspectives of Condé and Beveridge and played an important role in beginning a dialogue with viewers. The text used in the extended exhibition labels articulated both the curatorial and artistic intention of the exhibition, and provided a way for viewers to engage with the artwork and compare their own perspectives and experiences others. The combination of image and text positioned the exhibition as a forum for dialogue—a means of challenging and provoking the viewer (See Appendix F for further description of activities).

## CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS

### Dialogic-Insurgent-Curator

One of my research objectives was to develop a critical curatorial practice that utilized a socially engaged, dialogical and collaborative approach in working with artists, art galleries, and viewers. I used the concept of dialogical aesthetics as a way of exploring how marginalized voices challenged dominant narratives, and to compare numerous points of view as a way of exploring community centred ways of knowing. The research was focused on how the art gallery could function as a site for dialogue, and collaboration through the sharing of individual stories and experiences and through presenting of multiple ways of knowing and understanding the art world.

*Open Conversations* encouraged viewers to see beyond their own subjectivities, and engage with the world through the artist's consciousness rather than only from their own point of view. Empathetic insight was a necessary component of a dialogical aesthetic. Awareness of the content and the context of the artwork was actively cultivated for public viewing.

I explored how a creative form of PAR was used to facilitate a collaborative process in the research and development of the exhibition, *Open Conversations*, and photographic artwork, *Public Matters*. The use of a series of activities helped establish a dialogue and attempted to situate the Richmond Art Gallery as space for shared dialogue and offered participants opportunities to share different ways of knowing. This was accomplished in an atmosphere of mutual respect, and willingness to be open to different ways of knowing and possibilities. *Public Matters* focused on how the cultural workers at the Richmond Cultural Centre used dialogue and collaboration to articulate their working relationships at the Cultural Centre and how they engaged with the public.

The art gallery was a negotiated space that was created by a group of people who had few commonalities but built relationships with each other. Collaboration and dialogue were used in the art-making process of the works presented in *Open Conversations*. Through exhibition text panels and a series of activities that examined the content and context of the exhibition was presented for the public. These activities encouraged viewers to ask questions, and emphasized how questions could lead viewers to subjective interpretations.

This dissertation examined the use of dialogical aesthetics in curatorial practices, and how marginalized and/or under-represented voices have been suppressed in art galleries by the cultural, social, and political domination of neoliberalism. Socially engaged practice explored how art galleries can be spaces where dominant discourses are critiqued by juxtaposing them with competing voices and diverse points of view.

As the researcher/curator, I helped create a communal space for dialogical art making in which the voices of the participants and their different ways of knowing were examined. This process challenged the power the researcher holds over research subjects and offered an opportunity for participants to collaborate with professional artists in the creation of a work of art. This exhibition posed many questions about how to situate the art gallery in a contested public space where the assertion of oppositional voices disrupted dominant ways of seeing artwork.

### **Dialogical Looking**

The major of the research in this dissertation focused on exploring a collaborative and creative process working with artists, cultural workers and myself as the researcher and co-collaborator. Part of this research is investigating ways for the viewer to become an engaged participant as part of the project. The viewers were invited to write responses to questions on the

wall. The anonymous comments posted on the wall and in the comment book were explored in an informal discussion throughout the duration of the exhibition. The exploration of the concept of dialogical looking was less of a focus of this study but was explored as a way for viewers gain access to the art works and the art-making processes. Using dialogical looking as a methodology was intended to help viewers engage with the artworks in the exhibition. It also facilitated knowledge sharing between the artist and viewers.

The concept of dialogical looking suggests that viewers can consciously articulate questions and utilizes a dialogical and collaborative approach and will help provoke the viewer into exploring other concepts such as theme and context.

Pierroux (2006) asserts that having an understanding of dialogical narrative allows for a concept of visitor agency in the processes of meaning making: “Contemporary museology needs to develop a concept of interiority grounded in a sociocultural concern with the connections visitors make with objects, stories and experiences in museums and how these experiences intersect outside of the museum.” (p. 222)

Dialogical looking is a concept that creates an experience more comprehensive than an individual perspective. Curators who rely on the concept of dialogical looking are able to create processes of looking that asks viewers to create meaning based on the visual art that is being looked at, and make dialogical connections to the viewer’s own experience.

The following questions were developed to help viewers explore the concept of dialogical looking and assist them in exploring their relationships to the aesthetic, social, and cultural relations that were examined in the artworks in *Open Conversations*. The questions were intended to help viewers through a close study of the artworks. Viewers responded to the questions by writing comments on slips of paper in the room used for interpretive activities.

- 1) What do these images mean?
- 2) What or whose reality, if any, do these images represent?
- 3) How does your experience shape the meaning of the artwork?
- 4) What kinds of stories are the artists telling us?
- 5) What stories are depicted in the artworks?
- 6) What do you think happened in the scenes captured in the photograph?
- 7) Are these photographs works of art?
- 8) Why is this artwork important?
- 9) How does this artwork make you feel?
- 10) Why did the artists use a particular style or material?
- 11) What is the artwork about?
- 12) How does art express meaning?
- 13) How does artwork relate to your own interests?
- 14) What is the social role of the artist?

McKay and Monteverdi (2003) describe the process of dialogical looking:

Viewers exchange observations, memories, and associations with partners, while maintaining a second, internal dialogue as they work to understand the images they encounter. A third dialogue develops with the work of art itself, as it elicits questions and responses from each viewer. By acknowledging the importance of multiple dialogues, we propose that dialogic looking creates rich educational experiences that do not solely rely on the mediating voice of the museum expert, whether through written wall text or guided tours. (p. 40)

The use of dialogue between viewers and the artwork suggest closer study is required to demonstrate how viewers of art engage in inner dialogue. Mayer (2005) writes, “Dialogical looking is a three-fold approach, three simultaneously occurring dialogues—those with partners, within the privacy of one’s thoughts, and with the works of art themselves—stimulate learning while looking at artworks” (p. 15).

The concept of dialogical looking has transformative implications for artists, art galleries, and visitors. The act of looking is dialogical and suggests how the perspectives of our consciousness can interact with visual art. When we are looking at an artist’s work, we are invited to see the world through the eyes of the artist and to compare that with our own experience. The use of dialogical looking assists viewers in organizing and balancing way of becoming more fully engaged with the meaning in creating and understanding artworks. Dialogical looking helped introduce viewers to Condé and Beveridge’s unique collaborative social art practice and provided viewers with opportunities to explore the artworks from within particular historical, social, and cultural contexts. This was accomplished through didactic panels and text labels.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

I explored Condé and Beveridge’s complex creative process that brought together empathic activism, stories of marginalized communities, and a commitment to telling the stories and revealing the realities of cultural workers, and community activists. I posed a series of questions to analyze the creative critical inquiry used as a form of socially engaged art practice. The following research questions were posed to Condé and Beveridge.

## Research Questions

*How are dialogical aesthetics used implicitly or explicitly as a strategy by Condé and Beveridge in their artwork?*

Condé and Beveridge's art practice represents a passionately shared social goal of a critique of mass culture and neoliberalism. The artists deliberately challenged the dominant neoliberal narrative with the goal to include the voices of those who have been marginalized and disenfranchised by this narrative within our society and our understanding of contemporary issues.

The presentation of marginalized voices was marked by the presentation of a range of different perspectives and beliefs, in which dominant discourses were critiqued through juxtaposing competing voices and alternative diverse points of view. *Open Conversations* represented a contemporary cultural discourse in the form of photographic works and explored what Bakhtin called the polyphony, the incorporation of many voices, references, and the artist's voices. *Open Conversations* validated the Richmond Art Centre roles of cultural workers and showed the local community how to share individual stories publically with the intent of building community.

An example of this is the artwork, *Liberty Lost (G20, Toronto)*, which was Condé and Beveridge's response to the G20 Summit in Toronto in 2010. This photograph depicts the marginalized and disenfranchised people we see in our society every day, who struggle to have their voices heard in public spaces that have been dominated by the voices of the wealthy and powerful—what Bakhtin calls authoritative discourse—for generations.

## Liberty Lost (G20, Toronto)



*In the art processes of Condé and Beveridge, what is the relationship between process as methodology and product as findings? How are these elements made visible to viewers?*

Kester (2011) sees the interface between the artwork/artist and the viewer as a form of aesthetic that incorporates dialogue as a way of experiencing artworks. The collaborative dialogue used as part of the creative process could be used as a model for collaborative art practices that influence community and social engagement. This process is an exchange between the viewer and an artist who listens and is willing to work with the community and share the community's perspectives. Dialogue operates within all areas of cultural production and applies simultaneously to everyday speech, popular culture, and artistic traditions.

The art works in *Open Conversations* demonstrated how art galleries can become public spaces for dialogue where marginalized voices are able to challenge dominant narratives.

The photo narrative *The Plague* illustrates dominant narrative of unrestrained resource development and its effects on the environment and the marginalized voices of those who are opposed to the destruction of our ecosystem.

### **The Plague (2010)**

*The Plague* refers to the dual crisis of a destructive economy and a collapsing environment. The piece is set in the anonymous space of an international airport. Grouped in the front are various corporate figures representing capitalism. Behind the figures are major historic contributors to economics and environmentalism including; Adam Smith, Milton Friedman, Charles Darwin, and Rachel Carson. On the other side of the image are the people who suffer the consequences and resist the ongoing economic and environmental devastation.

## The Plague (2010)



*How does my role as a dialogical insurgent disrupt or enhance the art practice of Condé and Beveridge?*

In my role as a researcher, I developed a collaborative relationship with the artists and the participating cultural workers in an attempt to construct a new way of knowing. The use of dialogue challenged the relationship between the researcher and the researched in the creation of collaborative process. The artworks presented in the exhibition *Open Conversations* consisted of dialogically based works in which conversation was an essential part of the work itself. The

words of others reveal other ways of understanding, conflicting voices, and open space for new interpretations.

My strategy focused on establishing collaborative relationships with the participants and artists through a series of discussions, activities and the creation of an artwork that was presented in the public sphere. My role as project curator was to be an active listener, empathic to participants issues. The creation of the artwork was in control of the participants and artists that would ensure all participants' voices were heard as the project moved forward. I initiated a process that we created together as a model for art making in relation to the local community and issues at the Cultural Centre. This process offered opportunities to develop collaborative form of creative inquiry with the aim of developing new knowledge about the local community, the art gallery, the artists, the participants and the role of the public.

As part of this process, I arranged and facilitated numerous meetings with the participants one year prior to the arrival of the artists. This set the stage for using dialogue with the participants and provided an opportunity for the project participants to learn from each other in the creation of the photo narrative, *Public Matters*.

I also consulted with the participating artists in preparation for the exhibition and the collaborative artwork. I met with the cultural workers and collected stories from participants about their roles in the Richmond Cultural Centre; I gained insight into their jobs and how they engaged the public.

*How can the assumptions and practices in Condé and Beveridge's work be used in collaborative approaches to promote critical reflection in making artwork more accessible to diverse communities?*

The subject matter in *Open Conversations* was selected to help initiate a conversation when seen by viewers. Viewers were invited through a series of questions about the perspectives and experiences of the subjects in the photographs. The intention was to actively engage the viewer in a dialogue that involved the artworks, the artists, and the public. Viewers could make personal connections to their own experiences and re-interpret contemporary social and cultural issues. The selection of works presented in *Open Conversations* reflected a diverse series of alternative worldviews of those people who have been marginalized by the dominant social and political forces of neoliberalism. I suggest that the *Open Conservations* exhibition helped expose missing information and the real life experiences between privileged institutions and socially excluded groups.

*What was the role of the participating cultural workers as collaborators in the creation of Condé and Beveridge's artworks?*

Recent developments in contemporary curatorial practice have explored the idea of community collaboration, particularly in the formation of collaborative approaches to gallery exhibition programming. The artists, cultural workers, and I agreed on a collaborative approach in the development of the exhibition and the site-specific work *Public Matters*. Mounting this exhibition was a process of enabling and empowering representatives from the Richmond Cultural Centre to create the exhibition on their own terms, representing their consciousness and their choices.

During the exhibition of *Open Conversations*, the Richmond Art Gallery become a public forum for discussion and helped articulate diverse points of view. The conversations between the artists, the cultural workers, and me as the researcher were essential elements in the creation of

the artwork, *Public Matters* and the exhibition, *Open Conversations*. The exhibition attempted to create an awareness of the content and the context of the artwork as a way of engaging viewers.

### **Collaboration as an Insurgent Curatorial Strategy**

My interest in the concept of dialogic discourse for museums comes from what Bakhtin (1981) said, “The ideological becoming of a human being, in this view, is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others” (p.341) Bakhtin also states that,

“ the tendency to assimilate others’ discourse takes on an even deeper and more basic significance in an individual’s ideological becoming, in the most fundamental sense. Another’s discourse performs here no longer as information, directions, rules, models and so forth- but strives rather to determine the very bases of our ideological interrelations with the world, the very basis of our behavior, it performs here as authoritative discourse, and an internally persuasive discourse. (p. 342)

I have attempted to incorporate this concept into the insurgent curatorial process I used in my case study of Condé and Beveridge and in the co-creation of the *Public Matters* artwork.

I propose that the insurgent curatorial process used in this exhibition can be used to reveal contradictory and conflicting voices found within the dominant narrative of neoliberalism how this narrative attempts to dominate and persuade the majority of society. The insurgent curatorial strategy used in this research was an attempt to challenge the dominant neoliberal narrative and juxtapose alternative narratives through a process of dialogue and creative collaboration.

My insurgent curatorial strategy challenged visitors’ understanding of contemporary social, cultural, and political issues, and encouraged multiple narratives and representations that reflected everyone in the community.

In choosing to present an alternative perspective, the art gallery helped to re-define the concepts of collaboration and explore the concept of inclusion within its role as a cultural institution. As Hooper-Greenhill (1994) asserts, “museums can enter the arena, fight for the power to impose meaning and definition, or stay out of the game or allow others to impose meaning and define limits” (p. 9).

This research also demonstrated visual art as a form of creative critical inquiry that explored issues of culture. This form of arts-based research can offer important insights into the construction of knowledge about our world, increasing the educational value of visual art.

### **Summary of My Insurgent Curatorial Strategy**

This investigation first explored the art practice of photographers, Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, who have developed an artistic process that involves direct collaboration in the production of art by employing a participatory, socially engaged framework. The second part of this research demonstrated how Condé and Beveridge co-created a new artwork, *Public Matters*, which examined cultural issues relating to the Art Gallery, Museum, Archives and Library located in the Richmond Cultural Centre. Condé and Beveridge and their collaborators created a photographic artwork that explored definitions of intellectual and cultural work, workplace issues, and the role these institutions play within the City of Richmond. This project explored definitions of intellectual/cultural work and examined relationships between the cultural workers, their workplaces, and the people who use these cultural institutions.

The curatorial strategy is explored in this research combined form of arts-based research and incorporated a participatory and collaborative process that help to give voice to those who have been marginalized and/or suppressed by dominant social narratives such as neoliberalism.

This curatorial strategy engaged the public in dialogue that facilitated multiple and diverse ways of knowing to embrace a holistic approach in a creative form of critical inquiry to examine a complex and changing contemporary world. This strategy is of interest to contemporary artists, curators, and interested members of the community who are looking to understand how the role of dialogue is an important process in the development of a new engagement between artists, art galleries, and in communities.

This curatorial strategy exposes viewers to new ideas, stimulates their minds and explores other ways of knowing and informal ways of understanding the contemporary world. Art galleries can be spaces of encounters or areas of discovery where members of the community are invited to share their way of knowing the world and the process of informal learning is both reciprocal and continual. My insurgent curatorial strategy included the following components:

- The concept of dialogue and community engagement for the establishment of a process of collaboration and participation.
- Work with artists who incorporate dialogue in their art practice.
- Work with art galleries committed to working with various communities to help articulate their perspectives.
- Engagement with a public who are searching for alternative perspectives and opportunities to expand their understanding of other voices and ways of knowing other voices.
- To curate exhibitions with multiple perspectives to reveal conflicting voices and make visible varied and opposing world-views allowing for many voices to be heard at once and equally

- To transform the art gallery into a dialogical public space and demonstrate how contemporary art can, through dialogue and creative collaboration, go beyond the walls of the art gallery.
- To disrupt the tradition concept of the art gallery as a sacred space for quiet contemplation and assert the concept of space where diverse dialogue and many voices are heard and where members of the public can re-imagine themselves through the voices of others.
- Situate the viewer as an “active participant” in meaning making and the art gallery as a contact zone grounded in collaboration, participatory action, and critical dialogue.
- Explore the ethics of responsibility and obligation through creative forms of collaboration, participation, and dialogue.
- Articulate the ethical implications of the creative act.
- Present how artists are active agents of change in contemporary society and are obligated to make a difference in our communities.
- Situate the viewer as a central part of the meaning making process and explore how this can lead to a change in consciousness, greater capacity for compassion and responsibility to local and international communities.
- Offer multiple perspectives and multiple forms of languages that facilitate thinking and meaning-making in the world around us.
- To explore, conflicting discourses, as a way of finding alternate understandings of the world and transform our world.
- To explore how art galleries and museums can reveal their dominant authority so visitors can explore alternative narratives new and create new interpretations for themselves.

## **CHAPTER SIX: FINAL WORDS**

### **Overview- Was this research a good process?**

The purpose of this research project was to examine how the use of dialogue as a collaborative form of creative inquiry can be used as a socially engaged practice to help situate art galleries as public spaces for civic engagement. This research explored the process of dialogue as a shared and collaborative process and how it provoked, challenged, and transformed the participants, artists, and the researcher/curator in this research. The research examined a creative form of participatory action research (PAR) as a means of facilitating a collaborative process in the research and development of an exhibition and photographic artwork to help articulate the perspectives of cultural workers and what they do for the public. This curatorial strategy wove together stories, subjective narratives of disenfranchised voices and specific communities in a creative exploration of contemporary issues from the perspectives of marginalized and under-represented voices. An insurgent curatorial strategy can situate art galleries as spaces where dominant discourses can be critiqued by juxtaposing them with competing voices and diverse points of view.

The research focused on how the art gallery can function as a site for community building through the sharing of individual memories and stories as well as the gathering and exhibition of multiple visual histories offered in the public sphere. Art galleries are uniquely situated as public places for civic engagement, and can function as social institutions within civil society that are capable of expanding consciousness and transforming community.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

I propose that more work be done on critical contemporary curatorial practices guided by dialogical aesthetics. More study is needed to explore how to reconstitute the function and

purpose of art galleries as open spaces that stimulate collaborative social interaction, dialogue, and exploration of contemporary issues. The collaborative approach used in *Open Conversations* challenged traditional definitions of curatorial work and challenged opportunities to explore dialogue driven and collaborative process-oriented approaches.

The insurgent curatorial strategy proposed in this research is situated as part of a larger transformation of museum practices involving more community collaboration with marginalized and disfranchised communities.

The process of collaboration between institutions and community organizations is very complex and entails developing a protocol between art galleries and museum's perspective and the voices of the marginalized.

This dissertation explored an insurgent curatorial strategy that could be used to stimulate active and collaborative social interactions. This dissertation explored contemporary issues from the perspectives of under-represented voices. This strategy provoked conversations that questioned dominant contemporary narratives, and demonstrated how the use of dialogue in cultural expression is built on multiple, conflicting voices and can reveal social truths and contradictions because it rejects a single and dominant voice.

The ability of marginalized voices to challenge these narratives, allows for numerous points of view and ways of knowing to be articulated. The conflicting voices, assimilation of words of others, as well as dominant mainstream narratives, found in traditional art gallery can offer opportunities for contestation. The power of institutions such as museums and art galleries can legitimize certain identities and histories over others.

My curatorial strategy was built around the idea that dialogue and the voices of others—their discourse—is central to how people develop their ideologies (Bakhtin, 1981). I believe that

an insurgent curatorial practice can help art galleries can take a more active role in critiquing contemporary issues.

Through this project, the artists, the participants and community members were able to tell and hear their stories through their voices, and make visible the work they do and communicate these stories to the public in a creative and collaborative process. This process allowed my voice to become one of the voices incorporated into the artist's vision, the participant's voices, and my vision for the project as the researcher/curator.

One of the objectives of this research was to develop a critical framework that utilized a socially-engaged curatorial practice and established a dialogical and collaborative approach in working with artists, art galleries and the viewer. The use of dialogical aesthetics in curatorial practices offered opportunities to explore marginalized voices, to challenge dominant narratives, and to compare numerous points of view as a way of exploring community centred ways of knowing.

The participation of the public and the cultural workers as co-collaborators was critical to the development of the participatory dialogical practise concept used in this research. This dissertation attempted to explore and offer alternative perspectives and subjective experiences for viewers to engage with while looking at artworks created to form a dialogical foundation.

Through the selection of artists, the encouragement of community collaborations, attempted to involve viewers in experimental collaborative processes as way of contrasting dominant ways of seeing and knowing and alternative narratives. It was my intention to offer an

alternative creative process as an opportunity for people to explore their own identities in relation to others, to reflect on how people are different and how they are the same.

This strategy explored Bakhtin notion that the assimilation of words of others affects our conscious and unconscious thoughts. It is within these dialogic interactions that the viewer can begin to think about new ideas, and understand the intensions between alternative voices and dominant narratives such as neoliberalism. At the same time, these dialogical interactions enable viewers to construct new understandings, perspectives, and ideologies.

The photo-narrative, *Scene Otherwise* is a good example of how the voices or marginalized and disenfranchised people. This work based on the Occupy movement that organized many public demonstrations against the dominant neoliberal agenda in 2011. The figures in this photograph make up the voices of those who have been disenfranchised from society and was set in a park where the occupiers set up tents that included a library, media and arts centres, medical aid, and food services. The main character, a woman dressed in red, is shown in four stages of her involvement with the Occupy movement. The various communities or voices of others, that made up this movement include: First Nations, students, environmentalists, anti-poverty and migrant activists, and union members.

By revealing other possible meanings behind dominant discourses such as neoliberalism, the possibility of a space for new interpretations and change becomes possible.

### Image-Scene Otherwise (2012)



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## APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

### Curriculum and Instruction

### Participant Consent Form

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#### *Putting the Public in Public Art Galleries: The Insurgent Curator and Visual Art as a Critical Form of Creative Inquiry*

You are invited to participate in a study entitled, Putting the Public in Public Art Galleries: **The Insurgent Curator and Visual Art as a Critical Form of Creative Inquiry** being conducted by Scott Marsden The research begins June 1, 2012 and ends on December 31, 2012

Scott Marsden is a PhD candidate in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria and you may contact him if you have further questions by email at [scottmarsden@shaw.ca](mailto:scottmarsden@shaw.ca).

As a graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Mike Emme. You may contact my supervisor at 250-721-7896.

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this research project is to investigate how visual art functions as a critical form of creative inquiry and what can be learned when an art gallery attempts to operate as an open, public space that facilitates the sharing of individual memories and stories and a multiplicity of versions of history offered in the public sphere with the intent of community building. My research will also examine how the concept of dialogical aesthetics can be used to examine public experience, action, relationship, exchange, encounter, and communication.

#### **Importance of this Research**

Research of this type is important because dialogical aesthetics can help situate art galleries as public spaces that invite participation, dialogue, involvement, and the construction of community, and have the potential to involve visitors in a dialogic process as a means for personal and social transformation. Dialogical aesthetics facilitates dialogue among diverse communities and/or networks and explores the concept of dialogue as a form of socially engaged art practice. This art practice marks an emergence of a body of contemporary art practice concerned with collaboration and emancipatory action growing out of dialogue and conversation.

## **Participants Selection**

You are being asked to participate in this study because your work is important to the research conducted in this project. My research explores your artistic process which involves direct collaboration in the production of art with non-art communities and employs a participatory, socially engaged framework for the past 30 years. The research will investigate your unique use of dialogical aesthetics as a way of breaking down the conventional distinction between artist, artwork, and audience—a relationship that allows the artists to catalyze emancipatory insights through dialogue. The research will demonstrate how you have engaged in a type of dialogue through a creative orchestration of collaborative encounters and conversations that go beyond the walls of the gallery or museum. The research will explore how you utilize a dialogical approach to your art making. The resulting narratives you construct are within the languages of mass communication, delivering engaged social messages. Your artistic process will be explored in the exhibition and represent a complex creative process that links with activism, stories of marginalized communities, and a commitment to the social responsibility of telling the stories and revealing the realities of working people.

What is involved if you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include a series of face-to-face meetings and workshops. Video recordings will be made of these meetings and a transcription of conversations will be made available to you. You will have access to the transcripts and the interview will be made up of 4 to 5 hours sessions and will take place over a four-day period as well as documenting their working process over the course of the four-day period. I will be documenting your working process as they develop and art project at the Richmond Art Gallery over a two-day period. The series of face-to-face meetings would consist of a series of preliminary discussions about the artworks and the art project the artists will create at the Richmond Art Gallery. A section of the documenting your artists work process will consist of document the development, creation and installation of the site specific artwork at the Richmond Art Gallery. Once the artworks have been selected and the art project has been completed and installed. The following meetings will be preparing for the interview questions. The interview would take place over a four-day period. The tentative dates for the interviews are July 7–10, 2012 Additional section You will have access to the transcripts and any academic writing before they are used in any publications.

## **Benefits**

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include an exhibition of a new body of artwork and exposure to a new audience.

## **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw from the interview and observations at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, your interview data will not be used in the planned exhibition or exhibition catalogue/dissertation.

**Confidentiality**

Your work as artists is protected by copyright legislation. Because of your visibility as artists, interview data (that you will have had the opportunity to review) will not be confidential. The data will be used as part of the exhibition at the Richmond Art Gallery as a means of explaining the working process and art practice of the participating artists. Dissemination of Results: Exhibition it is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in a public exhibition and presentation in a public art gallery and selected conferences. By signing this form, you are consenting to the use of the data obtained in the research for future analysis. The video and the text from the interviews will be disseminated in the exhibition. Please confirm your consent to use the video and text interviews as part of the exhibition by signing below. \_\_\_\_\_

Signature

**Dissemination of Results: Dissertation**

It is anticipated that the results of the exhibition will be shared with others in the form of my dissertation. I would also like to use this video and text as part of my research after the exhibition opens for my research work. Please confirm your consent to use the video and text interview for my research by signing here. \_\_\_\_\_

Signature

**Disposal of Data**

Data from this study will be stored on the researcher’s computer, which is password, protected. If you decide to withdraw from the project, your interviews and documentation of your work process will be destroyed. The participants will have the opportunity to review all the transcripts of the interviews and observations before the text goes to print. The participants will have the opportunity to take out portions of the interview if they choose. The data from the research will be stored for archival purposes.

**Contacts**

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include supervisor. In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)). Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you agree to participate in this research project.

I agree to be identified by name/credited in the results of the study: \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Carole Condé & Karl Beveridge  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signatures

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

## **APPENDIX B: EXHIBITION EXTENDED TEXT AND RICHMOND ART GALLERY HANDOUT**

### ***Open Conversations: The Art Practice of Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge***

#### **Viewer Interpretive Process**

These activities are meant to provide the viewer with another way to engage with artworks in *Open Conversations* as well as explore the meaning making process within an art gallery. The artwork in this exhibition draws on the importance of formulating questions when looking at art and how these questions can lead to interpretation. Visitors to the exhibition will be able to construct meaning using their personal experiences, based on their own interpretations of the world, and through other individuals (family, peer group, friends, and colleagues) which constitute the community of the individual. Visitors to this exhibition are encouraged to become actively involved in developing their own interpretations of what they see and making sense of experience, of explaining and interpreting the world to ourselves and to others. The artworks in *Open Conversations* challenge the visitors' understanding of contemporary social, cultural and political issues and encourage multiple interpretations that reflect everyone in the community.

#### **Open Conversations**

*Open Conversation* explores the art practice of photographers, Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge who have developed an artistic process that involves direct collaboration in the production of art employing a participatory, socially engaged framework. Their art practice incorporates dialogue and collaboration with the audience, and is concerned with how we connect with others and create community.

The process of a dialogue-based, socially engaged art is intended to facilitate critical reflection of multiple and diverse ways of understanding our complex and constantly changing contemporary world. In this exhibition, conversation becomes an essential part of the work itself. Community collaboration is critical to the making of these photo narratives because those who were the subjects of their artwork also become engaged participants and active collaborators in their process of critical creative inquiry.

### **Interpretive Activity: Dialogical Looking**

*Open Conversations* explores two interpretive activities to help viewers investigate the artworks in this exhibition. *Art = Form + Theme + Context* and *Dialogical Looking* are methodologies that help engage the viewer with works of art in the exhibition. These interpretive activities are critical to helping the viewer gain access to visual art and explore the art-looking and art-making process. These activities help the viewer derive meaning from the exhibition by guiding them through the viewing experience. In order to understand the exhibition, the viewer needs to more fully understand art images to help create a sense of relevance and signification from the context of the viewer. These activities help encourage the viewer to examine their own responses to and points of view about the issues and concerns being presented in this exhibition.

Other interpretive materials included the documentary film, *Portrait of Resistance: The Art and Activism of Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge*, a selection of notes, drawings, storyboards, photo shoots, stage-props and other material used by the artists, and an interview of the artists to help reveal how the artists incorporate their use of dialogical aesthetics.

### **Form**

**(how the aesthetic elements were used to create the artworks) which include composition, art elements, principles of design, 2D&3D qualities, size, materials, etc.**

Condé and Beveridge make use of staged tableaux, thematic slogans, symbols and the construction of emblematic props and sets, which together generate an atmosphere of serious visual expression, all grounded in theoretical and ethical contexts. Condé and Beveridge utilize several modes of representation such as shallow pictorial space, text, emblematic references, specificity of narrative, community context to gain a larger sense of the background story, and removal of a single perspective in pictorial space in attempt to engage the viewer/reader as an active agent in the construction of the artwork's meaning.

Condé and Beveridge use a visual language that empowers the viewer/reader in a way that echoes of the photomontage work of artists in early twentieth-century Europe particularly in Russia and Germany. Condé and Beveridge's art practice investigates a range of visual cues and contradictions that function as visually intriguing signals that challenge the viewer to think critically. Their cibachrome tableaux combine the visual appeal of corporate advertising with Agit-prop montage elements. Using actors, props and painted sets, their staged photography projects labour issues through the codes of commercial culture. These photographic works were created thorough a series of collaborations with individuals representing various community, activist, cultural and labour organizations.

### **Exhibition Themes**

Following are support materials describing individual works which concerns the subject matter, point of view, visual sources or components depicted in the artwork; art historical references (other paintings and artist's contemporaries) and encouraging the connections made by the viewer's own experience, knowledge and interest.

#### **Theme I.**

*Open Conversation* presents a series of photographic artworks as "conversations" that have been created by the artists, which range from 1975–2011. These "conversations" explore

issues which include the histories of women in the workplace, environmental and labour issues, nuclear power, the decline of the fishing industry, struggles against neoconservative government policies, healthcare issues, anti-globalization protests and media representation of violence, transnational politics of water, freedom of speech denied and issues dealing with cultural labour. Condé and Beveridge have developed an artistic process that involves direct collaboration in the production of art with non-art communities and employs a participatory, socially engaged framework. Community collaboration was critical to the making of the photo narratives because those who were the subjects of their artwork also become engaged participants and active collaborators. The artworks in *Open Conversations* challenge the visitors' understanding of contemporary social, cultural and political issues and encouraged multiple narratives and representations that reflect everyone in the community.

## **Theme II**

This series of “conversations” in the form of photographic works begins with the seminal artwork, *It's Still Privileged Art*, (1976) that began Condé and Beveridge's development of their unique form of socially engaged art practice.

### **It's Still Privileged Art (1975)**

*It's Still Privileged Art* is a series of cartoons and text that narrate Condé and Beveridge's journey from a formalist to a politicized art. The text and images are based on taped

conversations the artists had with each other during the summer and fall of 1975 in which they questioned the art market and the ideological assumptions behind it. There are two alternating styles of drawing modeled on the then current Chinese Maoist comic books.

### **Work in Progress (1980–2006)**

The original version of *Work in Progress* was started in late 1979 and completed in 1980. It portrayed women over eight decades: from 1908 to 1979. The kitchen setting reflected the double workload and acted as a marker for the changing periods. It also tied together the issues of work and everyday life, a theme that runs through many of Condé and Beveridge's projects. Each woman is posed in relation to her outside job in a kitchen that contains appropriate period props. Each has a window framing a documentary photo that indicates the politics of the period, a calendar that shows the predominant type of women's employment and a snapshot of a typical family structure at the time (from extended family to a single mom).

### ***Oshawa, A History of Local 222 (1982–1983)***

*Oshawa: A History of Local 222* is a large project on the history of the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) Local 222. The first scene is in a kitchen in which a group of four workers and a union organizer are socializing. In the first set of five images, they recount their arrival as immigrants and early attempts to organize a union. The images are illustrated by the superimposition of staged photographs blended into the wallpaper. The second section covers the period of the Second World War when married women were first allowed into the plant and women first entered non-traditional jobs. The series also focuses on the home as a site of production indicating the double workload faced by these women. The third section covers the postwar years up to the mid-sixties and traces the struggle of women to gain recognition along

with the internal political struggles and gradual institutionalization of the union. The fourth section portrays women's entry into non-traditional jobs and the male workers' reactions to it during the 1970s. The series alternates between two sets: one in the plant and the second in a bedroom. Each of these scenes is framed by the other: the plant is seen through a dresser mirror and the bedroom through a car door window that is being assembled in the plant.

### **Theme III**

#### **No Immediate Threat (1985)**

This is a 10-part photo series that examines the ideological assumptions behind the development of nuclear power, its history and the problems faced by workers in that industry in 1985. It is based on informal conversations with nuclear power workers and their families in Kincardine, Ontario. The series traces the life of a fictional worker who would have been born at the same time as the advent of nuclear power, the bombing of Hiroshima, in 1945, and grew up to follow in his father's footsteps into the nuclear power plant. The text was based on the conversations the artists had had with the workers and provides a counterpoint to the scene.

#### **Non habera nada para ninquen (There will be nothing for anyone) (1994)**

Condé and Beveridge were invited to Vigo, Spain to examine current controversy surrounding the decline of the cod fishery and Canada's declaration of a cod-fishing moratorium. The images tell the story of the decline of the cod fishery from a Canadian perspective. They begin the series by identifying themselves as traveling artist/troubadours visiting the *Bar Terra Nova* (bar Newfoundland) in Vigo. They reference religious imagery both because of its history in Galicia, notably Santiago de Compostella, and because of its place in the cultural life of both Galicia and Newfoundland. The series traces the cod fishery from a time of abundance in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, to the introduction of technology and the employment of huge trawlers in the

1960s, the initial denial by government of the reduction of the stock and, finally, it's demise in the 1990s. It ends on the optimistic note that the cod fishery could survive if fish workers and their communities were able to manage the stock based on local needs and mutual consensus.

### **Ill Wind (2001)**

In *Ill Wind*, the members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) describe their own stories about the current crisis in the Canadian health care system. It was produced in two stages. The first stage involved a series of workshops with health care workers in Ontario that used techniques from Forum Theatre with the assistance of actor and director Aida Jordao. The workers visualized, through a set of theatrical exercises, both the work they do and their concerns about their jobs. From the image ideas gathered at the workshops, a series of five photographic concepts—one for each workshop—were developed. These concepts were then discussed and finalized with the workers. The underlying theme, expressed in different ways, was their frustration and anger over not being able to provide the care their patients needed and the stress they experience by the rising demands of the job. The second stage involved the photographing of the final images. Two members from each of the workshops were invited to act as themselves in the images, along with actors who played the patients and management. This would allow a viewer to focus on the workers, as well as reference a corporate-like hospital environment.

### **Cultural Relations (2005)**

This is a four-part photographic series that depicts four sites of cultural production: commercial, artistic, amateur and community. The series is loosely based on Gustave Courbet's painting *The Artist's Studio* of 1854–55. Each internal set refers to cola—from an ad, an artwork of a 'destroyed' ad, a snapshot in a cola plant, to a community production on the assassination of a cola worker in Latin America. The relations of production involved in creating the central image flank both sides of the internal set. While historically many artists have painted self-portraits, very few have extended that examination out into the studio and the social relations that inform their work.

Courbet's painting is one of the few exceptions. It acknowledges the presence and influence of other artists, intellectuals, as well as "ordinary folk," on his life and work. In contrast to Courbet (and his model) who are the centre and focus of his work, implying an individualist authorship, Condé and Beveridge attempted to portray a more collective, although hierarchical, problematic, and more complex portrayal of cultural production today. As Courbet's work is particular to France, and possibly Europe, in the mid-19th century, Condé and Beveridge's project is particular to Canada, and possibly the US, at this time.

**Multiple Exposure (2011)**

*Multiple Exposures* depicts the same location photographed over a 600-year period. Starting with a precolonial old-growth forest, the eight images portray the fur trade (the near extinction of the beaver), an early sawmill (the clearing of forests), a 19th-century textile mill (the use of fossil fuels, in this case coal), a 1960s chemical plant (modern industrial pollution), a closed plant in the 1980s (the shift of industrial production from the industrialized to the developing world with resultant globalizing environmental impacts as well as increased pollution resulting from global transportation), a 21st-century mall (consumer waste and the economy of debt) and finally an office tower (financialization and global warming). The location is identified in each image by the presence of Mount Nemo (part of the Niagara Escarpment) in the background. The foregrounds are constructed from various locations in Ontario.

The actors represent businesspeople: a colonial merchant, a pitchman for credit cards, and a stock market read-out. There are two workers in each image, one representing the human costs (injury, illness, and unemployment), and the other representing forms of resistance. All the worker characters are gathered together in the final image.

## **APPENDIX C: COMPONENTS OF THE EXHIBITION**

The exhibition contained the following materials

1. A series of selected photoworks
2. Video interviews of Condé and Beveridge
3. Video interview of selected Cultural Workers
4. Selected props used in photoworks
5. Sample storyboards from selected photoworks
6. Selected publications of artist's works

## **APPENDIX D: SAMPLE OF OPEN CONVERSATIONS EXHIBITION MATERIALS**

### **Exhibition Didactic Introduction Panel**

#### **Open Conversations: The Art Practice of Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge**

*Open Conversations: The Art Practice of Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge* marks the first solo exhibition in British Columbia of Canadian visual artists Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge. Condé and Beveridge's unique art practice represents a complex investigation of contemporary issues and articulates the artist's commitment to an art practice which incorporates ethical responsibility and an obligation to respond to the world through critical creative lens which utilizes collaboration and dialogue. Underlining Condé and Beveridge's artworks is a series of questions that critique concepts of ideology, power and control and offer alternative points of view that are open for dialogue. The foundation of Condé and Beveridge creative methodology is their commitment to collaboration and participation and the use of an "ethics of engagement" (Downey, A, 2009).

*Open Conversation* takes the form of two visual investigations. The first explores the art practice of photographers, Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge who have developed an artistic process that involves direct collaboration in the production of art employing a participatory, socially engaged framework. This exhibition examines how Condé and Beveridge have developed a unique art practice that provides a framework to expand and re-engage viewers through development of a series of visual art strategies that analyze contemporary social, cultural, and political issues. The exhibition investigates Condé and Beveridge use of the concept of dialogical aesthetics as a way of breaking down the conventional distinction between artist, artwork, and audience - a relationship that allows the artists to "catalyze emancipatory insights through dialogue".

The first exhibition investigates Condé and Beveridge use of dialogical aesthetics as a way of breaking down the conventional distinction between artist, artwork, and audience - a relationship that allows the artists to catalyze emancipatory insights through dialogue. The exhibition begins with the seminal artwork, *It's Still a Privileged Art*, 1976 that began Condé and Beveridge's development of their unique form of socially engaged art practice. The exhibition presents a range of selected arts works from the 1980-1990 and 1991-2011, the documentary film, *Portrait of Resistance: The Art and Activism of Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge*, a selection of notes, drawings, storyboards, photo shoots, stage-props and other material used by the artists, and an interview of the artists to help reveal how the artists incorporate their use of dialogical aesthetics.

For second aspect of this exhibition, Condé and Beveridge have created a new artwork which examines cultural issues relating to the Richmond Art Gallery, Richmond Museum, Richmond Archives and the Richmond Library all located in the Richmond Cultural Centre. Condé and Beveridge collaborated with the participants to create a photographic artwork that explores definitions of intellectual and cultural work, workplace issues and the role these institutions role play within the City of Richmond. The use of participatory action research was critical to the making of this photo-narrative because those who were the subjects of the artwork are also engaged participants and active collaborators in the development of this ground-breaking artwork and creative process.

At the heart of Condé and Beveridge's art practice is the fundamental principle that art is a social transaction that becomes a participatory, and collaborative process and is a means of communication and of articulating commonalities and as a means of self-expression for those in society who have been marginalized and whose voices have been suppressed by dominant social narratives. Community collaboration is critical to the making of these photo-narratives because those who were the subjects of their artwork also become engaged participants and active collaborators in their process of critical form of creative inquiry. This type of art practice makes assumptions about the relationship between art and the broader social and political world, and about the knowledge that aesthetic experience is capable of producing.

For Kester the ethics and aesthetics of artworks and how they interact with the viewer is critical as well as the, “creative possibilities of mediated intersubjective exchange.” “ The goal in either case is a transformation of human consciousness in a way that enhances our capacity for the compassionate recognition of difference, both within ourselves and in others.” (Kester, G. 2012, p. 185)

The artworks in *Open Conversations* challenge the visitors’ understanding of contemporary social, cultural and political issues and encouraged multiple narratives and representations that reflect everyone in the community. In doing so, the artworks offer the gallery visitors an example of what Bakhtin (1981) calls “words of others.” The voices of others, their discourse, are central to Bakhtin’s theory of how people develop their ideologies. He posits that we learn and grow as we interact with and assimilate into our consciousness the voices of those who surround us. The “words of others,” by revealing other potential meanings and the ideology behind the dominant discourse, make possible a space for new interpretations, and change becomes possible. *Open Conversations* demonstrates how Condé and Beveridge have engaged in a type of dialogue through a creative orchestration of collaborative encounters and conversations that go beyond the walls of the art gallery. Their art practice realizes its purpose through a dialogue and collaboration with the audience and is concerned with how we connect with others and create community. The process of dialogical aesthetics utilized by Condé and Beveridge is contextually grounded as a form of participatory action that engages in public criticism and is intended to facilitate critical reflection of multiple and diverse ways of understanding our complex and constantly changing contemporary world.

Guest Curated by Scott Marsden

## APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW WITH CAROL CONDÉ AND KARL BEVERIDGE

### The Interview-Collaboration

Condé and Beveridge: Our working relationship is based on a collaborative process mediated through the union movement or community groups. Our work attempts to bridge two audiences, working people and those in the arts. We feel that it is not only important to articulate the concerns and experiences of working and community life, but that it should also be able to stand up to the sophistication of corporate culture and take into account the complexities of cultural representation.

Condé: Depending on what the project is, there is collaboration between us and then there is the collaboration if you are working with a community. Therefore, there are two forms of collaboration. Then I guess then at some stage then you are working within the art community. Because that is a form of collaboration in that, your work has to fulfill the expectations of what an art community expects. So, all these collaborations.

Condé: Usually, you and I decide what the topic will be, if it's going to be on healthcare, or if it's going to be on nuclear, if we've been active around a specific area that year, and been out to a demonstration or something along that line, after that experience, then we come back and talk about who it is that we'll actually contact, if it's a union or if it's a community, then we'll contact that group.

Beveridge: In the beginning, it was more formal, because we were just meeting people and becoming involved in things. Therefore, we would, I mean at the time of the first projects, because what we would even, in part of our own discussion was around feminist issues. In addition, that was at the same moment that within the trade union movement, women were fighting for recognition, both in workplaces and in unions.

Condé: I was part of women's perspective, and part of the women's movement and in relationship to Partisan Gallery. Therefore, I was active around women's issues within the arts community.

Condé: Within the left, there is always anything that people are struggling to get their rights that are where you are going to be active at that year and that involvement. Therefore, if it is around nuclear, if it is around going to the Quebec Summit. Alternatively, in the case that is slightly different from that, we did for almost 4–5 years stuff on healthcare. That was because Karl was very ill and from that experience of having homecare and having hospital care, from that experience we then did three major pieces around healthcare. That after this that we started doing more orientated from our own perspective, so that would be like the history. Then the next one would be that we had contacted the union, and then gone through all the layers that you go through in a union movement to get access because they are not open to the public.

Condé: So you usually start off with a communications officer who is actually, his job or her job is actually to be active in the community, and from that process they then move you down till you get to the local level, and you either go to their workshops, or you go to their conferences, so you hear the stories they're telling and then from all that information you piece together your own passion for the issue, plus the involvement now of the individual people who are struggling to get that.

Beveridge: There is a kind of form of community arts where people, as Carole says, kind of parachute into a situation and undertake a project and then move on to something else. Whereas we have always maintained practice within a particular sphere and particular community as a kind of sustainable development. Because it is not only producing a project, it is also opening up the whole issue of cultural politics, cultural discussion, to that community. Meaning that that community become active in the process of democratizing cultural institutions, cultural process, that sort of thing.

Condé: Equally so, I think when you actually work in a community, you are very aware of how isolated the art world is from the people that you are working with. The language that's being used, whether it be dialogical aesthetics or whether it be making some abstract shape, and then you're putting it in front of somebody who's been growing up on TV and ads, and that's their concept of visual storytelling.

Condé: So you have to move from being as we were, sculptors and painters, into being someone who is actually now trying to find a language that is readable to a public around the issues that they are involved in. Otherwise, whom are you doing it for? In the art world, things are supposed to be obscure, just as they are when you read some intellectual is writing. It is supposed to be obscure because it is only readable by that little small group. It is not going to be read by the person on the auto line.

### **The Interview-Fine Art vs. Activism as Art Practice**

Beveridge: Basically, you are not only challenging the kind of conventions of the fine arts in that sense, in terms of its kind of abstraction, and ambiguity and those sorts of things, but you also, need to challenge the media. The commercial art, the commercial field. In other words, what most people see as culture, you have to challenge those assumptions too. So in a certain sense, you are developing a dual thing, where you are working in a critical relationship to the arts community but you're also working in a critical relationship to what would be called popular culture.

Beveridge: He quite rightly points out is one of the impulses behind modernism was an antibourgeois sentiment. In other words, it was against the vulgarization of culture, against the rise of popular culture. In addition, that was one of his impulses because he was critical of it because it was entertainment and simply made people passive rather than active in a social way. So part of the thrust of modernism was a critique of that. The problem with modernism is the way it did it, is it became insular.

Beveridge: When we have conversations with people and we talk with people about the

topic that we are dealing with, whether it be nuclear energy or women's rights or the environment, we also talk about culture. Therefore, it is not just people talking about their experience to us, and we are just like these receptors, we also talk to them what our experience is as cultural producers and what the issues are in culture. Therefore, in a sense it becomes a kind of exchange in that way. So the conversation is not only about their political experience or issues, it is also in a sense about our political issues in terms of culture. In addition, part of what you are talking about is what the problems with cultural representation are.

Beveridge: Why is it that people do not see themselves in the popular media or in the Fine arts? In addition, all those kinds of issues that comes along. So in a way, it is as you are not being altruistic, you are not being there as an expert, but you are exchanging ideas across two experiences.

Condé: You are dealing with your functioning as a participant and the way they are trying to deal with their boss or their issue or activism. If it's around activism as opposed to being a union-specific piece, then you're talking about all the different demos that you've been on, the strikes that you've been to, so you come down to being equal.

Condé: So therefore you are involved with the issue, you go down to the strike, you see all the things that are happening, and then you actually end up finding a way to visualize it. So you can be a participant in groups.

Beveridge: When we went down to Quebec, we went on a bus with autoworkers. So the whole trip there and back was with autoworkers out of locals in Toronto and Brampton. So already we were framing within that context and the conversation was underway there and all that sort of stuff. People understand the larger context of their own particular situation you know, why plants are closing down here, why people are being laid off, why jobs are being shipped to the developing world. The quote, "de-industrialization," they understand all that. In addition, it comes through those free trade agreements and deregulation.

Beveridge: Some subjects more than others do. This history of the union, we actually read material, we go into archives, we do all sorts of research as well as talk to the retirees and people who were involved in that history. In terms of things like the environment, around water, we read all sorts of material, met and talked with all sorts of people, from the people at the Polaris Institute, the Council of Canadians who are involved in water issues. So we met with activists as well as doing the research, reading the books, all that sort of stuff so that you gain information on that.

Beveridge: One example was doing the cod fishery and realizing the extent that cod was as a food source. You sort of realized, well, nobody really—particularly in North America—

reacted to the loss of the cod fishery. But it was equivalent to, if you took away all the cows in North America. And you can imagine what the reaction of that would be. Because as a food source, cod accounted for 40% of protein for the globe. But it was mostly eaten in the developing world, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa. Right? Salted cod was what fed the slaves in the West Indies during slavery. Newfoundland cod—that is what the slaves lived on.

Condé: The concept was most of the people who go as photographers end up being documentary photographers in the town. And you are there for 10 days but before we went we actually did a lot of research on it, we understood that the people who were fishing in Spain were actually fishing a lot of the cod fishing out of Newfoundland and all of the area that was there. Then we ended up talking to the CAW or the autoworkers that are part of the fisheries union and we ended up getting information around that.

Condé: We ended up getting information around the campus Della, the religious pilgrimage that goes through the town. So you end up with a lot of information about the issue, even before you arrive. So when you're there, your job is to photograph there, so we did photograph our little sets and that in Spain, and we ended up with the old fishing village part versus the fact that Vigo fishes has already fished out all of the fish from England or Europe all the way down to the end of Africa. All the cod was gone, so that is the reason they had moved over to the Grand Banks. That's...you get a whole bunch of information and then you have to find out a way to tell that story in—in this case it was eight images—so we doubled up two concepts at once.

### **The Interview-Connecting with Community**

Beveridge: We have used religious imagery a lot. Because when you are looking for a language that is understood and a symbolism that is understood, it ends up being religious symbolism that is commonly understood. Most people can, even people who are not Christian, know what those symbols are. What you realize.

Condé: Accessibility.

Beveridge: It is the issue of accessibility, but even more than that, what you realize within modern culture there are very few symbolic references. Two things: very few symbols and very few rituals. What we have lost are those kinds of community rituals, community symbols.

Condé: What we now have is, the minute you see an M, you know that is McDonalds.

Scott: Those symbols have replaced the community symbols.

Condé: Yes, that is right. And prior to that, like when we would look through old newspapers, because cartooning was a form of illustration of stories, so there was a lot more visual symbols at that moment in time because they were trying to tell stories in a visual cartoon style.

Beveridge: Because the interesting thing about religious symbols despite the entire overlay that goes on that and the problems with that, they also point to certain kinds of values. And certain kinds of beliefs. That is what you begin to subvert the symbol at the same time you can use them.

Beveridge: We've used the Pieta in a number of pieces: in the Plague, we have a Pieta, in the Vigo fishery one we have a Pieta. But we reverse the gender roles; we changed who the characters are so that they are not European people, things like this. So we generally challenge the symbol but also want it to be read as that symbol.

Condé: This is the Pieta, and this is the resurrection. So it is the whole Biblical story. It goes from, in the fishery piece, from the loaves and fishes, the miracle of the loaves and fishes, which relates to the abundance of codfish in days of old. To the expulsion of the moneychangers, which relates to the capitalization of the fishery, and the bringing in of large trawlers and sonar sound systems which then just began the rape of the oceans, to the last supper, which is the betrayal, because in Canada particularly, governments didn't protect the fisheries. To finally, the death of the fishery, which is three crosses and the Pieta, and then the resurrection. And it is shot in a port in Vigo, which is the in-shore fishery, a small fishery, which is sustainable.

Condé: It is a sustainable form versus the ones that have two large ships. All these fisheries conglomerated, put their money together and bought two huge ships and it's a mile-long net that gathers the—everything: small, large, whatever, just a mile-long and just scoops up all the fish. Yes, well because it was also affecting Canada. In other words, we were not trying to tell just their story, because we were bringing it back to the fact that it was affecting Canadian fishing, because we had to have the moratorium, and there were shots over the bow of the Spanish ships by the Canadians.

Beveridge: Vigo, which is the largest fishing port in Europe, and the Grand Banks, in Newfoundland.

Condé: So we are telling the Canadian story. So we are supposedly troubadours telling the Canadian story.

### **The Interview-Artists and Ethical Responsibility**

Beveridge: In most, pretty well all the projects we have done are working people. The thing

that comes across [is] the sense of responsibility people have around their job. Whether its healthcare workers, autoworkers or cultural workers at the Richmond Cultural Centre, etcetera is people have a sense of responsibility to their job and to the larger society for whom they are working in a certain sense. And the thing that healthcare workers express is the needs of the patient are the most important. Similarly, in cultural centres it is about serving the public, etcetera, and etcetera. So the sense of social, how does that apply to arts? Well, artists have in a certain sense, a social responsibility to the communities they live and work in. Because culture involves a larger issue of how do you see culture.

Beveridge: Culture is an expression of the shared experience of a community, and maybe of multiple communities within a particular geography if you look at it in an ecological sense. A culture is an expression of the life and beliefs of the people, and the spirit of the people. You have to actually work with those communities to be able to understand, know, express, and share what those things are. So your responsibility is to articulate the broader community. In terms of the fine arts, the responsibility in artists' field is to art itself. And the curious thing is that all art is collaborative practice. The issue is that most artists work within the arts community and it is a collaborative practice within the confines of the arts community and its institutions.

Condé: And we know that because we've done it too. In the early years before we started actually working with other communities that was the community we functioned within. If you were going to get a show, if you went to the bar, who you socialized with, who you hung out with, who you had for dinner, because you were also tied to that community because it is your economics. You are getting grants, you are getting shows, so it is not just for the sake of doing that, it is actually an economical responsibility to stay alive and keep working. So there is that aspect.

Beveridge: So anyway the ethics is that basically if you feel you have a responsibility to represent the communities that you live and then that is the ethics you are working with and that is your responsibility as an artist.

Condé: They're all the same. The only difference is they will be different issues, whether it be autoworkers or whether you are a First Nation artist and you're working with Innu community about the community, you're going to be dealing with women's issues, you're going to be dealing with food issues, you're going to deal with economics, it's all the same issues, it's just from a specific point of view.

Beveridge: What the larger project that you are involved with is working towards a kind of true democracy. In addition, that people have basic equality. So what you are looking at is situations of inequality in its various forms.

Beveridge: Yes, in some immediate sense because obviously the people that you work with are part of who your audience is and part of who sees it. And as you know in the case of the project, we did in Edmonton with the custodial workers. In terms of when you move

into the institutional context that becomes a little more difficult because then viewers are more abstract. And then that raises what you bring up a little later, how institutions and galleries begin to engage in a conversational process.

Beveridge: Because basically viewers come in and leave, and don't have any necessarily interactive or conversational relationship to the situation other than maybe with somebody who's sitting at the desk.

Condé: You spend a year working on a project and trying to come up with symbols and then you actually create the sets and the drawings that you do or the sets, and then you have the actors come in and play the part and then you take your photograph. But there are lots of levels within it and it is different between somebody who is walking through a space and looking at something easily, quickly—that information should be readable, than if somebody actually owns the piece or it's in a book or you actually have a magazine that has the image in it—you've got a lot more time to sit down and study it. People don't—it is not as if people have large armchairs, sit, and look at a piece for a length of time. So you have to have a quick reading, and then there are all the level readings that are in behind it, depending on the length of time somebody spends with that image.

Beveridge: One of the people who we did the Classwork project with was a labour Council president outside of Toronto, started a small Mayworks in her own community, and encouraged artists there. And became part of discussions within the larger labour movement so that there were cultural policies developed, so that there

Beveridge: The term dialogical aesthetics is a term that I think covers work that is involved in some sort of community process, essentially, in which an artist actually has conversations with the community and the work comes out of those conversations.

Beveridge: It was more formal in the early times as we got to know the community, it was more kind of interviews and that sort of thing, and then as the community got to know us and we got to know the community, it became more and more informal, so that we had conversations rather than more formal interviews.

Beveridge: The conversation continues in two ways: one, through the work, that is true, and how people see and understand the work. The other one is that the conversation continues past the work into, and, like a lot of the people who we worked with ended up becoming involved in kind of cultural initiatives within the trade union movement, and these sorts of things, such as Mayworks, such as the Workers Heritage Centre.

### **The Interview-Dialogical Aesthetics and Community**

Condé: The United Farm Workers Union every year has an award that goes to an artist, called the Caesar Chavez award. There your work is seen up on a screen at a convention, and

the artist comes up and is given a plaque for this. So this is happening in different unions, but as an example of one of them.

Condé: Then they also did things, like so we had got the Ontario Arts Council to come up with money to be able to grant people, artists, money to be able to work with a union. So there is actually community arts has an arts area for just labour. So there is that kind of thing that you set up.

Beveridge: So in a certain sense it is not just the production of images, it is a larger involvement with the community that has all sorts, and hopefully has different kinds of results. And particularly to begin to build a kind of sustainability of culture within the communities.

Condé: To me if you're going to have people taking up issues—that comes from the person themselves, that comes from the teaching in the school, it comes from a belief that the issue that you're fighting, whether it be around Israel, whether it be around Palestine, whether it be around nuclear, whether it be—whatever the issue that impassions you, and you're an artist, then you have those issues that you're going to be talking about. It is not dialogical aesthetics that is going to do anything to promote it; it has to do with the activist, who is also artist, who believes there are stories to be told about the community that is being screwed around.

Beveridge: Obviously, we do it and I do not quite agree with what you said, but that is fair enough. I wanted to raise the issue of the notion of empathy. In a certain sense there is the Brechtian notion which is non-, against a kind of empathetic reading. And shocking people—would be the term that he uses. We use certain elements of a kind of Brechtian non-naturalism, in order to rather make a point. So I do not know if our work is empathetic in ways that other work is. Ours more is about foregrounding the composition, the construction, the argument, rather than naturalizing it in, as I understand empathy to be.

Beveridge: Sort of, as you identify with a character, which functions through naturalism, which to me is one of the main pieces of corporate culture.

Scott: But in the case of you, and this idea of dialogical aesthetics, this concept is actually challenging that, saying wait a second, there are other things going on here.

Beveridge: Another way I would describe dialogical is it is a collaborative practice. Collaboration challenges the whole myth of the individual genius.

Scott: That's one of the key elements, is this idea of collaboration as opposed to the individual blonde-haired person, and is this idea of community.

## **APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW OF CULTURAL WORKERS**

**Bill Purver, Archivist—Richmond Archives.**

Purver: My name is Bill Purver. I'm the archivist for the City of Richmond. The issues are, from an archivist's perspective, my issues are in terms of the expected responsibilities of my position, are to ensure that the records of the city government and city officials, as well as of the community, are preserved and made accessible to a wide variety of users. I was just trying to get across the issue that we deal with, maps, photographs, textual records, and that one important aspect of our work, that of providing access to records, providing customer service and access to records to the general public as well as to staff—but with the scene that I was photographed with, was dealing with someone who represented the general public and a particular type of research. So I guess what I was trying to represent with some seriousness, with a little bit of levity, and also trying to show that it's more than a one-dimensional job in that there are a lot of different types of records that we provide access to here.

Scott: Why would that be important for the people of Richmond to know?

Purver: Well to understand, one, that we exist and to give them an idea of what we, that we are accessible. As part of the government, that's a service that we provide. It's part of the accountability of city government as well as a broader accountability to the community. It does only reflect, and maybe this becomes a bit of an issue—it does reflect only one aspect of my work. Clearly, there are two other aspects that it does not reflect, and that is the issue of actually ensuring that city records and community records worthy of permanent retention are in fact acquired and then properly accessioned and legally documented.

Purver: Secondly the work that goes on in making them accessible: the database work, the descriptive work, the arrangement, the indexing, all of that kind of work. So it is not reflected in the picture. So I guess in the end I guess there is an issue of the picture, because of the limitations that I am just one small part of this cultural centre, the limitations of what Karl and Carole can do. The issue is that it does only reflect one of a multitude of different functions and activities that I perform.

Purver: I did not really have expectations. As I initially said, I had initial trepidation and a little bit of worry, which certainly I do not have now. But I think what happened generally for me is there was a dynamic working, and the relationship that Karl and Carole managed to develop with everyone put them all at ease. And it is almost as if in my mind, "hey I've done my part", my expectation is this will be a very interesting work of art that is created, but it is up to the artists now to create it. So my expectation simply is, "oh I'm looking forward to see what they do."

Purver: The value of learning has so many different values. There is sort of an aesthetic goal, there is a value just inherent in knowing something about the past—and in particular the past of your community where you live. But much beyond that, this is where there is a relationship with, for example, the museum. We do share that kind of thing. There's a

relationship to trying to let people learn about the past. Here, ours is an undiluted past; in the museum it's an interpretive past, the museum interprets the past and then does it through exhibits and displays and programs. Here we have a bunch of boring records—which I don't find boring at all, and many people don't either—but what we preserve here, the value of the archives is people can learn from the actual evidence of the past, and can use that evidence to interpret themselves how things have happened.

Purver: It's very important for people to learn the past, but it's very important for people to learn there is a basic, raw material to understand the past. That you can't make up your facts. You can't change history by changing the facts. And the facts only exist as evidence in documentation, in the original documentation that is carried out in context. So in archives for example, the definition of a record, of an archival record, is a document, whether in any media, it could be a photograph, it could be textual records, maps, whatever, but any media that is created naturally by a creator, in the course of that creator's natural event. It isn't created for posterity.

Purver: The minutes taken by city council are not taken so that 100 years from now, somebody can figure out what city council did. The minutes are taken because, one, it's a statutory necessity for a committee-like council in order to function, it has to have its minutes which records the decisions of that body, rather than individuals of that body. Plus it is then used...the resolutions of council that are documented are then used to create, to have new activities come about.

Purver: They are used to resolve to do things. And so they are the evidence of why the city did something. How the city did something. Similarly, in community and private records, the same kinds of things: the correspondence, the family photograph album, and the business records. Again those were created at the time, they weren't created for posterity, they were created at the time to then provide evidence of actions taken and how those actions then influenced other actions.

Purver: To go in the doors of a museum you have to be interested in a museum. Similarly, in an art gallery you have to go through a door normally, unless it is public art out there, but you have to have the intention to go to an art gallery. In addition, in archives the intention is almost inherent in the activity that the person is seeking. We are all working with the concept of community. And the concept of community is basically the same. And we both and I think all cultural workers, value heritage. Clearly the museum is in Heritage Services, as the department of the government. But the parallels of what we actually do are not the same. And I think that's where archives are always struggling to try to get across that we don't, we're not necessarily proud of being different, it's just the nature of what we do is different.

Purver: We're not interpretive. We don't interpret. I mean, everybody interprets. But the basis of what we do—appraisal for example, appraising records what to keep and what to throw away, that's an interpretive process, but it's based on sound principle and policy. But the other issue is, I'm not a historian, although in my past I do have history background, but

when I'm working here I'm not a historian. I'm the keeper of the record. I'm a keeper of the evidence, rather than interpreting.

Purver: Which, you know a curator of an art gallery, a major part of that is interpretation process. A museum exhibit is interpretation. Setting up a program for young people or old people or whomever you are setting up a program for, there is interpretation. You're saying, "I think they should know about this, and I think they should know about this in this way". The archivist says, "I think you should know that we have records that might help solve some of your issues." It's a very different kind of approach to being a cultural worker.

**Lynn Bevis, Executive Director—Richmond Art Gallery.**

Bevis: I'm Lynn Bevis, I'm the director at the Richmond Art Gallery and that's basically the executive position of the gallery, paid staff. The things that I would identify would be acquiring the appropriate resources for the gallery. So obviously funding is a big issue that we always have. The more we can acquire for the gallery then the more we can spend on programming. Which leads to the next issue, which is cultural enrichment for the community? I think that is one of the main things that we are here to do. So the more programming that we can provide, then we can provide better exhibitions and better programming.

Bevis: The public has no expectation. I think there probably are two groups: there is the group that knows about art and they come specifically to see what's on exhibit. I think that there's also a group that's sort of more passive kind of user to the gallery. They're the people who happen to be in the cultural centre and they tend to pass through the organization, or the doors because they might be attracted to what they see through the glass.

Bevis: The group that knows more about art is expecting to see a certain quality of work. They're expecting to have opportunities to learn more about it, to participate through workshops and things like that. All of the work that we do here, present here is issues related. So when we advertise or distribute the information about whatever the exhibition is about, then it tends to reach a different market. As I said there is one sort of crossover level that's always going to come just because they're interested in art in general. But usually it's about where their interests lie about how closely the exhibition matches that.

Bevis: That's why we try to do those community components. Such as inviting the community to bring in their own family photographs. Or maybe having a discussion with the community about an aspect of the issues that are being dealt with in the art. We try to open it up more so that people actually see that the art relates to their lives, or relates to real life.

Bevis: What we did, anticipating that people would be upset by the work, we set up the first gallery so that it would foreground all of the issues. So we had a display that dealt with

video gaming. We had a display that dealt with the art historical references that you found in the artwork.

Bevis: There are a lot of pop culture advertising issues that were there. And then we provided a lot of background information, we had images of the artist shooting the pictures with their models; we had biographical information about the collective. And then in the programming room we also had a video running that talked about media and violence and children. So we were trying to set up that these are some of the things that embedded within the video. So that when people went in to look at it, they were already prepared to see it.

Bevis: Because I report both to a board of directors and to the City of Richmond. I'm sort of divided in that sense. I'm actually employed by the city. But I take some of my direction from both the city and from the Board. And I sort of act as a conduit between the two, so that the information is passing, everybody knows what is happening on either end. So what do I do?

Scott: In terms of the city, sounds like you have to report to the City of Richmond and then you have to report to the board.

Bevis: Yes, I mean a lot of what I do with the board is, that's more standard for a gallery director: you tell them what is happening, what are the issues within the organization.

Bevis: I think there is definitely value in informal learning because quite often that is where the real transformation, internal transformation takes place. And some people are very passive viewers so they just come in, they look at the pictures and they walk out. But what we find is that most of the people that come in relate to it very personally and if you look at our comment book, people will write very, very long comments related to whatever issue is at hand in the work.

Bevis: And quite often they'll write in Chinese and our attendants will translate it for us. But people connect really personally with a lot of the work that we show here. But any opportunity that you have to learn more about yourself is, as I say, transformative. I think that it's a good thing because it ties in to all those other aspects that we believe in like citizenship, and leadership and cultural...understanding. You know, if you can see that, oh yes this ethnic group has the same feelings about their family as I do, and they have the same problems as I do, and so forth, then it breaks down those 'us and them' type barriers.

Bevis: I think it matters because, like I said, it is transformative personally. For myself, art is something that gives me a lot of solace. It just gives me that pause during my day where I can unpack things that are likely emotional and intellectual at the same time. And it makes me see the world in a different sort of way, from a different perspective. It might expose me to new information, new thoughts, and I think that most people do that—they may not have the kind of background that I have and so it may not be as conscious for the average viewer but I think ultimately very profound things come to people from looking at work.

Bevis: You know, we're all visual learners. We're all cued from when the go button gets pressed to learn visually and to process the world visually. So I think that it's just something we do naturally, it's just that we're not always taught how to do it. Like I said, it depends on the exhibition. Most of the people who come here are from the local community. Quite a lot of people that come in are coming to the cultural centre anyway.

Bevis: Which is why it's really nice to have the museum and the archives and the library and the arts centre and everybody all in one space. So we get a lot of shared visitorship which is really lovely. We get a certain amount of tourists so people are obviously coming here specifically to experience the work here. We get quite a lot of people who come in from Vancouver and quite often even people from other galleries, other directors and curators come to see what we're doing here.

Bevis: So we're definitely on the radar. But I would say that probably 80 percent of the people that come here are Richmond people. And I would say probably about 80 percent of them are more or less passive viewers. So there's no real understanding of the incredible amounts of administration and paperwork and research and everything that we do. And I don't know whether that is all going to come out in the work that Carole and Karl create. I think to some extent the fact that we are basically administrators as much as anything else or office workers as much as anything else will probably come out. But I mean who really knows what anyone else does unless you've actually job shadowed somebody. I don't know. It's going to be really interesting and I'm really glad they're doing this. I think it's—you know I've admired their work for a really long time so I was very excited when he came to us with the proposal.

**Rebecca Forrest, Curator—Richmond Museum & Heritage Services.**

Forrest: My name is Rebecca Forrest. I'm the curator of the Richmond Museum and Heritage Services with the City of Richmond. And my job for the museum is to look after Richmond's material culture, collect Richmond's material culture and preserve it. So in other words, protect, preserve, and also display Richmond's artifacts. I think there are a number of different issues that we face as cultural workers or as museum workers. Really it comes down to time and resources. We're always doing more with less. And I think sometimes the public would be surprised to hear how much of our time is dedicated to writing grants to get funding to put on exhibits and public programming that can *supplement what the city provides as well. So usually, it is time and resources and because we love our jobs and are dedicated to them, we always want to do more as well.*

Forrest: Yes, as I am doing my interview right now I am trying to take 15 minutes out here to quickly come out and do this interview. In addition, we are doing an exhibit changeover right now, which is [a] combination of support from the community, from the city, from our society, so there are a lot of different players working within museums and arts culture and heritage that I don't think sometimes the public realizes.

Forrest: The artifacts really in there, and the story, relate to Richmond's past and it's present. And we try to look towards the future, so we're just not looking at the past. We're not to just [dwell] in the past, that's really important for the Richmond Museum, that we're telling a complete story of who people are and what they do in Richmond today and what their stories are.

Forrest: My job specifically is to protect and to make accessible Richmond's material culture and in essence, that is what the core of a museum is. So through our exhibits we're able to make that accessible to the public. So for us it's about collection, preservation, and then making that collection accessible and making history—it's cliché but—"come to life" and has more meaning than just an object sitting on a shelf. And we do that in a number of different ways, through exhibits, through public programming, like our events Doors Open Richmond.

Forrest: One part of what we do is also, we're fortunate enough to provide opportunities for students to learn about museums. So they've come into the museum as interns or as summer students through government grants and are able to really learn about collections management, exhibitions, public programming, and they're providing a service to the community as well as having valuable lessons that they're learning on the job.

Forrest: We're certainly not there to tell people what to think. We like to present the information and put questions out to the public. For example, with our current exhibit, Garden City of Richmond's Agricultural legacy, one of the topics we are looking at, was important in the past and what is still very important today is the Agricultural Land Reserve.

Forrest: So we're certainly not there to solve the whole issue of the Agricultural Land Reserve, but we can put some facts out there, some information, we can highlight maps and artifacts and really put it out there to the public "what do you think?" So interaction with the exhibitions, with any of our programming, is very important. Because otherwise it's just an object sitting out there. It has no story behind it. It has no connection to the community. So for us, informal or non-traditional learning is really, really important but I find, especially being the curator, that I learn more from the public than they do from me.

Scott: So you're using the artifacts as a way of establishing some kind of a dialogue.

Forrest: Absolutely, engaging with the public. I think the best example of it is actually something we do here at the museum with contemporary collecting. Why would you collect new or recent objects? Well, who better to tell our own stories than the people using these objects today? Who knows more about them than the people using them today? And we've been able to use them in exhibits to demonstrate change over time. And I think that's important for the public. Why is it important? Quite a generalist in my job, and there's different types of curators, so often when I put an object out I get much more stories and feedback from the public than I could ever find in a book somewhere.

Forrest: To demonstrate change over time. Where have we come from? How did we used to be? How did we change? All of those questions that I think have fascinated people from I think the beginning of time. I think museums are slowly moving towards that. And I think about five years ago there was still a lot of pushback from communities and museums, not to do a lot of contemporary collecting because they lacked space. One thing about working for the City of Richmond is that's never been a question. If you feel it's important to Richmond's history to reflect this, and certainly, Richmond's technological history is very important *and has influenced a lot of development out here, then we should be collecting it.*

Forrest: And personally—I'm pretty biased, it was my dissertation topic—so I had an interest in it when I was studying. And really then got to put it into practice once I got out on to the field and have seen it, basically, in action and the exhibits. And seen people interacting. And what's so important for me with the newer objects—and they don't have to be contemporary like 2012, but even items from the 70s and 80s which other museums won't touch—it's fascinating to see a younger man or woman come in with their young child, and they're maybe in their 20s and have a child, and be able to talk about the objects on display and their experience with it. Whereas if it's something that was hundred years old, they wouldn't be able to tell that story to their child or to whoever they've come in with.

Forrest: We have very diverse users. And I think one of the reasons why is because of where we are. And how we have all these different cultural institutions in one building. I've worked for other museums where I maybe get 10 visitors in a week. Here we have thousands coming through our doors. And it is because they're coming to use the library, or they're coming to the arts centre for a class, and then they see the art gallery or museum, maybe something they wouldn't traditionally go into, and then by default we get more users. And they tend to come back again and again. But what we're found is we get many, many small children—we have a great discovery area at the back of the museum, interactive components—so we get a lot of families and children and, depending on the exhibit, we're seen an increase in younger people, youth coming in.

Forrest: Well I think it's part of our job to actually put out engaging, interesting exhibits and programming related to those exhibits. And that we have a duty to the community to make collections accessible, and make history accessible and we do that through educational programming, public programming and the exhibits. Visitor expectations, that's a tough one, you know it really, really depends on the visitors. We get some people who are just fascinated enough just to come in, take a quick look around and hopefully we've peaked their interest.

Forrest: I think other users, you know, I think the expectation is sometimes that we will take their object into the collection. So we try to work with them on a bit of education with what we take in and why we take in. So that we meet their expectations and they meet ours as far as the standards of what we collect. And for them I think accessibility is the biggest issue

with our visitors as far as expectations. They want to see it out; they want to see it taken care of.

Forrest: I think I have a responsibility to collect Richmond's contemporary culture. I would say visitors aren't as aware of that, but I do feel they become more aware and the best thing is going to a donor's house and them showing me a typewriter that I have 20 of and yet I see out of the corner of my eye something that's maybe new, or more modern.

Scott: And you want to use that?

Forrest: Yeah, and it really changes their mind about history and what they think of as history. Especially with our culture as it changes and, we're such a throwaway culture.

Forrest: Absolutely, I think first and foremost we're here to serve our communities. And that doesn't change if you're looking at the arts centre or the art gallery or the front desk or the archives. We're all here to serve the community, and I would say for the art gallery, archives and myself, parts of our, what we do is about collecting and preserving Richmond's culture.

Forrest: I think the best thing I've gotten out of it is, despite all us working in this building, is that we don't often work together. And it's not for lacking of wanting to work together; it's just once again time and resources. And so it's been wonderful to actually sit down with the art gallery, archives, art centre, administration, and talk about who we are, what we do, and what's ultimately important. Because when it boiled down to—what I was hearing from everyone, it came down to the community, people's stories, their experiences, and engagement with the community, and working with the artists has been fun actually. Especially seeing everyone kind of mime out what they do. It does bring us back down to the core of what we do. Which is interesting because sometimes we do get sidetracked by phone calls and emails and requests that sometimes have nothing to do with your job. So to bring it back down to the core is really interesting.

## APPENDIX G: INTERPRETIVE ACTIVITIES

### Culture Days

**Friday–Sunday, Sept 28 – 30, 2012**

City-wide celebration of arts and culture, featuring free events throughout the weekend.

#### **Saturday Sept 29:**

- **Gallery Tours in English and Mandarin – 11am-1pm**
- **Panel Discussion – *What is Arts and Culture Work?* - Cultural Workers at the Richmond Cultural Centre – 1-2:30pm**

**Curator Tour and Talk with Scott Marsden – 2:45 –3:45pm Sunday, Sept 30:**

**Gallery Tours in English and Mandarin – 11am-3pm o Richmond Printmakers Open House 1:00-4:00pm**

### **Contemporary Art Talk – Socially Engaged Art Practices**

**Saturday, October 13: 3:00 – 4:00pm**

Free visual presentation on the emergence of artists who work collaboratively with artists, communities, and organizations to develop socially engaged works.

**Free Film Screening – *Portrait of Resistance*, with Guest Curator Scott Marsden**

**Saturday, October 20: 2:00-4:30pm**

In this feature documentary, seminal Canadian artists Condé & Beveridge are the subject of an in-depth examination of the artists' methods of collaboration and work for social change, introduced by Scott Marsden who curated their exhibition for the Richmond Art Gallery.

***ART FOR LUNCH* – Curator tour with Scott Marsden on Condé and Beveridge**

**Thursday, October 4, 12:00–1:00pm - #246727**

Great food, great art and great conversation! Join us for a tour of the current exhibition with the Guest Curator, Scott Marsden, followed by a lunch in the Gallery. Pre-registration required, \$10 per person includes tour and tasty lunch.

### ***LET'S MAKE STUFF!* SUNDAY ARTIST GROUP**

**2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of each month, Drop-in 1:00 – 4:00pm**

Join us in the Gallery Art-Room for a relaxed, social studio time. Get inspired by bringing new or mid-stream projects, your own art materials, and work alongside fellow artists. Adults only. \$5.00 drop-in, or FREE for Art Gallery Members. For more information contact [ktycholis@richmond.ca](mailto:ktycholis@richmond.ca).

**Oct 14 – No session in Nov and Dec due to holiday and renovation**

### **PHOTOGRAPHY WORKSHOPS FOR ADULTS**

In connection to Condé and Beveridge's exhibition, the Art Gallery will present workshops on basic digital photography and video techniques. Pre-registration required.

**Photography - Photo Composition: Telling a Story with Photographs - #246747**

Saturday, October 27, 1:00 – 4:00 pm, \$20/session

**Digital Photography: Taking Better Photos - # 246752**

Thursday, November 8, 1-3pm, \$20/session

## APPENDIX H: TEACHING GUIDE

Richmond Art Gallery Teachers Guide PDF

# Richmond Art Gallery SCHOOL ART PROGRAM TEACHERS' GUIDE



Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, *Liberty Lost (G20 Toronto)*, 2010, Inkjet Print on Paper

September 15 - November 10, 2012

## *Open Conversations:* The Art Practice of Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge



Guide prepared by: Melanie Devoy & Katherine Jackson

Generous support for the School Art Program provided by  
TD Bank Financial Group



Richmond Art Gallery School Art Program - Teachers' Guide  
7700 Minoru Gate Richmond, BC V6Y 1R9 Phone: 604-247-8300 Fax: 604-247-8368 [www.richmondartgallery.org](http://www.richmondartgallery.org)

**APPENDIX I: SCHOOL ART PROGRAM**  
**Richmond Art Gallery School Art Program PDF**



**A DAY OF THE ARTS**

The Richmond Art Gallery in partnership with the Richmond Arts Centre is offering a full day of arts workshops at the Richmond Cultural Centre. Bring one class and spend the day, or bring two classes and switch activities after lunch. *A Day of the Arts* is offered every Tuesday during the Gallery's regular exhibition schedule. All art materials are provided, lunch not included.



**BOOKINGS**  
 Melanie Devoy  
 School Art Program Coordinator  
 phone: 804.247.8516  
 email: mdevoy@richmond.ca

**Tour & Art Workshop**  
 Richmond Art Gallery

Students tour the current exhibition at the Richmond Art Gallery then go into the art studio for a hands-on art lesson. Kindergarten classes choose from *Portrait, Colour, Shape or Pattern Workshop*. Primary and intermediate art workshops follow the exhibition schedule. See workshop descriptions and dates in the School Workshops section.

**Theatre Arts Workshop**  
 Richmond Arts Centre

Students create stories and act them out through character development. They learn how the voice and body can help develop dramatic and comedic scenes, based on stories from their own imaginations. For the intermediate levels, current social issues will be worked into their scenes as a form of expression

**SCHEDULES**

- Kindergarten**  
 9:30am - 10:30am | 10:30am - 11:30am  
 Max 20 students per class  
 \$100 for the full morning
- Primary Grades**  
 10:00am - 11:30am | 12:30pm - 2:00pm  
 Max 30 students per class  
 \$170 for the full day
- Intermediate Grades**  
 9:30am - 11:30am | 12:30pm - 2:30pm  
 Max 30 students per class  
 \$190 for the full day

Richmond Arts Centre