DIALOGUE AT THE THRESHOLD: THE ARTIST BETWEEN MUSEUM AND COMMUNITY

A THESIS IN
Art and Art History

Presented to the Faculty of the University of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

by
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Kansas City, Missouri
2015
DIALOGUE AT THE THRESHOLD: THE ARTIST BETWEEN MUSEUM AND COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

Artists Suzanne Lacy and Ann Hamilton use forms of language to produce experiences that challenge the individual’s perception. While differing in methods and outcomes, Lacy and Hamilton construct environments that allow individuals to participate in communicative exchanges. Hamilton creates multi-sensorial installations that rely on acts of communication through reading, speaking, and listening. As a socially engaged artist, Lacy facilitates dialogue between individuals through large-scale performances that confront social issues in public space. This thesis argues that twenty-first century art museums, specifically The Brooklyn Museum and the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts in St. Louis, capitalize on the methods of artists such as Lacy and Hamilton, respectively, to create authentic communicative exchanges with neighboring communities. The Brooklyn Museum and The Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts have recognized the forms of language present within Lacy and Hamilton’s works as opportunities to generate social experiences that can extend the art institution’s authority.
beyond the usual museum visitor to a larger, diverse population in order to remain socially relevant in the twenty-first century.

I argue that Hamilton’s *stylus* (2011), commissioned by the Pulitzer, and Lacy’s *Between the Door and the Street* (2013), produced in partnership with Creative Time and the Brooklyn Museum, were intended to provide opportunities for community outreach, on the part of the museums, to ultimately strengthen the relationships between the institutions and marginalized groups through the means of communicative acts. Through the activation of touch and voice, Hamilton directed the participation of the viewer to form a relationship between the viewer’s body and the space of the installation. I argue that forms of language were used not to produce a discursive space, but instead draw attention to the instability of language. Distinct from Hamilton, Lacy facilitated a public dialogical intervention around gender issues that challenged participants while creating an intimate, discursive platform regardless of the large scale of the project. Despite institutional intentions, I contend that these practices resulted in highly intimate relationships for the individual rather than develop merely public ties between the museum and marginalized communities.
The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences have examined a thesis titled, “Dialogue at the Threshold: The Artist Between Museum and Community” presented by Renae Ashley Williams, candidate for the Master of Arts degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to the chair of my thesis committee Dr. Cristina Albu for her unyielding support, dedication, expert guidance, and thoughtful feedback during the research and completion of this thesis. I am also grateful to Dr. Frances Connelly and Dr. Rochelle Ziskin for their helpful questions, encouragement, and expertise throughout the writing of my thesis.

I would also like to thank my family and Caleb for their constant assurance and support of my aspirations.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In response to the rapid movement of art practices into the public realm, art institutions have focused on gaining loyalty and support from their surrounding communities in their attempt at expanding audiences. They are making strides to engage with demographic groups that are different from those of their frequent visitors. As museums seek to engage with marginalized, diverse communities (often residing in local neighborhoods), they develop community outreach to strengthen relationships with those beyond their usual visitors.\(^1\) Interactions with their neighboring communities through community programming and a newly implemented visitor-focus have led art institutions to extend their role beyond that of purveyors of culture—as facilitators of social change.

In *Social Works*, Shannon Jackson argues that the notion of the art museum acting as an autonomous entity is no longer viable in the contemporary art world, driving art practices and institutions into becoming heteronomous.\(^2\) The art institution can no longer rely only on its collection as a method for community engagement. The heteronomous institution now must work with varying programs and artists to fulfill its social responsibility of community outreach. The social engagement resulting from collaborations between the art institution and these third parties creates an opportunity for communication between the institution and its community. The art institution calls upon

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the artist, specifically, to initiate a dialogue between the institution and its community beyond what can be fulfilled in its architectural space.

Current art museum mission statements and strategic plans act as evidence of this ongoing shift within museum practices. Outlining agendas that focus on the importance of connecting with neighboring communities, most art museums have turned their business model into one that is visitor-centered and community-driven. In order to aid art museums in achieving such an undertaking, the Pew Charitable Trust implemented the Program for Art Museums and Communities (PAMC) from 1995 through 2002. The PAMC enlisted the participation of eleven museums to implement new programs and serve as models for other twenty-first century art institutions. The program provided the participating museums with the opportunity to employ programs and services that aimed to increase public audience participation and engagement in art museums, while “rebuilding community loyalty and support.” At the core of this mission was the necessary involvement of the artist to enhance the participation of the public. Six of the eleven museums implemented artist-in-residency programs to create or sustain

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4 The PAMC issued grants to museums to implement programs that would improve the experience of the visitor. The museums included the Art Institute of Chicago, the Carnegie Museum of Art, the Denver Art Museum, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, the Museum of Art at Rhode Island School of Design, the Seattle Art Museum, the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive at the University of California, the Walker Art Center, and the Whitney Museum of American Art.

5 Pitman and Herzy, *New Forums*, 3.

6 Ibid., 1.
relationships with their communities. The Pew Charitable Trusts’ study outlines the success of these programs while unintentionally demonstrating the dependence the art museum has on the artist and a third party, as exemplified by the PAMC, to engage with its community.

In order to demonstrate the dependency of the museum on an artist and a third party to establish a communicative relationship between itself and its community, I will analyze two recent site-specific projects: Ann Hamilton’s *stylus* and Suzanne Lacy’s *Between the Door and the Street* (2013), created in collaboration with the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts in St. Louis and the Brooklyn Museum, respectively. Hamilton and Lacy use forms of language in the execution of these projects, while offering a stark contrast not only in process and material, but also in each artist’s intent. The interactive installation of Hamilton’s *stylus* creates an opportunity for exploration through the activation of the individual visitor’s senses within the space of the Pulitzer. A theme of “call and response” is evident within the installation—a dialogue created between the visitor and Tadao Ando’s architectural space, and potentially the surrounding neighborhood. Analogous to her aims in other works, Hamilton does not intend to create an experience of community engagement, but rather an installation that generates individual “bodily extension” through sensorial engagement. Lacy’s socially engaged work *Between the Door and the Street* uses dialogue as its medium in a more explicit manner. After months of planning, eighty organizations with approximately 400 individual participants (in addition to the thousands of audience participants) gathered on

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the brownstone stoops of Park Place in Prospect Heights, Brooklyn to discuss social issues in relation to feminism.

Despite the dissimilarities between these two projects, the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts and the Brooklyn Museum intended similar outcomes from partnering with an artist—the opportunity to diversify their audiences and to connect further with their surrounding communities through the communicative aspects of the artists’ works. In addition, both projects would have not been possible without the assistance of a third party to create these opportunities for community engagement. Lacy’s performance would not have been possible without the resources provided to her by Creative Time, the non-profit, public arts organization in New York City. The Brooklyn Museum acted as a host institution. The museum provided Lacy and Creative Time with financial support, promotional aid, and a meeting space leading up to the event. By taking a figurative “backseat” in Lacy’s project, the Brooklyn Museum demonstrated its comfort with community engagement outside the walls of the museum into the public sphere, while nonetheless strengthening the message concerning its relevance to the lives of the general public.9

Distinct from Lacy’s Between the Door and the Street, Hamilton’s work alone cannot be considered an occasion for community engagement despite art critic Steven Henry Madoff’s claim that the communicative acts of stylus “instantiate community.”10 Perhaps the recurrent use of the word “community” in his essay within the exhibition catalog would not be as problematic if Matthias Waschek (former director of the Pulitzer

9 Nina Simon, The Participatory Museum (Santa Cruz, Calif.: Museum 2.0, 2010), 287.

10 Steven Henry Madoff in Hamilton, Stylus, 60.
and curator of *stylus*) did not assert that Hamilton’s “artistic intervention permeated all of our institutional activities from public programs to publications and web projects, and also extended into the urban fabric of St. Louis.” The permeation that ensued from *stylus* was not the work of Hamilton, but instead was the outcome of the Pulitzer’s community projects department, which was invaluable to the engagement that took place in the dilapidated Old North neighborhood of St. Louis.

The engagement resulting from the efforts of Lacy and Creative Time and the Pulitzer’s community projects department would not have been feasible within the walls of the art institution. The setting of the museums’ neighborhoods for these moments of community engagement warrants an examination of the movement of art practices into the public sphere. The institutional response to these practices will also be reviewed through an analysis of museum studies scholar Lois H. Silverman’s writings on the social work of museums. Silverman proposes communication as a mechanic of social work for museums, and claims that museums are agents of social change whether they are aware of it or not. A more specific exploration into these modes of communication that form social relationships will be achieved through a discussion of Grant Kester’s theories of dialogical art. Connected to community art practices, Kester discusses the collaborative aspects of conversation and its ability to create new insights for those communities involved. Using Kester’s theories, I will examine the dialogical aspects of both

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Hamilton and Lacy’s work to determine the relationships created between institution and community through the act of dialogue.

**A Brief History of How Contemporary Artists and Museums are Driving Community Engagement**

A decade of civil rights activism and “minority liberation,” the 1960s created opportunities for individuals to challenge authorities and institutions of all genres, including the art museum. Starting with the 1950s, Allan Kaprow created “happenings” to enhance the connection between art and life through the viewer’s direct participation. The enclosed setting of the art museum did not provide the context for these connections and remained inaccessible to a broader public. Artists sought spaces that were more closely linked to the environments of everyday life, creating artist-led galleries or moving their art practice to the streets. Many artists began to orient their practice around communities that were “often alienated from the institutions of high art,” or the low-income, working class. Artists, such as Suzanne Lacy, Judy Chicago, and Lucy Lippard, among others, used their art to drive social activism by reaching out to marginalized communities within the public sphere.

In response to the widening gap between contemporary art practices and the institution, the museum sought to prove its relevance and its worth in regards to social

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16 Ibid., 126.
activism. One such example is the development of the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum (currently the Anacostia Community Museum) by the Smithsonian Institute in 1967. Located in a low-income neighborhood of Washington, D.C., the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum was created in collaboration between the Smithsonian, a local neighborhood organization, and Dr. John R. Kinard (a pastor with extensive work with youth groups in the Anacostia neighborhood).\(^{17}\) Progressive in its practices, the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum required “the deep involvement of the community itself in every aspect of museum operation,” including exhibition design and installation, as well as administrative decisions.\(^{18}\) The Anacostia Neighborhood Museum demonstrated the potential of a museum acting as a democratic institution, involving its community while challenging the definition of what it means to be a museum in the twenty-first century.

In his essay “The Museum, a Temple or the Forum,” Duncan F. Cameron problematizes the definition of the museum amid shifting practices that require the museum to fulfill its social responsibility.\(^{19}\) Although Cameron completed this essay in 1971, the confusion he contended the museum was experiencing over its roles as temple and forum has continued over the next four decades. As broadened audience participation continued to be of vital importance to artists throughout the 1970s,

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\(^{19}\) Duncan F. Cameron, “The Museum, a Temple or the Forum,” in Gail Anderson’s *Reinventing the Museum: The Evolving Conversation on the Paradigm Shift* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2012), 54, 55.
institutions aimed to create more authentic and accessible experiences for the general public. Competing with public arts organizations such as Creative Time (founded in 1973 as a support for the artist to engage with a large, democratic audience), it became vital for art museums to respond and participate in the art practices within the public sphere. In 1977, the Centre Pompidou opened in Paris in response to the need for an environment that could feature new art genres such as “happenings” and video art, along with more traditional forms, thus endeavoring to reach “much larger, non-museum-going public.” Including a plaza, a library, temporary exhibition and performance arts spaces, along with galleries allocated to the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, the Centre Pompidou sought to act as a space of “experimentation and play,” abandoning any expectation of the museum as temple.21

The 1980s witnessed a second wave of institutional critique, in the wake of Reagan’s presidency. Following the critical art practices of artists like Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren, and Marcel Broodthaers from the 1960s and 1970s, artists such as Mark Dion, Jenny Holzer, Andrea Fraser, and Michael Asher created conceptual works that challenged the authorities at large, including the art museum. The museum responded by inviting artists to perform or create installations within its space to enable the formation of a more democratized environment and lose its label as “temple.” In 1989, the Philadelphia Museum of Art invited artist and theorist Andrea Fraser into the museum environment to create a site-specific performance, using the history of the museum as its


subject. In her didactic performance *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk*, Fraser posed as a docent and led visitors of the museum on a tour while outlining the history of the museum’s authority and elitism. The museum’s apparently benevolent acceptance of such critique demonstrated the transformation that art institutions are attempting to implement through the assistance of the artist to appear more democratized and heteronomous.

In 1994, Suzanne Lacy’s seminal text *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* outlined the emergence of socially engaged public art practices. New genre public art practices became more established and larger scale community projects were implemented. Mary Jane Jacob independently curated two large site-specific projects in the 1990s: *Places with a Past: New Site-Specific Art in Charleston* (1991) and *Culture in Action: New Public Art in Chicago* (1993). Both projects aimed to reach out to communities through the site-specific works of established artists integrated within the public sphere. The artists commissioned to create works for these exhibitions researched and collaborated with varying communities in both cities to bring to the surface the forgotten histories of neighboring communities to enhance the visibility of specific urban areas.

Competing with such extensive public arts projects, the art museum has struggled to keep up with the community engagement established by the artist and other independent entities. In order to accomplish the viewership of new genre public artists, the museum has begun to apply its resources within the public sphere. Certain museums

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have become leaders in their field, working toward a socially engaged institution, including those involved in the PAMC. The Walker Art Center was one of the eleven participating institutions that engaged in practices that attempted to build a relationship with its surrounding communities while providing services. Perhaps its involvement in the PAMC was a result of its already established focus in the early 1990s on “sustained community involvement,” while working with the artist.23 Through the support of the PAMC, the Walker Art Center refocused its already existing artist-in-residency program “to center as much on audience engagement as presenting.”24 The Walker attempted to build relationships with diverse communities that included large Native American and immigrant populations. An initiative was created called Artists and Communities at the Crossroads that sought to engage in collaborations with people and organizations surrounding the museum through community-oriented artist residencies.25 While focusing on specific audiences, such as teens, low-income families, and non-white groups, the Walker concentrated on communities within a two-mile radius of the Walker, “the idea being that it was a microcosm of the city: the richest people, the poorest people, the oldest residents, and the newest immigrants.”26 At first, the artists and curators involved in Artists and Communities at the Crossroads worked independently on the planning of the artist residencies. After some time, the “curators and artists would


24 Pitman and Herzy, New Forums, 42.

25 Ibid., 45.

26 Sarah Schultz quoted in Pitman and Herzy, New Forums, 44, 45.
benefit from the educators’ knowledge of the community.” The success of the artist residency programs in the Walker’s surrounding communities depended on the collaboration with the education department. Through its collaboration, the Walker has built effective relationships with its communities while becoming a forum for its neighborhood.

The Walker Art Center’s extensive work with communities within a close radius to its building demonstrates the actions that many museums, including the Brooklyn Museum and the Pulitzer, strive to implement into their museum practices. The roles of education departments are increasingly significant as many art museums seek to increase their number of visitors. Museum educators’ research and understanding of surrounding communities help the art institution bridge the gaps between the institutional roles of temple and forum.

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CHAPTER 2


In her book *The Social Work of Museums*, Lois H. Silverman discusses the social worker’s primary goal of fostering relationships, stating that, “relationships are the agents of social change.”\(^1\) Silverman further discusses the ways in which social workers create a “client-centered personal relationship” with each individual—forming “a unique bond of trust and caring.”\(^2\) The relationship she outlines between the social worker and the client is one that some museums have adopted and strive to create between itself and its communities. In the last fifty years, the emphasis on museum-community relationships has led to the restructuring of traditional museum practices, with an increased focus on education and community programming departments.

Prior to the 1970s, museums were dependent on curatorial departments for educating the public. Nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century museums sought to provide the general public with a historical and cultural education through permanent collections and exhibitions created by curators. Art museum education theorist Melinda M. Mayer notes that the “power relations in art museums privileged art historical interpretations made by the curatorial staff as appropriate content for dissemination to art museum visitors.”\(^3\) Museums communicated to their audiences, or the museum-going

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2 Ibid., 31.

public, through “organized walking,” treating their visitors as “minds on legs,” a term used by social and cultural theorist Tony Bennett in his book *The Birth of the Museum*.\(^4\) The movement and experience of the visitor was highly directed by the institution through its layout and chosen works on display. In addition to the lack of engagement afforded to visitors, the collections on display were inaccessible to a majority of the public sphere. Multiple museum audiences were treated as a homogenous group with similar backgrounds and histories, as well as a comparable appreciation for art.\(^5\)

The cultural shift of the 1960s and 1970s drew attention to the inaccessibility of the museum to the public sphere. Artists began creating artworks in public spaces, including happenings, installations, and performance-based works that required audience participation. As art institutions became less socially relevant to most of their intended audience, museums shifted their focus to the experience of the visitor, in order to draw more of the public into their institutional spaces. With dedicated attention to the visitor experience, museums expanded their educational methods beyond the actions of the curator by increasing the importance of the role of education departments and programming.\(^6\) Art educators were displeased with previous educational practices including “‘walk and talk’ lecture tours”\(^7\) and the museum’s reliance on its visitors to seek out knowledge solely by viewing artworks. Interactive elements were implemented

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\(^5\) Ibid., 1.

\(^6\) Mayer, “A Postmodern Puzzle,” 357.

\(^7\) Ibid., 359.
by education departments to increase visitor engagement and became mainstream practices in the 1970s to create a more meaningful experience for the visitor. In the 1980s and 1990s, empowering the visitor became key in providing a relevant educational experience for the visitor while fulfilling the museum’s “responsibility to community, race, ethnicity, disability, and gender.” Special exhibitions that dealt with social issues or popular culture influences were produced to appeal to a broad audience.

Presently, museums continue to adjust their practices and the function of the museum to increase their audience members. In its quest to become more democratic, the art museum has taken steps to create an exchange of communication with its visitors through interactive elements including video responses, spaces for visitor feedback, and Internet participation through blogs and websites. Distinct spaces for contemporary projects and new media are becoming commonplace in the traditional art museum.

Despite these advances by art institutions, a large part of their intended public is still out of reach for art museums. Relatively distant relationships between museums and their communities has resulted in some art museums taking drastic actions to create and sustain working relationships with their audiences—to act as “social workers.” While Silverman asserts, “the museum experience itself activates relationship and interaction,” a study of current art museum practices demonstrates how museums are doing considerably

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9 Ibid., 364.


more to create these relationships. Collections, exhibitions, and interactive features remain essential to museum practices, but a close look at the Brooklyn Museum and Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts will demonstrate the additional efforts art museums must take to build relationships through social work beyond the museum experience. In order to provide meaningful social experiences and to pursue connections with their communities, the Brooklyn Museum and the Pulitzer produce community-driven exhibitions and programming that strive to be relevant to a larger and more diverse public audience. Through these practices, the Brooklyn Museum and the Pulitzer intend to extend their authority beyond the walls of the museum into the public sphere as socially relevant institutions.

To increase their influence into the space of the public sphere, many art museums, including the Brooklyn Museum and the Pulitzer, seek to appeal to their “community.” Often the term “community” applies to a marginalized group—those that differ from the usual museum visitor. The Brooklyn Museum and Pulitzer both have neighboring communities that are typical of the average museum visitor. The Brooklyn Museum, located in Prospect Heights, neighbors other cultural institutions such as the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Brooklyn Public Library, Prospect Park Zoo, and Brooklyn Children’s Museum. The Pulitzer is located in the Grand Center arts and entertainment district in St. Louis—home to a dozen galleries and museums, including the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis. Despite locations that might encourage an appreciation for art, both museums aim to reach nearby neighborhoods beyond these cultural districts that are noticeably dissimilar. Directly north of the Pulitzer are neighborhoods that starkly

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contrast with Grand Center. Noted in Grand Center’s website in 2013, Delmar Avenue has acted as the district’s northern boundary.\(^\text{13}\) Delmar Boulevard or the Delmar Divide infamously acts as a dividing line that exhibits the extreme segregation of whites and African Americans in St. Louis.\(^\text{14}\) To the north of Delmar are abandoned neighborhoods with sparse and dilapidated architecture. Those that reside in these areas are primarily African American.\(^\text{15}\) Included in the region north of Delmar is the Old North neighborhood—an area that has largely been deserted, but has been the focus of a restoration project by current residents. In the 2010 census, the Old North neighborhood was reported to have a population of 1,916, with seventy-eight percent of the population African American.\(^\text{16}\)

Though Prospect Height’s population is not as disparate as the area around the Delmar Divide, it is still home to a varied population. In 2000, Prospect Heights was resided by 28.2% of whites and 49.5% of African Americans.\(^\text{17}\) The 2010 census conveyed the ongoing gentrification of the area as the population percentages essentially


\(^{15}\) Ibid.


\(^{17}\) “New York City Demographic Shifts, 2000 to 2010,” http://www.urbanresearchmaps.org/plurality/.
reversed. As a neighborhood experiencing gentrification, the Prospect Heights neighborhood includes a mix of the old and new—historic brownstones, recently built luxury condos and apartments, and more neglected apartments and townhomes. With such varying ages and levels of education and income, Prospect Heights may be considered a fairly diverse locale.

Despite the diversity of both locations, several exhibitions and programming opportunities aim to relate to their “community” as if it were a homogenous group. The Pulitzer and Brooklyn Museum’s commitments to their communities are reflected in their mission statements. The Pulitzer’s mission statement focuses primarily on a collaborative approach to community engagement: “Through engaging exhibitions, programs, and partnerships with artists, curators, and innovators across disciplines, Pulitzer Arts Foundation strives to inspire both the St. Louis community and international arts audiences to think differently about creativity in daily life.” The Pulitzer hopes to act as an institution that can serve the whole St. Louis population and beyond. The Brooklyn Museum’s mission is more visitor-centric:

The mission of the Brooklyn Museum is to act as a bridge between the rich artistic heritage of world cultures, as embodied in its collections, and the unique experience of each visitor. Dedicated to the primacy of the visitor experience, committed to excellence in every aspect of its collections and programs, and drawing on both new and traditional tools of communication, interpretation, and presentation, the Museum aims to serve its diverse public as a dynamic, innovative, and welcoming center for learning through the visual arts.

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18 The white population of Prospect Heights was reported at a growth of 47.2% with a decline in the African American population to 30.1% in 2010.

The Brooklyn Museum’s mission statement emphasizes the experience of the individual visitor, acknowledging the diversity of its residents, whereas the Pulitzer’s mission combines St. Louis’s distinct communities into a singular, homogenous “community.” By defining St. Louis as one “community,” the Pulitzer risks generalizing these groups by ignoring differences and further alienating its potential audiences from the space of the institution. The Brooklyn Museum is more successful in acknowledging the differences of its visitors, while outlining its goal of serving the public.

The Brooklyn Museum’s commitment to the visitor has not only shaped its mission statement, but has called for a transformation of the museum’s structure, both internally and externally. Built in 1897 in a Beaux-Arts-style with monumental columns, steep stairs and heavy, bronze doors, the Brooklyn Museum’s façade acted an imposing barrier for the public to view its encyclopedic collection (figure 1). A 2004 remodel inserted a glass entryway at the ground level that opens into a public plaza with easy access to the subway (figure 2). The new entryway and public plaza were constructed to create an accessible entrance and environment for the public, acting as a “front stoop” to provide “multiple options for programming as well as areas for informal gatherings.”


23 Ibid., 67.
Current director of the Brooklyn Museum Arnold Lehman stated that the museum “wanted something more welcoming, something less cathedral and less you-versus-us.”

The new entryway forms a stronger, physical connection between the museum and its neighborhood, which Lehman claims has resulted in more visitors to the museum.

Because the Brooklyn Museum was established in the late nineteenth century, it has worked to transform its reputation from traditional encyclopedic museum into a twenty-first-century social institution. Along with the main entrance remodel, the Brooklyn Museum reorganized its departmental framework to demonstrate its dedication to the visitor experience. With a stronger focus on the social needs of the visitor, the Brooklyn Museum implemented a reorganizational plan in 2006 that increased the importance of the education and community programming departments—often seen as “a lower place in the museum hierarchy.”

Lehman sparked controversy when he unveiled the reorganizational plan that would dramatically restructure the curatorial department of the museum with a greater focus on the educator. Rather than keeping the traditional model of curatorial departments, such as African Art, American Art, European Painting, etc., Lehman stripped down the curatorial departments into two categories: a Collections

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24 “About: The Museum’s Building.”
http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/about/rubin_pavilion.php.


26 Ibid.

27 Andrew McClellan, Art and Its Publics, 2.

28 Grant, “Rescuing Brooklyn,” 68.
Division and an Exhibitions Division. The objective was to “generate more communication and new ideas among curators through establishing an interdisciplinary structure,” but because of these changes, many believed Lehman was weakening the power of the curator. The plan highlights the importance of the educator within each division, by noting the significance of collaboration with the educator. It is even indicated that the “content of certain exhibitions might even appropriately be developed by an educator or designer, supported by a curator, rather than the other way around, as is traditionally the case.”

The role of the educator within an exhibition could help ensure that the exhibition appeals to a larger, more diverse audience, an idea that Lehman did not feel that some curators agreed with when he first arrived: “When I came here, I found a number of curators weren’t in sync with the commitments I had made to greater accessibility and diversity.” Through the curatorial reorganization plan, Lehman demonstrated the museum’s devotion to becoming an institution for its visitors rather than one that places the most value on object collection and preservation.

Many of the transformations that have taken place within the last decade at the Brooklyn Museum can be attributed to Director Arnold Lehman. Upon his arrival, the Brooklyn Museum was suffering from the same effects delineated in the 2008 report of


31 Brooklyn Museum Curatorial Reorganizational Plan, 3.

32 Grant, “Rescuing Brooklyn,” 69.
the National Endowment of the Arts: “over the last twenty years, audiences for museums, galleries, and performing arts institutions have decreased, and the audiences that remain are older and whiter than the overall population.”

33 The Brooklyn Museum was experiencing dwindling audience and membership numbers, which, in effect, led to a decline in funding. 34 Arnold Lehman made it the Brooklyn Museum’s purpose to become a museum for the diverse residents of Brooklyn, stating, “We have two-and-a-half million Brooklyn residents, and we need to become the most accessible institution we can be. We can be both a neighborhood and a national museum. Or, let me put it this way, we are a world-class museum with roots in our neighborhood.”

35 This statement from Lehman demonstrates the Brooklyn Museum’s determination in being both an institution that provides the traditional museum practices of collection and preservation, while functioning as a community museum like the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum that aimed to serve its community by involving residents in its practices, as well as providing programs that were socially applicable to the neighborhood’s needs.

In addition to the remodeling and its curatorial department restructuring, the Brooklyn Museum has juxtaposed works from various time periods, media, and subject matter to offer renewed perspectives regarding their permanent collection of the more than 1.5 million objects obtained in the early twentieth century. 36 In his discussion of the

33 Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, i.


35 Grant, “Rescuing Brooklyn,” 69.

role of the museum shifting between temple and forum, Duncan F. Cameron outlined the need for the art museum to rework its collection to appeal to its current museum audience by placing works within a historical context or connecting the collection to popular culture.\(^{37}\) This practice became a mainstream museum exercise when artist Fred Wilson curated the Maryland Historical Society in an exhibition entitled *Mining the Museum* (1992). The Maryland Historical Society was looking for innovative ways to “up-date the way history was being presented at MdHS, while at the same time developing ‘an audience that reflected the cultural diversity of the community.’”\(^{38}\) Wilson reorganized the collection of the museum to highlight the state’s history of slavery and colonization. One such example is an installation from the exhibition entitled “Metalwork” that contrasted shackles with silver cups and pitchers (figure 3). His curatorial intervention created an opportunity for dialogue while reframing the institution’s relationship to its marginalized communities.\(^{39}\) African Americans, along with Native Americans and women, had been largely left out of the Maryland Historical Society prior to the exhibition.\(^{40}\)

Steps have been made at the Brooklyn Museum to create dialogue around objects while providing a stronger historical context. Opening in 2012, the long-term installation

\(^{37}\) Duncan F. Cameron, “The Museum, a Temple or the Forum,” 54.


\(^{39}\) Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum*, 159.

\(^{40}\) Talbot, “Return of the Whipping Post.”
“Connecting Cultures: A World in Brooklyn” features works from the permanent collection at the museum entrance in the museum’s Great Hall (figure 4). Curators arranged artworks by the themes of people, places, and things.\textsuperscript{41} Distinct from the traditional separation of cultures of other institutions, the installation holds works from various times, cultures, and media to demonstrate “connections across cultures, which allow us to see the ways in which art reflects our shared humanity.”\textsuperscript{42} Through these connections, the visitor is potentially able to form a stronger personal connection to the works while creating meaning for himself.\textsuperscript{43} A problem that results from such an approach is that the space became overwhelming by trying to address multiple cultures and time periods with the display of over 300 objects in one condensed space. The space acts as an introductory gallery for what the rest of the museum has to offer, but with such a large collection of objects in once space, it would be easy for the museum visitor to become over stimulated and use the installation as the full museum experience. While the point is to alter the museum experience into one that is more accessible and intriguing to the public, the museum experience could have a more lasting effect on the visitor if this was the practice that carried on throughout the various galleries rather than in one gallery at the entrance of the museum.


\textsuperscript{42} Brooklyn Museum label; “Connecting Cultures” organized by Chief Curator Kevin Stayton with the effort of other curators.

\textsuperscript{43} Silverman, \textit{The Social Work of Museums}, 15.
Like the Brooklyn Museum, the Pulitzer has made concerted efforts to build a diverse audience and connect with its communities by attempting to overcome both architectural and departmental challenges. The Pulitzer has experienced a setback comparable to the Brooklyn Museum in getting individuals into its doors as a result of its intimidating exterior. Designed by architect Tadao Ando and completed in 2004, the Pulitzer’s predominantly concrete exterior is gray and cold with natural light flooding into the galleries (figure 5). The minimal design and hidden entrance create a closed-off space to maintain a private and contemplative space, but a visit to the museum leaves many visitors wondering how to enter into the environment Tadao Ando created. Because of its uninviting exterior, the Pulitzer has had to work especially hard through its programming department to be perceived as accessible to nearby residents, particularly those north of the Delmar Divide. The Pulitzer’s inaccessible interior and limited hours (only two days a week) require it to create events to attract a crowd when it is open. While the Brooklyn Museum has relied primarily on its exhibitions to connect with its surrounding communities, the Pulitzer has entrusted this task to its programming department through events that complement exhibitions. Most of the Pulitzer’s exhibitions have been focused on more conceptual and Minimalist art practices, including works by Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, and Gordon Matta-Clark. The unapproachability of these kinds of exhibitions has resulted in significant work on the part of its programming department to create valuable experiences with its public.

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The project that jumpstarted the Pulitzer’s community engagement outside the walls of the institution was 2008’s *The Light Project*, produced in conjunction with the Pulitzer’s exhibition *Dan Flavin: Constructed Light*[^46]. Created in collaboration with the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM), the Saint Louis Art Museum, and White Flag Projects[^47], *The Light Project* was “motivated by a commitment to the arts and an interest in social and urban revitalization.”[^48] The outdoor installations that resulted from the project used the setting of the Grant Center arts district[^49]. Three artists and an artist team lit the neighborhood through site-specific works that resulted in events with community members. Artist Spencer Finch used the light from the St. Louis sunset as his inspiration for what has been labeled as community engagement[^50] through his work *Sunset (St. Louis, July 31, 2008)* (figure 6). After observing the sunset from the roof of the Contemporary Art Museum, Finch produced ice cream that reflected the colors he perceived from the rooftop[^51]. Using a solar-powered soft serve machine at the entrance of the CAM, Finch’s ice cream was served freely to Grand Center visitors and pedestrians for six weeks. The opening night of the installation saw a line of visitors out the door of the museum, waiting to partake of the ice cream. Four area schools came to


[^47]: White Flag Projects is a non-profit, alternative arts institution in St. Louis established in 2006 to become a platform for a variety of contemporary arts practices without “overt institutional filters.” http://www.newmuseum.org/artspaces/view/white-flag-projects

[^48]: http://lightproject.pulitzerarts.org/

[^49]: Ibid.

[^50]: Interview with Lisa Harper Chang.

[^51]: http://lightproject.pulitzerarts.org/artists/progress/spencer-finch/page/2/.
the district to consume the ice cream during field trips.\footnote{Interview with Lisa Harper Chang.} \textit{Sunset} created a convivial experience as the installation was successful in gathering a large number of people as free ice cream was offered, but it did little to serve specific St. Louis communities besides literally serving ice cream to visitors. Finch’s installation was considered the most effective form of community engagement from \textit{The Light Project},\footnote{Ibid.} but this was most likely claimed because of the number of people who came to the stoops of these institutions rather than a specific mode of audience involvement or response.

The project that was more successful in engaging and serving residents in \textit{The Light Project} was Rainer Kehres’ and Sebastian Hungerer’s \textit{CHORUS}. Requiring the participation of area residents, Kehres and Hungerer set out to create an installation in the Spring Street church in Grand Center. A historical landmark in St. Louis, the church caught fire in 2001 after a long period as a place of worship for a primarily African-American population.\footnote{http://lightproject.pulitzerarts.org/completed-work/kehres-hungerer/} The fire left the church uninhabitable, with its roof destroyed and the exterior shell still standing. At the request of the artists, the Pulitzer asked community members to donate old lamps and lampshades to construct a roof for the building (figure 7). Residents of St. Louis became involved in the project as they were asked to share the histories of the lamps; they recounted personal stories of people and events from their pasts. The personal accounts of the people through the stories of the lamps were collected alongside the lamp donations and documented on the Lamp Collection website to “open dialogue about what light means to different community
members.” 55  Pictures were taken of the lamps with their owners. While some participants simply liked the project and wanted to contribute, some individuals used it as an opportunity to get rid of old lamps. Other participants used the project to remember loved ones: “A dear friend died and I had to clear out his house – this lamp was there so I ‘confiscated’ it. I love the project. I wanted to memorialize my friend.” 56  This project provided an opportunity for St. Louis residents to contribute to the production of the installation and insert personal stories into the public sphere.

A more targeted programming event was a collaboration entitled Staging (2009) produced by Lisa Harper Chang, social worker and former Master of Community Engagement at the Pulitzer, with Director Matthias Waschek. Staging was a theatre program for former prisoners in which the participants performed scripts based on their responses to the Old Masters exhibition (figure 8). Ideal (Dis-)Placements: Old Masters at the Pulitzer (October 24, 2008-October 3, 2009) included fourteenth to eighteenth-century paintings from the collections of the St. Louis Art Museum and the Harvard Art Museums. Using the natural light of the Pulitzer, the objective was to show these works as they would have been displayed in their original spaces, including aristocratic interiors and Medieval and Renaissance churches. 57  In the programming for the exhibition, the Pulitzer collaborated with the St. Louis Prison Performing Arts, Employment


56 http://lamp-collection.pulitzerarts.org/page/4/

57 http://pulitzerarts.org/old-masters
Connections, and the Performing Arts Department at Washington University to give the former prisoners the opportunity to use art and theatre “to help develop skills for their future lives and employment.”

Over six weeks, the participants were guided in their efforts to improve their writing and performance abilities by creating skits related to the paintings’ themes. By applying social work practices, the Pulitzer’s programming department and non-profit organizations created a beneficial experience for these “at-risk” individuals to establish a sense of empowerment for the participants.

While the Pulitzer has primarily relied on its community programming to create meaningful experiences for residents, the Brooklyn Museum has sought to engage Prospect Heights and the greater Brooklyn area with events to which the visitor could easily relate. The Brooklyn Museum has strived to communicate its accessibility with its non-white and younger communities that have not previously felt an attachment to the museum through exhibitions.

Since Lehman’s arrival, the Brooklyn Museum has organized exhibitions such as “Hip Hop Nation” (2000) and “Star Wars” (2002). Both exhibitions were met with criticism for being “too accessible” and populist, risking the academic reputation of the museum and its sense of scholarship, but both received high attendance. The Brooklyn Museum’s design of more accessible, relatable exhibitions aims to provide a sense of identity to populations that have not previously felt welcome in institutional space. By creating a meaningful experience for the visitor, the Brooklyn

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58 http://stagingoldmasters.pulitzerarts.org/about/

59 Kramer, “Cultural Elitism vs. Cultural Diversity,156.

Museum affirms the visitors’ interests, while fostering an environment of inclusion. Detrimental in this practice is that these kinds of exhibitions give the museum a guise of accessibility by addressing wildly popular topics that already appeal to a large audience. With “Hip Hop Nation” and “Star Wars,” the Brooklyn Museum stepped out of its role as art museum into a purveyor of mass culture to increase its attendance. The Brooklyn Museum could have instead used its resources to provide innovative forms of engagement and educational opportunities for visitors to instill an appreciation for art forms to ensure that the visitor would continue to come back to the museum.

Perhaps most indicative of the efforts put forth by the Brooklyn Museum to sustain its relationship with its communities was Click! A Crowd-Curated Exhibition (2008). This exhibition began with a call for photographs to be submitted online that fit the theme of “the changing faces of Brooklyn.” The public was invited to assess the works online, which resulted in 389 photographs evaluated by over four hundred thousand people. While some of the photographs looked professional, many of the photographs (numerous amateur cityscapes and portraits) made it clear that the public curated the event. In her review of the exhibition, Laural Ptak discusses the major theme of Click!:


63 Ibid.

*Click!* posits that a diverse populace can be better at making decisions than expert individuals. The very notion of ‘crowd curating’ challenges the authority, taste, and power dynamics in which formidable arts institutions like the Brooklyn Museum are typically steeped, and keeps in step with the democratic and participatory culture of the increasingly ubiquitous online context.65

Demonstrating its effective and transformative use of technology, the Brooklyn Museum’s *Click!* gave its viewers a platform to debate the works, share opinions, and have authorship in what is displayed, but most importantly it challenged the traditional importance of the role of the curator in the art institution.

A similar online forum for community engagement at the Brooklyn Museum was its membership program, 1stfans (launched in 2009 and ended in 2012). 1stfans was created as a means to “turn the impersonal engine of museum membership into a relationship-based, community-centered interaction for two specific museum audiences”: the Target First Saturdays participants and the online community.66 These two audiences have been recognized as having an established relationship with the museum, but often do not feel the need to become members. 1stfans was marketed as a social networking museum membership (separate from the traditional memberships) that aimed to provide members with exclusive content and opportunities to become connected with other members.67 1stfans members were promised special events and opportunities to meet other members, museum staff, and artists at the Brooklyn Museum’s Target First

65 Ptak, “Click!,” 12.


67 Interview with Will Cary (membership) and Shelley Bernstein (technology) in Nina Simon, “1stfans.”
Saturdays, a free program with art and music events, including activities, performances, and films, held each month at the museum. Within its first year, 1stfans signed up over five hundred members for a membership fee of $20 per year, resulting in a successful first attempt in constructing a targeted community membership program. Creators Will Cary and Shelley Bernstein considered 1stfans the first step in serving the museum’s whole community. It reached a younger crowd and targeted individuals that did not feel that the traditional membership hierarchy was suitable for their needs. Ironically, 1stfans failed after three years because of its complete separation from the membership structure. The implementation of 1stfans as an entity separate from the museum resulted in a lack of awareness about the program and opportunities for growth in membership status. In its efforts to radicalize the museum experience, the Brooklyn Museum has attempted to separate itself from traditional museum practices, as seen in 1stfans and in its popular culture exhibitions. Rather than developing innovative practices that impart a connection with the museum through educational programs, the Brooklyn Museum has continued to alienate a large section of the public by providing accessible experiences only sporadically.

**Institutional Goals: stylus and Between the Door and the Street**

As noted, the Brooklyn Museum and the Pulitzer have taken steps to become more approachable by altering traditional museum practices to remain socially relevant.

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69 Shelley Bernstein, “A Sunset for 1stfans,” https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/community/blogosphere/2012/05/11/a-sunset-for-1stfans/

70 Ibid.
Because of its long history as an encyclopedic institution, the Brooklyn Museum has restructured its façade and departments to practice a visitor-centered approach and emerge as a museum that serves its diverse population. These methods have been criticized for being too populist and depreciating the role of the curator. The Pulitzer, however, has attempted to maintain the traditional values of the museum while remaining relevant in the twenty-first century through social work. In his essay, Nick Priori discusses how the twenty-first century art museum is struggling to define itself as both a modern and postmodern institution—one that both preserves and collects while providing accessible and entertaining opportunities. The Pulitzer has embraced the challenge to be both a place of reflection and a venue for amusement. By labeling itself as both “laboratory” and “sanctuary,” the Pulitzer has aimed to achieve both roles by attempting to become a hybrid of modern and postmodern museum ideals. In 2011, the Pulitzer commissioned Ann Hamilton to create stylus. This multi-media project activated the interior of the Pulitzer through the interaction of the viewer with the Pulitzer’s space, but, like other Pulitzer exhibitions, failed to create an opportunity for profound engagement with its surrounding communities. To compensate for the lack of engagement, the programming department (formerly headed by Lisa Harper Chang) created events that engaged the Grand Center district and the Old North neighborhood, using themes from Hamilton’s stylus.

Commissioning Hamilton to create stylus, the Pulitzer sought a work that engaged its public despite the closed-off space of the Pulitzer. The interior space of the Pulitzer

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71 Nick Priori, “Having One’s Tate and Eating It: Transformations of the Museum in a Hypermodern Era,” in Andrew McClellan’s Art and Its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium.
would also present a challenge to Hamilton in the development of the installation. Unlike most gallery spaces, the interior is flooded with natural light. The Pulitzer’s permanent collection, consisting of only three large works, is retained within the space and cannot be relocated.\(^72\) The Pulitzer needed Hamilton to produce an installation that would embrace the space of the Pulitzer, while creating an opportunity for engagement. Acts of reciprocity inspired the theme of “call and response” for Hamilton, specifically the acts of listening and speaking—“a give and take—that might build over time into a conversation and an ongoing connection and program—perhaps—one larger and longer and more ongoing than our immediate project.”\(^73\) Hamilton developed the idea of “call and response” as a possible means to fulfill the Pulitzer’s mission of creating an artistic event that permeates the everyday lives of St. Louis’ communities and entails collaborations between the artist, curators, and programmers.\(^74\)

Hamilton liked to think of the Pulitzer as an ear, one that not only listens to speaking, but also to the sound of the hand on the wall or foot on the ground.\(^75\) Hamilton produced an installation that required the viewer to interact with the space of the Pulitzer through touch and sound. The viewer’s participation resulted in sounds that would reverberate throughout the space. Examples included signing a pad at the entrance and the touch of a piano key to stimulate a musical response from a piano situated on the

\(^{72}\) The Pulitzer Foundation’s permanent collection consists of these three works, specifically made for Tadao Ando’s space: Ellsworth Kelly’s *Blue Black* (2000), Richard Serra’s *Joe* (1999), and Scott Burton’s *Rock Settee* (1988-1990)

\(^{73}\) An e-mail from Ann Hamilton to Matthias Waschek (July 5, 2009), *stylus*, 12.

\(^{74}\) http://www.pulitzerarts.org/mission.

\(^{75}\) An e-mail from Hamilton to Waschek (June 4, 2008), *stylus*, 1.
opposite end of the gallery. The viewer could speak into a microphone or play a record that would intermix with sound recordings that constantly played throughout the installation. Visually, concordances (hand-printed newspapers including keywords from \textit{stylus}) were laid on a table near a row of books. A video was projected of a figure waving and clapping. Papier-mâché moldings of hands lined a gallery window. The hands of the figure and moldings represented Hamilton’s first impression of St. Louis—a waving of hands calling welcome. Through these visual and auditory elements, Hamilton crafted a space for both “reception and transmission,” or moments of “call and response,” through speaking, listening, and touch.

The Pulitzer’s programming department attempted to use Hamilton’s theme of “call and response” to provide services to neighboring residents since the exhibition itself did not fulfill the Pulitzer’s expectation that the project would help it meet the goal of community engagement better. While the exhibition itself did not generate an occasion for social practices, the programming department used \textit{stylus} to strengthen its existing relationships. Area high schools participated in the concordance workshops primarily because they had a rapport with them from prior programming events, including \textit{The Light Project}.\footnote{Interview with Lisa Harper Chang.} The concordance workshops were collaborations between the St. Louis Public Library and the Pulitzer’s programming department. The concordance workshops, led by the Community Projects Coordinator, acted as an opportunity to teach students about media literacy while giving them a chance to contemplate their communities.\footnote{Amy Broadway, “\textit{Stylus} Community Programming Teaches Media Literacy” \textit{The Contemporary Pulitzer Blog}, November 10, 2010 (Accessed June 8, 17, 2014),
Students were asked to research the depiction of their neighborhoods in the local press and choose words from various newspaper articles to create their own concordances. Students became familiar with their area library, were given library card applications, and were taught how to use library databases. The Pulitzer’s goal was that “participants [would] feel empowered by where they live as they research, understand and take ownership” of their identities, while encouraging a sense of activism within the students. As the students created concordances with Pulitzer staff members, the programming department was empowering the students to combat the stigma that had been forced onto them, while challenging stereotypes. To conclude the concordance workshops, the Pulitzer hosted a final celebration with a gathering of the participating area high schools. Students exchanged papier-mâché hands created during the workshops, which were marked with colors of their high schools. The act was to represent the shared experience that had occurred over several months, while creating a moment for reflection.

In its continued effort to produce a chance for “social work” with each exhibition, the Pulitzer enlisted the aid of two social work students and an artist to create a project entitled Urban Wave, in conjunction with *stylus*. While most of the community


78 Ibid., “St. Louis Library Partners with the Pulitzer.”

79 Ibid., “Thinking About Community at Gateway to College.”


81 Emily Augsburger, “Community Projects Final Celebration,” 2buildings1blog.org/Pulitzer/.
engagement that resulted from *stylus* was the idea of the programming department, Urban Wave required the input of Ann Hamilton for its completion. Determined to activate the theme of “call and response,” Urban Wave used the hand motif from *stylus* (the gesture of welcoming) and printed it on posters to be pasted around the Old North neighborhood (figure 9). Urban Wave requested the assistance of a local non-profit Urban Studio Café, the Old North Restoration Group, and an area elementary school for feedback on which buildings to paste the posters. Old North was chosen because of the restoration efforts that it was undergoing and the abandoned and brick aesthetics of the uninhabited architecture. The Urban Wave team scouted out vacant buildings, took photographs, and sent them to Hamilton for curatorial approval for their aesthetic qualities before pasting the posters on the buildings.83

Despite the Pulitzer’s hopes that *stylus* would offer “a chance to closely merge [their] programming activities with the installation concepts through direct communication with the artist,” the Urban Wave posters resulted in an aesthetically-pleasing photograph opportunity, but Hamilton’s input regarding the location of the posters did not create any kind of engagement with residents. The ultimate objective of Urban Wave was that individuals passing by would see the image of the hand on the posters and interest would be garnered in the Pulitzer. The Urban Studio Café offered its space to the Pulitzer to act as a place where residents could gather information about the posters and *stylus*, while offering cards with the Pulitzer’s phone number to actively participate in the bell speaker portion of *stylus*. The cards would be used to call and leave

82 Amy Broadway, “Urban Wave Gets Rolling”

83 Ibid.

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a message that would then be projected off the roof of the Pulitzer through the bell
speakers into the surrounding neighborhoods. The Pulitzer did not have an audience
feedback strategy in place or a way to measure if the posters encouraged a visit to the
Pulitzer or leaving a message, thus making it difficult to measure the effectiveness of the
project. Messages that were left did not contain personal information regarding
identities, but rather personal stories, readings, or sounds.

An ongoing program that resulted from *stylus* is *sound waves*, a collaboration
between the Pulitzer and St. Louis local radio station, 88.1 KDHX. *Sound waves: stylus*
included live performances in the galleries of the Pulitzer in response to the recordings by
Shahrokh Yadegari that played throughout the installation. Throughout the time of
*stylus, sound waves* presented various musical performances in different galleries of
Tadao Ando’s architecture and “represented the music of a different cultural tradition
found within the St. Louis Community: Brazilian, Balkan, jazz, blues, and hip-hop.”

By showcasing music from cultures around St. Louis, the Pulitzer wanted to create an
event that would make members of communities that do not usually feel welcome come
to the museum: “It’s the way KDHX and the Pulitzer are calling to diverse communities
and traditions within greater St. Louis community to respond.” Hamilton collaborated
with Yadegari and the radio DJ to pick music that would go well with the sound

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84 Amy Broadway, “Urban Wave Gets Rolling.”

85 Interview with Lisa Harper Chang.


87 Quote by Lisa Harper Chang in Amy Broadway’s blog post, “Brazilian Music Next
Thursday.”
recordings (they continued to play through the sound waves events), while being culturally responsive to the St. Louis population.

The Pulitzer became exceptionally active in its role as “social worker” through its community programming in *stylus*. By contrast with the Pulitzer, the Brooklyn Museum was sought as a partner in the production with the project. The partnership with Creative Time and Suzanne Lacy permitted the museum to act in a smaller capacity, but still benefit from the engagement triggered by *Between the Door and the Street*. The Brooklyn Museum offered financial support to the project, provided a meeting place, including a public Artist Talk, and hosted an “architectural intervention” on the stoop of the museum.  

By contrast with the Pulitzer, the Brooklyn Museum was sought as a partner in the production with the project. The partnership with Creative Time and Suzanne Lacy permitted the museum to act in a smaller capacity, but still benefit from the engagement triggered by *Between the Door and the Street*. The Brooklyn Museum offered financial support to the project, provided a meeting place, including a public Artist Talk, and hosted an “architectural intervention” on the stoop of the museum.  

Between October 10th and the 20th, Lacy wrapped the outside stairs of the museum in a series of questions to the community (figure 10). Questions were posed to the Brooklyn Museum’s visitors, such as “Why do women earn less?,” “Who watched the kids?,” and “Who’s winning the war on women?,” with bold, black lettering on a bright, yellow background. The steps of the Brooklyn Museum provided a space for communication for its residents, catalyzing a dialogue for the upcoming performance and, at the same time, making residents aware of the Brooklyn Museum’s involvement.

Lacy’s performance was specifically presented by the Brooklyn Museum’s Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art. Sackler first proposed the Center in 2002 to Arnold Lehman and the Brooklyn Museum’s Board of Trustees and its inaugural exhibition took place in 2007. The Brooklyn Museum jumped on the opportunity to develop the first museum space devoted to the work of feminist artists, who are primarily

88 http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/exhibitions/suzanne_lacy/
activist in their practices. The Sackler Center would also potentially attract a larger female audience that has historically been neglected by major art institutions, further diversifying the Brooklyn Museum’s audience.

Lacy described the Sackler Center as “a natural and perfect partner” for *Between the Door and the Street*, as they provide “a critical voice for women artists,” while representing a large population of women. In its efforts to act as “social worker,” the Brooklyn Museum’s partnership with Lacy provided the museum with an opportunity to engage its visitors in dialogue, while associating the institution with activist causes. By teaming with Lacy, the Brooklyn Museum obtained the opportunity to reach out to its communities outside the confines of the art institution and into the public realm. *Between the Door and the Street* was performed on the residential stoops of Park Place, Prospect Heights—“a space between public and private life.” The Brooklyn Museum’s Vice Director of Education and Program Development, Radiah Harper, suggested the neighborhood to Lacy because of its proximity to the museum (about a ten minute walk)

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and its diverse population. The Park Place community became particularly active in the project by attending information sessions and allowing the use of their front stoops for the performance, which gave the Brooklyn Museum a chance to secure a positive relationship with a street occupied by long-time residents of Brooklyn. Lacy’s process was reliant on community feedback, emphasizing “multivocality and inclusion.” The Brooklyn Museum’s development of its audience was dependent on the collaborative and inclusive elements offered by Lacy’s work.

The Brooklyn Museum’s association with the project helped it establish relationships through the connections that were formed with Brooklyn residents and organizations that represent marginalized groups that may not have previously viewed the art institution as relevant in their daily lives or interests. Through its interactions with more than four hundred organizers and community participants involved in the months of planning and the thousands of audience members that came to listen, the Brooklyn Museum had the prospect of forming relationships with the greater Brooklyn population, along with its surrounding neighborhoods. Through participating in a socially engaged art practice, the Brooklyn Museum further defined itself as a “community museum” by providing an opportunity for social engagement and dialogue.

95 Ibid.
97 Lang, Reeve, and Woollard, The Responsive Museum, 54.
Lois H. Silverman discusses the ways in which museums can build common ground or cohesiveness between individuals and groups through these forms of communication: “Cohesiveness is thus served when groups learn and practice forms of respectful interaction like active listening, informed debate, and civil dialogue that can help prepare them to navigate conflict without coming apart.” The Brooklyn Museum’s involvement in Between the Door and the Street aided in its role as “social worker” by contributing the resources Lacy needed to foster a deeper community connection and dialogue. By promoting Lacy’s project, the Brooklyn Museum was able to demonstrate its commitment to social issues and the problems that impact its residents. The Pulitzer took advantage of Hamilton’s stylus to validate its involvement with the marginalized area of Old North. Working with diverse area schools and canvasing the Old North neighborhood, the Pulitzer established its presence in its “community” to appear as a socially relevant institution. By partnering with artists, the Brooklyn Museum and the Pulitzer intended to further form their appearances as social institutions.


100 Silverman, The Social Work of Museums, 121.
CHAPTER 3

FORMING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT IN THE WORKS OF ANN HAMILTON AND SUZANNE LACY

A History of Contemporary Art Engagement

The active participation of the viewer has been a prominent feature of a large number of contemporary artworks, following the methods of Allan Kaprow’s happenings and performance art of the 1970s that sought to assimilate art into the routines of everyday life. Encouraging audience participation became a means to a democratic approach to art, seeking to break down barriers between the work of art and the viewer that the art institution reinforced through its traditional practices rooted in the nineteenth century. Art institutions’ efforts to expand their image from that of a temple to that of a laboratory have led to growing support for the participatory art genre and the commissioning of projects that engage a broad audience.

In the article “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” Claire Bishop notes the museum’s shift to service-based collaborations with the artist by implementing the practices of relational aesthetics—a term coined by Nicholas Bourriaud that defines artistic encounters that seek to create “microtopias,” or situations that promote positive relationships and construct communities.¹ The intended product of such relational art is precisely what the museum strives to accomplish through collaborations with artists—an attempt to break down the “distinction between institutional and social space,” as discussed by Bishop in regards to Rirkrit Tiravanija’s work.² In his 1992 work *Untitled*

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¹ Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* 110 (Fall, 2004): 52.
² Ibid., 56.
(Still) at the 303 Gallery in New York, Tiravanija relocated objects found in the gallery’s office space and storage room into the exhibition space, while he set up a temporary kitchen in the storage room, where he cooked curry for gallery visitors, challenging the gallery’s function (figure 11). Although Tiravanija confronted institutional space, Bishop did not feel that this project demonstrated the antagonism that she finds necessary largely because most of the individuals that visited the installation were artists, curators, and other museum-going individuals. Tiravanija’s works are currently accepted widely into the walls of various art museums. Bishop argues that antagonism must be introduced within a work to create an opportunity for actual democracy. Art institutions, despite their efforts to become democratic establishments, have primarily provided support for art projects that can provide an image of positive relationships between art museums and community members, which is produced by inviting artists such as Tiravanija.

Relationships are central components in both Lacy and Hamilton’s work, as recognized by both the Brooklyn Museum and the Pulitzer. While relationships are significant for both artists, the types of relationships and the audience roles ascribed in their formations differ considerably. Through her multi-media installations, Hamilton produces fully-body sensorial experiences that respond to sites and their histories. Hamilton researches sites as a part of her process to create the work, using the history of the location to drive her work. Forms of language play large roles in her installations to reference a place and its past. Both written and audible language is prevalent in her installations through reading, speaking, and listening, but often the written and spoken forms of language are unintelligible. Hamilton develops relationships in her work by

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3 Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” 56.
focusing on the individual experience of the viewer with these forms of language in intimate spaces. By implementing interactive and reactionary elements that respond to the viewer’s movement, touch, or voice, Hamilton attempts to shift the perceptual experience of the viewer and create a dialogue between the viewer and the space of the installation by focusing on acts of speech. These elements construct an immersive, and, at times, uncomfortable and challenging environment for the individual viewer. Various sounds often fill the spaces of her installations, along with large collections of small objects. One example is her installation *myein*, created for the 1999 Venice Biennale. Over the course of five months, Hamilton evoked aspects of the United States’ “invisible or unspoken” history by making incomprehensible the texts of Abraham Lincoln’s second Inaugural Address and selections from Charles Reznikoff’s *Testimony: The United States*, a poem outlining a “record of human suffering and injustice.” Lincoln’s address was projected aurally in phonetic code and Reznikoff’s text was written on the walls in Braille in the rooms of the United States pavilion. The text was indecipherable for most visitors unless they made concerted efforts to take note of the phonetic code or knew how to read Braille. Bright fuchsia powder filled the room, covering the walls and accumulating on the floor over the period of the installation (figure 12). Written and spoken language, along with the color from the powder, enveloped and overwhelmed the space of the viewer.

While Hamilton produces immersive and interactive environments for the viewer through a combination of materials and language, Lacy forms her works instead by

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gathering people to engage in conversation. As a socially engaged artist, Lacy is dependent on the relationships formed through public conversations between participants. In her text *Mapping the Terrain*, Lacy coins the term “new genre public art” to describe art that “uses both traditional and nontraditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives.” In regards to the outcomes of such projects, Lacy notes that the “inclusion of the public connects theories of art to the broader population: what exists in the space between the words public and art is an unknown relationship between artist and audience, a relationship that may itself become the artwork.” In new genre public art, the relationship can often take the place of the art object. Like Hamilton’s installations, Lacy’s works are specific to their sites, requiring extensive periods of time, research, and planning, with respect to the location and its residents. Lacy’s research and planning manifests into events that challenge “fixed identities and perceptions of difference.” Often focusing on feminist issues, Lacy’s works seek to engage communities in dialogue, resulting in conversations that may be challenging to both active and inactive participants, or audience members. While Lacy’s early performance work from the 1970s was more antagonistic, her current work continues to confront issues head on, while giving voices to those otherwise unheard through dialogues that focus on the individual needs of the participant. Her early

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7 Ibid., 20.

8 Ibid., 35.

9 Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 84.
work *Three Weeks in May* (1977) assertively confronted the public about rape through a series of events, including interventions in the streets. She marked sidewalks in red lettering announcing that a woman had been raped nearby (figure 13) and a one night installation performance that included accounts of sexual violence pasted on the walls while the carcass of a lamb with white feathers was suspended from the ceiling (figure 14). While this work allowed women to insert their stories into public discourse, in her later works, such as *Storying Rape* (2012), she has taken a more subtle approach. *Storying Rape* was a performance at the Los Angeles City Hall that involved nine community leaders in conversations around the “current state of rape narratives and the opportunities for persuasion that may be found in alternative narratives (figure 15).”

The nine participants gathered around a small table and conversed while fifteen reporters observed and relayed the dialogue to the public through various social media platforms.

Both artists require the active engagement of the participant, and because of the participatory and collective aspects of each of their works, the Brooklyn Museum and the Pulitzer have used these artists as what Grant Kester labels “social service providers.”

In *Conversation Pieces*, Grant Kester examines the institutional goals in working with a community artist: the artist is thought to be able to identify more with a marginalized community and, through this means, bridge cultural and social gaps between the institution and these groups. The problem with the institutional goals of community engagement falling onto the shoulders of these artists is that the artist is not always

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10 http://www.suzannelacy.com/recent-works/#/storying-rape/


12 Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 140.
capable of achieving such goals, nor may he or she wish to engage with the specific communities envisioned by the institutions. Hamilton has never sought to act as a “social service provider;” unlike Lacy, she does not define herself as a socially engaged artist. Moreover even Lacy’s work is social practice, not social work. While Lacy aims to strengthen relationships between different groups, aesthetic and performative choices still play a significant role in her work, which sets her apart from social workers that solely provide services. Lacy also creates moments of tension by bringing together participants with differing viewpoints in order to produce ultimately positive relationships. The 1997 performance Code 33 prompted conversations between Oakland teenagers and officers from the Oakland Police Department about crime, tensions, and stereotypes that both groups held about one another. The performance sought to bring positive change in the relationship between the two groups through dialogue, workshops, and training sessions.

In Social Works, Shannon Jackson acknowledges the difficulty in formulating a single definition for social practice, or socially engaged art. In its most basic definition, social practice is the combination of aesthetics and politics. While this definition will be applied in my discussion, Jackson cites other characteristics that will also be useful, including social practice’s durational, collective, and performative, multi-media qualities. It also becomes fundamental to explore how social practice can “provoke reflection on the contingent systems that support the management of life.” Beginning with her work in the 1970s, Lacy challenges her participants and audience members to

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13 Jackson, Social Works, 13.
14 Jackson, Social Works, 14.
15 Ibid., 29.
question existing power relations and structures by disrupting everyday routines with aesthetic, political performances.

In the 1970s, Lacy’s performance-based collaborations acted as commentaries on the violence against women. Greatly influenced by Allan Kaprow, Lacy began to insert artistic practices into everyday life by exploring the identity and conditions of women’s lives: their communities, their roles, and experiences within the public sphere.16 Similar to other artists of the 1970s, including Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, and Marina Abramovic, Lacy used her body aggressively to expose violent acts perpetuated against women, including such gestures as throwing herself against and smearing organs and blood on walls. In her 1975 piece One Woman Shows at the Grandview Gallery in Los Angeles, Lacy facilitated a performance in which she acted as three different women: “the woman who is raped,” “the woman who is a whore,” and “the woman who loves women.”17 She paired each woman with an action that she performed, including “reading the day’s rape reports from the Los Angeles Police Department; drawing blood from her arm and injecting it with a grapefruit that she imprinted on the wall; and slamming her clothed body, soaked in black paint, into the white gallery wall” (figure 16).18 One Woman Shows, along with her other works at this time, took place away from the space of mainstream art institutions. Many of Lacy’s practices, like those of other feminist artists in the 1970s, including Judy Chicago, were situated in the Woman’s Building in

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17 Sharon Irish, Suzanne Lacy: Spaces Between (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 47.

18 Irish, Suzanne Lacy, 48.
Los Angeles. The Woman’s Building was established in 1973 and acted as a space for feminist art practices that protested “major museums for their exclusion of women artists.”¹⁹ Lacy and other feminist artists rejected the support of the art institution and located their practices in alternative gallery spaces and into the public sphere.

As her work progressed, Lacy’s art expanded to a larger and more public platform, including *In Mourning and In Rage* (1977)—a work that responded to the Hillside Strangler murders of ten women in Los Angeles. Lacy collaborated with other women, including Leslie Labowitz, to address the media’s sensationalizing of the deaths of the women.²⁰ During this time, feminist artists were at the forefront in reaching a large audience and transforming it through performance.²¹ Ten women, shrouded in black and red robes and transported by hearse to reflect the dramatization of the media, performed on the steps of L.A.’s City Hall (figure 17). Sixty women from the Woman’s Building, City Council, and the Rape Hotline Alliance followed in a motorcade behind the hearse. Identifying with not only those raped and murdered in L.A., but also those that endured the same fates throughout the country, the performers declared, “I am here for the rage of all women, I am here for women fighting back!”, while the women from the motorcade replied “In memory of our sisters, we fight back!”²² The media covered the event, thus calling the public to action, whether they wanted to hear their political message or not. In addition, her collaborators, including the Los Angeles Commission Against Assaults on

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¹⁹ http://www.womansbuilding.org/history.htm.


²² Lacy, *Leaving Art*, 69, 70.
Women, made demands for free and accessible self-defense classes, which were met through an allocation of the reward money held for the individual who would turn in the strangler. Nonetheless, in other social practices, the effectiveness of shifting the audience’s attitudes was hard to assess.\textsuperscript{23} In this performance, Lacy hoped to demonstrate how “artists can play an active role in the politics of social change,” while aiming to inspire the general public.\textsuperscript{24}

Lacy began a method of dialogue in \textit{In Mourning and In Rage} that would continue throughout her career, creating communicative acts that engaged a broad audience. In the 1980s, Lacy delved more into erasing boundaries between art and life.\textsuperscript{25} Lacy’s works gradually called for an even larger scale and time commitment as she used performance as a “platform for temporary community” and “essential human discourse.”\textsuperscript{26} Lacy began to immerse herself into these performances by collaborating with residents from specific sites to form relationships. Her involvement with specific communities allowed her to intervene socially through dialogic performances that sought to challenge active participants’ (performers’) and inactive participants’ (audience members’) preconceived notions and hierarchies.

Indicative of Lacy’s artistic practices from the 1980s into the present is her work \textit{Whisper, the Waves, the Wind} (1984). As her work evolved, Lacy began to use performance as a means to form relationships with a specific community—in this case,

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\item Lacy, \textit{Leaving Art}, 69, 70.
\item Ibid.
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older women from the San Diego Community. Beginning in 1983, Lacy collaborated with multiple arts organizations and the Older Women’s League in San Diego. Initially inspired by the aesthetic image of older women dressed in white, sitting together on the beach, Lacy’s work soon “grew to take on social and political ramifications—older women’s cultural invisibility, the potential loss of dignity and respect we face as we age, and the resources that this society shuts off in its flight from death.”

After months of discussions with fifteen older women from a retirement committee in La Jolla, Lacy recruited women over the age of 65 to perform by attending meetings and discussion sessions that Lacy states “were held to articulate the performers’ perceptions and to communicate to the non-senior community the needs and concerns of older women.”

The planning and private discussions that took place away from the public constitute an essential component of the artwork and are considered by Lacy as important as the public performance.

After a year of planning, 160 women (from multiple socio-economic backgrounds) performed within two coves on the beach, filled with tables covered in white tablecloths (figure 18). Standing on top of cliffs, hundreds of audience members looked out onto the event. Before the women came out, a fifteen-minute recording played multiple conversations at once, along with a variety of sounds, including waves, laughter, and singing, making it difficult for the audience to understand the dialogue. The playing of sounds continued as the women, once gathered at their tables, began to

27 Lacy, Leaving Art, 154.

converse. The conversations were inaudible to the audience members, although some gathered around the speakers confusing the audio recording with the words uttered by the performers. After an hour, the audience members were invited to join the conversations on the beach. They were responsible for initiating the dialogue with the participants. *Whisper, the Waves, the Wind* created a more convivial experience to foster relationships between participants and audience members. The conversations revolved around questions such as “What do you want to do with your life? How do you feel about the physical process of aging? What has age taught you about dying?” These questions drew on experiences that each female performer confronted because of her age. These shared concerns helped participants empathize with one another.

In the 1990s, Lacy continued to make democratic works that echo the approach called for in Claire Bishop’s 2004 article on the need for antagonism in participatory art. Lacy’s performances of the 1990s often contained a degree of opposition between participants to challenge stereotypes and potentially construct empathetic and respectful relationships. Through these performances, Lacy delved deeper into social practice. She began to create works, which related more closely to specific socio-political conditions faced by Oakland communities. Commenting on her deeper engagement in the 1990s, Lacy explained a shift in her focus:

> I ‘left’ art in a sense, spending more of my time engaged directly with local communities, rather than exhibiting in museums and galleries. I recorded this work via televised newscasts and documentaries and through widely attended performances, lectures, and other presentations. Living in Oakland, an extraordinarily racially diverse city, I worked with youth,

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29 Arnold, “Suzanne Lacy’s ‘Whisper, the Waves, the Wind,’” 128.

30 Jackson, *Social Works*. 
artists, and activists on ten-year series of projects within education, criminal justice, health, and local governance, an endeavor that taught me much about the alignment of political forces around/against race and class.  

From 1998-1999, Lacy produced one of her most seminal works, *Code 33*, a collaboration with artists Julio Morales and Unique Holland, and with Oakland teenagers and the Oakland Police Department. *Code 33* was successful in forming constructive relationships between these contrasting groups by facilitating workshops, conversations, and a public performance on October 7, 1999. It also aimed to create debate in the public sphere on “youth interaction with police, including police brutality; the need to youth mentorships and safe entertainment; the criminalization of youth; and the role of youth in community life,” while encouraging a change in the “way individual police and the Oakland Police Department relate to young people.”  

On the day of the performance, thirty small groups composed of 250 individuals, combining Oakland teenagers and police officers, engaged in tense dialogue on the top of a parking garage (figure 19). Both the teenagers and the police members raised questions for debate: “Why do police talk to young adults disrespectfully?” “Why don’t the police believe us?” “Why do young people lack respect for police?” “How can the police better help youth in Oakland?” “Why do you think we became cops anyway?” A thousand audience members and several representatives of mass media moved between the groups. 

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of performers in dialogue—some laughing and smiling, others showing signs of anger and suspicion.\textsuperscript{34} The dialogues were interrupted after an hour and a half by a dance performance that encouraged residents to reflect on the conflicts between the police and the youth in their neighborhoods. After the event, Lacy collected participant evaluations in order to assess the impacts of the conversations. Based on them, one could note a shift in perception from both the police and teenagers involved.\textsuperscript{35} The change in perception resulted not only because of the performance, but also thanks to the years of dialogue set up through art workshops, leadership team meetings, and presentations.\textsuperscript{36} Lacy remarked that, after the performance, “there was widespread social pressure to provide better education, more safety, and more positive opportunities for young people.” Shortly after the Oakland Police created a Chief’s Youth Advisory Team.\textsuperscript{37} While I am sure that Lacy’s performance did not erase tensions completely, the performance created an opportunity to promote relationships of mutual respect between participants.

Ann Hamilton’s works and the relationships they usually produce differ significantly in both subject matter and execution from Lacy’s projects. Her works oscillate between installation and performance, with a substantial focus on the body and language through a variety of materials that catalyze viewers’ sensorial engagement.\textsuperscript{38} The ear and the mouth, as transmitters and receptors of language, play integral roles in

\textsuperscript{34} Roth, “Making and Performing ‘Code 33’,” 53.

\textsuperscript{35} Lacy, \textit{Leaving Art}, 279.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 277.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 282.

\textsuperscript{38} Wallach, “A Conversation with Ann Hamilton in Ohio,” 53.
Hamilton’s works. The acts of speaking and listening call for active engagement in her installations. The viewer is often expected to insert her voice into the space of her works. By contrast with Lacy’s projects, Hamilton’s works do not specifically call for an actual discursive act between exhibition visitors. Rather the sound of the viewer’s voice can contribute to a collective sound by becoming integrated into a collective acoustic landscape triggered by the installation. Hamilton’s installations usually include a variety of sounds, whether they are produced from an action performed through interaction with a material or through sound recordings. With a background in both fibers and sculpture, Hamilton creates installations that transform spaces not only through sound, but also with her use of large amounts of household objects and fabrics, often manipulated through manual work, such as folding or knotting. With a strong interest in the history of textiles, Hamilton uses fabric as a means to make reference to forgotten and ignored histories of labor within specific places.  

Using a combination of these elements, Hamilton constructs experiences that draw attention to existing relationships between differing elements by creating and challenging the individuals to reflect on their relationship with language through interaction with sounds and materials. The multitude of supplies used and the inclusion of sound are evident in her earlier works, including *privation and excesses* (1989) at Capp Street Project in San Francisco. *Privation and excesses* was created in response to the Mission District of San Francisco—the location of the Capp Street Project. Similar to many of her works, this project responds to a specific site. Unlike Lacy, who creates

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works that respond socially to a specific group or community, Hamilton occasionally creates her installations based on a personal interaction with the aesthetic qualities and the history of a place. This often results in a site-specific connection that may not be easily decodable at first sight. Pennies became the subject matter of her work in San Francisco, as she reflected on her experiences with the homeless on the street and the guilt she felt from having only pennies when they requested money.\textsuperscript{40} In this installation, Hamilton covered the floor of the space with 750,000 hand-laid pennies in a layer of honey (figure 20). The repetitive quality of manual work is present in many of Hamilton’s works, which often reference the history of the working class, and the collective process through which Hamilton created the environment with the help from volunteers.\textsuperscript{41} Hamilton is interested in exploring “the relationship that binds the individual to the group.”\textsuperscript{42} Individual parts come together—sounds, objects, and labor—to produce a sensorial and communal experience for the viewer.

Included in privation and excesses was an attendant who sat in a chair at the back of the space, wringing her hands in a hat of honey (figure 21). Attendants were an integral part of Hamilton’s work throughout the 1990s, blurring the boundaries between installation and performance. Thus, she meant to acknowledge and value the manual labor that was required to complete the project.\textsuperscript{43} Behind the female attendant, a pen of


\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
sheep and two machines—one that ground pennies, and the other, teeth—filled the backspace of the gallery (figure 22). The grating sound of the teeth and pennies being pulverized contrasted with the sloshing sounds from the hands repeatedly moving through the honey. The contrasting elements of copper pennies and honey generated “a disturbing, provocative experience” for the installation visitors. Through these means, Hamilton intended to “evoke the end of innocence,” which, in her words is equivalent to a disenchantment that occurs once a child realizes that pennies are not valuable, but rather an annoyance, and once animals, previously seen as sacred, become products of consumption.

 Privation and Excesses was Hamilton’s more personal response to a space, but her 1991 project indigo blue, a commissioned installation created for “Places with a Past: New Site-Specific Art at Charleston’s Spoleto Festival,” reflected the history of the place. Comparable to the selection of site in Lacy’s socially engaged works, the location of the project determined Hamilton’s materials and context for the installation. Exploring the history of Charleston’s working class, Hamilton studied the local production of indigo that began in 1744. She also investigated the symbolic correlations between this material

43 Mary Jane Jacob, Places with a Past: New Site-Specific Art at Charleston’s Spoleto Festival, 70.


47 Jacob, Places with a Past, 74.
and the color for blue-collar worker clothes. Hamilton responded to the history of Charleston to create a truly site-specific work: “I became interested in the social history of blue, in terms of how it was used in and represented in different class situations.” Hamilton used an old auto garage to draw attention to the divisions between the working class and the upper class in Charleston. She filled the garage with 14,000 pounds of individually folded blue uniforms on a hovering platform (figure 23). As the viewer walked around the heap of clothing, an attendant sitting at a table became visible. The performer meticulously erased words from history books by spitting on an eraser with her saliva, thus signaling the relationship between the body and language (figure 24). For Hamilton, this laborious action hinted at the omission from historical narratives of individuals who would wear such uniforms and their contributions to society, whereas the shirts acknowledged their roles. The erasing of the text also attempted to change the viewer’s perception of language. By no longer being able to read the text, the viewer to rely on other forms of sensorial perception like touch and smell to gather information, especially the sense of smell. Bags filled with soybeans on the upper level of the garage added a pungent, disconcerting smell, overwhelming the senses of the viewer—an experience she acknowledges could not be created in a museum.

48 Jacob, Places with a Past, 74.
50 Jacob, Places with a Past, 75.
51 Coffey, “Histories That Haunt,” 15.
While many of her works, including *indigo blue*, take place within a public space, it is necessary to take a look at her work inside the spaces of galleries and museums. Her installation *corpus* (2003-2004) at MASSMoCA takes elements from her previous work, such as sound and large quantities of textiles, to transform the expansive main space of the gallery. Over ten-months, Hamilton used machines to lift and release millions of sheets of translucent, blank paper on the floor of the gallery to demonstrate “the possibility of speaking or writing.” 53 Red organza covered the 3,500 windowpanes of the gallery, converting the white walls of the space into pink hues that changed with the light of day (figure 25). 54 Twenty-four speakers descended and rose again while the paper fell from the ceiling. A voice was emitted from each speaker, generating a murmuring sound. The visitor activated the installation further when shuffling through the space and catching paper as it fell to the ground. 55 This large space acted as a site of exploration where kinetic bodily engagement had an extremely active role charting the components of the work. Adjacent to this space was a small dark room that acted as a “transitional corridor” with spinning speakers that filled the space with voices, creating a “claustrophobic and threatening” atmosphere. 56 The experience ended with a balcony that overlooked the large gallery space where viewers could sit and observe others’


experiences, as fragmented text was projected. Light and sound were accentuated throughout the piece—two elements that are easily overlooked by museum visitors. Hamilton embraces these components as a method to highlight the architectural form of the site and to treat the museum space as one of contemplation and transformation for the viewer.

The formation of relationships in the works of both Hamilton and Lacy is largely contingent on individual elements coming together to produce a collective experience. In Lacy’s practice, individuals come together to engage in dialogue over a shared problem despite differences. The dialogical experience in her works is often challenging for the participants just as the multi-sensorial environments created by Hamilton are for the museum visitors. Sounds, objects, and actions, like manual labor, combine to create an immersive environment in Hamilton’s installations. Both artists rely on the individual’s participation to develop relationships. Through her works, Hamilton attempts to form a relationship between the body of the visitor and the space of the installation based on more or less disorienting language forms or sensorial stimuli that encourage visitors to construct the meaning of the work through meaningful and creative correlations. Lacy endeavors to generate relationships of mutual respect and understanding by engaging participants in conversations that confront stereotypes and preexisting perceptions. Both Lacy and Hamilton demonstrate an ability to create collective experiences, but the means through which they achieve this are quite different. Despite these distinctions between their practices, both artists were partnered with to produce collective experiences that provide evidence of art museums’ commitment to broadening local audiences and strengthening collaborations with neighboring communities.
Relationships in *stylus* and *Between the Door and the Street*

The collective dimension of Hamilton and Lacy’s practices was appealing to the art institutions due to their desire to enhance relationships with local communities. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Pulitzer and Brooklyn Museum benefit from the relationships that are formed by these artists and seek to identify with their surrounding communities to remain socially relevant. The Pulitzer commissioned Hamilton to create a work that would produce connections between the space of the museum and its surrounding neighborhoods. When Matthias Waschek began his conversations with Hamilton about the upcoming commission of *stylus*, he received poems from Hamilton over e-mail that outlined *stylus*’s themes. One example is a poem sent to Waschek that almost reads as an artist statement:

> Just as the Pulitzer building
> is a singular structure in a larger neighborhood in a city…the materials
> of the project engage a relationship
> between the individual and the group
> between a solitary and a collective body
> between a single voice and a chorus
> between a silent book and a spoken reading between a solitary listening and
> a collective hearing

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The collective aspects of the installation were essential for forming potential relationships within *stylus*, but the engagement resulting from the installation was self-contained. The Pulitzer wanted Hamilton’s project to be an opportunity for communicative exchanges with a large, diverse audience. The interactive elements of the installation (pen on paper, microphone, records, and piano sounds) instead required individual engagement in order

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57 Hamilton e-mail to Waschek, *stylus*, 28.
to leave one’s imprint onto the collective acoustic landscape. Hamilton references “a single voice and a chorus,” which is quite literal in this work. The viewer’s individual voice, or touch that provokes sound, intermingles with the sound recordings that play throughout the installation or the sounds from other visitors. When discussing the singular aspects of indigo blue, she recognizes what the individual and the collective relationship mean by stating, “I want to be part of a collective body and I want to hold myself completely outside of it”—essentially an individual experience. Hamilton is interested in the communal experience of voices joining one another, but also separates the individual from the group by providing interactive, individual experiences. The viewer’s interaction with an object in a gallery, such as playing the piano or speaking into the microphone may have added an element to the collective sound throughout the space, but most facets of the installation required individual action and did not necessarily result in collective forms of interaction between other viewers. Instead stylus created disjointed forms of engagement that stimulated the senses. One critic noted the lack of connection between the viewer and the installation, stating that stylus “testifies not so much to the inevitability of human communication, but to its precariousness.” The sounds throughout stylus accumulate in acoustic layers, resulting in forms of language that are difficult to understand. The language in stylus becomes less about a message and more about the acts of communication—speaking, reading, and listening. In stylus, these acts require the individual to personally communicate with the space of the Pulitzer.


Hamilton aimed to create an intimate relationship between the viewer and the museum space.

To effectively create a relationship between the Pulitzer and the Old North neighborhood, as the Pulitzer had intended, Hamilton would have had to produce a more site-specific installation, which would have responded to the history, politics, or social concerns of specific communities in St. Louis, as outlined by Miwon Kwon in her book regarding site-specificity. Instead Hamilton exclusively responded to the Pulitzer building and her first impressions of St. Louis to generate an intimate setting. Responding to Tadao Ando’s architecture, Hamilton became concerned with how the space changed with the variations in the intensity of natural light throughout the day. She explored similar interests in her work corpus at MASS MoCA that used light and pink organza to transform the space. In stylus, she sought to extend viewers’ corporeal presence in the museum space through tactile and acoustic input. Forms of contact, such as the hand and pencil, became central themes in this installation. The hand also became an important motif as it represented Hamilton’s first impression of St. Louis—a hand “‘raised and moving to signal departure or welcome, recognition or attention—a greeting expressive at a distance, greater than the reach of the voice calling or the ear reaching to hear.’” Concerned with modes of communication, Hamilton uses the hand’s touch as an intimate form of communicating, one that demonstrates a proximal, tactile relationship

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60 Miwon Kwon, One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2, 30.

61 Hamilton, stylus, 73.

that neither the ear nor voice can offer. The hand is often used to provoke sounds throughout *stylus* as an alternate form of communication to speech.

Approaching the Pulitzer building, the visitor encountered sounds that were amplified into the surrounding neighborhood, specifically Washington Boulevard of Grand Center, in an attempt to connect the installation inside the building to the space outside. Hamilton selected sounds, such as vocal recordings and messages called in by local residents, as well as music, to be emitted from five bell speakers that were mounted to the roof of the Pulitzer as a means for the building to “become a cavity for speaking and listening…to link the interior and the exterior (figure 26).” On the Pulitzer’s blog, it is noted that the bell speakers once belonged in church bell towers—“so this won’t be the first time they’ve been used to beckon a community.” Unfortunately, instead of acting as a call of welcoming and an encouragement for local residents to leave an acoustic message that would then be disseminated from the rooftop, this public call for engagement had in some instances the opposite effect. Many nearby residents became frustrated and annoyed with the constancy and the volume of the voices and sounds.

Once the visitor entered the Pulitzer building, he or she was invited to sign his or her name on a tablet with a pen. The pressure the visitor applied on the pad triggered a Disklavier piano to play from the small gallery on the other side of the building. Upon entering the main gallery, the visitor could speak into a microphone that would transform her voice into piano music. A tilting table contained two steel balls for the viewer’s

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63 Hamilton’s e-mail to Waschek, *stylus*, 72.

64 Amy Broadway, “The Bell Speakers.”

65 Interview with Lisa Harper Chang.
activation through movement and play. The steel balls’ movement and collisions were amplified through speakers near Ellsworth Kelly’s *Blue Black*, a painting from the permanent collection that essentially became a part of *stylus* since it hangs above the main staircase of the Pulitzer. The display also included shelves of books and records that were borrowed from the St. Louis Board of Education and the St. Louis Public Library. Newspapers were also set up for the visitors’ interaction (figure 27). Two record players, one on the main level and another on the level below, were set up to play a selection of bird calls, sound effects, and vocal recordings. The viewer was invited to read the books and newspapers aloud. These elements were arranged by Hamilton so that the viewer’s interactions would “punctuate, interrupt, and animate the composition” of *stylus*.66

On the same table of the main gallery’s record player, there laid a stack of concordances silkscreened by a St. Louis printing company (figure 28). Hamilton created the concordances by using keywords from local, national, and international English newspapers and crossed them with keywords from *stylus* and other events. A vertical column ran down the length of the newspaper with themes from *stylus* in its first issue: BEING, BODY, CALL, CHORUS, HAND, HEARING, LIGHT, LISTEN, MOUTH, SENSE, SPEAKING, TIME, TOUCH, VOICE, WORD, WORLD.67 Hamilton listed another edition in which she used words regarding the region of St. Louis and the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers: FLOAT, FLOW, FLOOD, FREEDOM.68 These main

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67 Copy of concordance, vol. 1, Friday, July 30, 2010.
words intersected with lines from various newspapers to create a disjointed assemblage of phrases and current events. The fragmented language of the concordances echoed the sound recordings that played through the installation. The installation saturated the viewer with incoherent forms of language to shift the perceptual experience from one primarily focused on drawing specific meaning from communicative forms.

On the main gallery wall and column, Hamilton created a video of a papier-mâché hand with a black and white striped sleeve waving and sweeping across the wall. The same video was projected on the sidewall, creating a mirroring effect, which would at times line up to join the hands in a clap (figure 29). For Hamilton, the alignment of the two hands meeting symbolized the reciprocity of the project, evoking call and response patterns. These papier-mâché hands appear again as three-dimensional moldings along shelves that filled the center wall of the gallery to the windows of the water court (figure 30). The hands were used as gloves as Pulitzer employees encouraged visitors to try on the hands and rearrange them on the shelves. Along with the recordings throughout the installation, the hands became an instrument to literally envelop the body of the viewer.

Large ladders were placed throughout the main gallery to “suggest both a speaking platform and the labor of repair.” On top of the ladders were mechanisms that slowly spun projected images in a circle. The three projectors moved at varying speeds and in different directions to show various forms of contact, including paper and pencil

68 Hamilton, *stylus*, 75.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid., 76.

71 Hamilton, *stylus*, 76.
and two hands.\textsuperscript{72} Within the footage, images of current newspaper issues appeared, as well as photographs from the St. Louis Public Schools Archive. Despite these attempts to create connections with the St. Louis community, these photographs could easily be replaced with another school district’s photographs or recreated within another site. Most of the elements of the installation, including the pianos, record players, and papier-mâché hands could easily be integrated in a display context located in another city; however, by incorporating small elements from the St. Louis area, like photographs and newspapers, Hamilton triggered an emotional connection between the viewer and the installation.

Visitors were invited to play a second Disklavier piano in the small upper gallery that would produce a variety of sounds. As the sounds from both pianos resonated back and forth throughout the Pulitzer, additional recordings arose from the floor vents in the main gallery. These recordings were created in collaboration with sound designer Shahrokh Yadegari through a computer program he had previously developed entitled Lila. Yadegari taped a singing mockingbird and played it back to the bird. The mockingbird ultimately tried to overpower the recording of its own voice, resulting in a program that created repetitious, looping variations off of one’s voice.\textsuperscript{73} This program generated call and response patterns throughout the installation as the sound was reciprocated. The sounds entered into dialogue with another, as well as with the other elements of the installation. The constant sound that played from this program was the voice of soprano Elizabeth Zharoff from the Opera Theatre of St. Louis as she sang and then responded to the playback. The combination of these looped recordings, visitors’

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{73} Matthias Waschek, \textit{stylus}, 22.
voices, and piano sounds with the projected images of hands created a “deeply unsettling” experience for some viewers as it overwhelmed their senses. The various noises intermingling with one another resulted in unnerving, ghost-like sounds. The unintelligibility of these speech acts contributed to this effect, altering the perceptual experience of the viewer as he or she became more aware of language as sound rather than as content.

One of the most important elements of *stylus* for Hamilton was the table of Mexican jumping beans set up in the window-lined mezzanine of the Pulitzer (figure 31). The table has played an important role in many of Hamilton’s other projects, including *indigo blue*. Hamilton’s use of the table implies a “social exchange”: “it always implies a social space. It’s a place of work, a place of solitary study, or exchange; it’s where you eat, where everything happens.” As the room filled with light, the tiny pods would begin to warm and gently bounce on the tabletop. The sound of the movement was amplified into the main gallery by two microphones. Underneath the table hung taxidermy birds, creating a strong contrast between the “‘call’ of the surface swarming above” and the “muteness beneath.” The connection between sound and silence is also evoked in the image of the clapping figure. Despite the action that the viewer knows produces sound, the image claps in silence. Hamilton calls attention to the dependent relationship between the two—there can be no sound without silence.

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76 Hamilton, *stylus*, 78.
Yadegari collaborated with sopranos Christine Brewer and Elizabeth Zharoff from the Opera Theatre of St. Louis and Hamilton to create a performance called *Intervals*. Hamilton ascended one of a series of ladders placed in the main gallery during *stylus* as the audience sat below rows of folding chairs (figure 32). Using Lila, the singers’ live voices looped to create a “call and response,” while students from Washington University and Hamilton (Hamilton spoke into a microphone) read words arranged poetically from recent newspapers. The collective action of speaking together is one that Hamilton seeks as a means for enhancing the emotional connection associated with collective public expression, since there are not many places for collectively speaking together. Through these acts, Hamilton created a ritualistic and sacred space that suggested a church experience, as people came together to speak in a communal manner. While most of Hamilton’s installation provoked a sense of playfulness through its interactivity, *Intervals* fulfilled the Pulitzer’s other role as sanctuary.

In the conclusion of her description of *stylus*, Hamilton describes the project as “a building, a condition, an engagement, and a possibility of gathering together.” The *stylus* finale created such a gathering as the project concluded. Hamilton read concordance texts in response to Kelly’s *Blue Black*. The finale concluded with a “Chorus of Waving Hands,” by Hamilton requesting visitors to put on the papier-mâché

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79 Hamilton, *stylus*, 78.
hands from the installation and silently wave together to symbolize Hamilton’s initial impression of St. Louis—hands waving welcome. DJs that had performed through sound waves played music and refreshments were offered. The two appearances by Hamilton in the performance *Intervals* and the finale created a false sense of her involvement in the community programming put forth by the Pulitzer. In the programming that resulted from *stylus*, it was often difficult to discern whether or not Hamilton was involved in the process. One such example is that on first impression, the Urban Wave team that pasted posters throughout Old North seemed to be deeply involved with Hamilton in the project. A discussion with Lisa Harper Chang revealed that Hamilton’s role was actually fairly minimal, as was her role in the other programming that was conceived from *stylus*.\(^{80}\) This is not to say that Hamilton was creating this impression, but the Pulitzer relied on the presence of the artist to solidify the social work it had done. Demonstrated in these performances, Hamilton’s presence became a commodity for the Pulitzer as it demonstrated the actions the museum was taking to respond to the needs of its communities by commissioning a site-specific artwork.

Symptomatic of socially engaged art practices, the presence of the artist was also required throughout the implementation of Lacy’s *Between the Door and the Street*. Lacy teamed up with the Sackler Center at the Brooklyn Museum and Creative Time to create a stage for “conversations about the role of gender in activism.”\(^{81}\) With nearly four hundred participants, mostly women and a few men, Lacy sought to create a platform that would provide participants with the opportunity to voice their concerns about gender

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\(^{80}\) Interview with Lisa Harper Chang.

issues—how they have affected their personal experiences or how they tie in with other significant social issues such as family, employment, race, immigration, and domestic violence. Nearly eighty organizations participated in the performance, including groups that were dedicated to anti-violence, LGBTQ, feminist, labor, immigration, and sex worker issues.  

Over six months, Lacy engaged in dialogue with stoop leaders, participant organizers, neighborhood organizations, and participants to conduct research and plan for the performance—a process that stressed “multivocality and inclusion,” as well as politics over aesthetics. Her research and planning process constituted a considerable amount of what Lacy considers to be the actual project. However, information about performance research and preparations was not made available to the public: “You don’t come in and say, ‘Here’s a project, I thought it up one night, do it.’ You sort of move into the community and figure out what people care about.” Lacy considers the site to be the community in which she is working—the artwork is “accrued over time through the interaction between the artist and the community.” Lacy’s research began with identifying a street in Brooklyn to hold the performance. Brooklyn was chosen by Lacy

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83 Lacy, Modern Painters, 51.


85 Kwon, One Place After Another, 95.
because of its diversity—as a “community with a lot of histories intersecting.” Creative Time played a significant role throughout the research and planning of *Between the Door and the Street*. As an organization that assists artists in creating public art that can engage a diverse audience and shift societal perceptions, Creative Time was able to accomplish the large-scale demands of the project. Per Lacy’s request, Creative Time began the planning process by sending interns out to canvas streets in Brooklyn that had stoops. After Creative Time presented Lacy with twenty possible streets, the decision was narrowed down to four streets in different neighborhoods, based on demographics and the convenience of having a block association (less of a struggle to gather permits for the performance). At this point, Lacy visited Brooklyn and ultimately chose Park Place in Prospect Heights, a neighborhood that has a large artist population and a strong sense of community because of the close proximity of the stoops with one another. Prospect Heights is also in close proximity to the Brooklyn Museum, yet not fully gentrified, with easy subway access from other locations.

Creative Time reached out to the Park Place block association and its president to begin a dialogue about the possibility of such a project. Meetings took place to explain the process and gauge feelings about it. The response to the project was positive since

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86 E-mail from Suzanne Lacy, June 23, 2014.


88 Phone conversation with Yisa Fermin from Creative Time on April 3, 2014. During the project Fermin was assistant to the project manager. She coordinated meetings with community board members and participant organizers. She researched possible advisory board members by looking for different feminist organizations in the New York area.

89 E-mail from Suzanne Lacy.
many Park Place residents are artists or have an appreciation for art. Creative Time introduced the project to individual Park Place residents and others within a four-block radius by knocking on doors and handing out fliers to explain the project. Dinner meet-and-greets took place with Lacy, curators, and residents in attendance, as a forum to voice any concerns or opinions on the project. Miwon Kwon notes the importance of involving residents in the decision-making and planning aspects of community-oriented art practices in order to ensure that the residents identify with the work and develop a sense of ownership over the project. This was clearly the case in Lacy’s *Between the Door and the Street*.\(^{90}\)

Both Creative Time and the Brooklyn Museum helped form an advisory board of nineteen women. These women were chosen because of their commitment to gender issues through their political, academic, or social involvement. The advisory board had weekly meetings with Creative Time and aided in compiling questions, as well as a list of possible organizations to approach for their possible participation in the performance. A lengthy list was given to the participant organizers to round up participants. These eight women reached out to about ten to twelve organizations each to find organizations that would be willing to perform. While Hamilton requested residents to leave messages on the bell speakers to lead viewers to the space of the Pulitzer to engage in communicative acts, Lacy relied on conversations to garner interest in the project from various groups. From the eighty organizations that participated, each had a stoop leader that rallied participants from her organization and lead the discussions. The stoop leaders also participated in multiple meetings with Lacy in which they would get to know one

\(^{90}\) Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 96.
another, discuss topics, go through details of the performance, and sample questions that Lacy had written. Although Lacy had provided sample questions, stoop leaders were asked to create their own questions that were then sent off to participant organizers and the advisory board for approval. Each stoop leader ended up with four to five questions to discuss on the day of the public performance that either dealt with issues related to their organization or more personal issues, such as stories of domestic violence.

Two rehearsals took place with the four hundred participants before the evening of October 19, 2013. At the actual performance, five to ten participants, easily spotted by the yellow scarves that each wore around her neck or shoulders, sat on the stoops and began to converse (figure 33). The stoop leader activated the participants’ engagement by posing the questions, while the audience members became participants through listening. Lacy wanted as diverse an audience as possible and knew that it would not just be Prospect Heights’ residents in attendance, but rather a larger Brooklyn population. Lacy also took the participants’ families and friends into account: “We also assumed that each group of women would bring their own audience of concerned friends and families so that the audience might be more diverse than the typical Creative Time audience.”

Approximately 2500 audience members walked through the street, some stopping near a stoop to listen to a specific conversation, while other audience participants conversed with one another (figure 34). The stoop participants’ conversations were not amplified—a decision made prior to the performance for financial reasons and because amplifying specific conversations would deem them more important than others. This decision

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91 E-mail from Lacy.
resulted in discussions that were difficult to hear for the audience members, but had a more personal, intimate character. Hamilton’s work, similarly, was difficult to hear, but that resulted instead from an overabundance of sounds being amplified through speakers at once. In Lacy’s project, an effort had to be made by the audience participants to become active listeners by leaning in to hear the conversation better. Much like the audience of her performance _Whisper, the Waves, the Wind_, the audience members became witnesses to an intimate act and were responsible for their engagement. Music was played and apple cider was served at the completion of the performance and the audience members were given the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the stoop performers (figure 35). The neighborhood block party at the end of the performance is something that Lacy prefers to do at the conclusion of her events as a chance to bring everyone together and celebrate, but the resulting conviviality does not negate the challenges and struggles of the process or the dialogue. Like Hamilton, Lacy challenges her participants through forms of communication that aim to shift the perceptual experience of the participant. While Hamilton confounds language to draw attention to the acts of communication, Lacy’s lack of amplification forces participants to work past these barriers to engage in a dialogic exchange.

Creative Time reported the overall performance as a positive experience based on participant and audience feedback. Some participants felt “emotionally overwhelmed,” as it provided individuals with a forum to talk about these issues with family, friends, and

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92 Phone conversation with Yisa Fermin.

93 Phone Conversation with Yisa Fermin.
While the performance resulted in a positive experience, Lacy challenged her participants, both on the stoop and in the audience. The requirement for diversity in religion, class, and race led to conflicting and contrasting groups sharing a platform to discuss their opinions and challenges. Throughout the months of planning, these groups had the opportunity to enter into dialogue with one another and, potentially, form relationships.

Hamilton and Lacy require contrasting levels of participation from their viewers. Hamilton requires her viewers to respond to the site by activating the space through voice and sound in her installations. Lacy calls on her participants to engage in dialogue around social issues in public spaces. Both artists require the presence of individuals to complete the works, but the differing levels of participation required result in varying forms of relationships. A comparison of Hamilton and Lacy’s works demonstrates a strong disparity between the two as their methods of engagement differ, as well as the relationships, which they aspire to construct. Lacy attempts to construct empathetic relationships by staging performances that engage diverse groups in dialogue around social issues that challenge not only the perceptions of the participants, but also those of the audience. Hamilton’s *stylus* used the acts of transmission, touch and sound, to produce a relationship between the viewer and the space of the Pulitzer. Despite these differences, art institutions in both cases were capitalizing on the artists’ projects to open up dialogue with members of neighboring communities in order to broaden art access.

Hamilton’s focus on the individual and the collective dimension of participation in *stylus* was seen as an opportunity for the Pulitzer to be perceived as an institution that

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94 Phone conversation with Yisa Fermin.
reaches out to neighboring communities. Although Hamilton focused on the individual and collective within *stylus*, the emphasis was on the individual and collective aspects of the body and language produced by individual interaction with the space contributing to a chorus of sound, rather than a collective community. The eerie voices and sounds emitted throughout *stylus*, along with the shifting light, the projections, and the cold atmosphere of the Pulitzer, gave an unwelcoming impression to the visitor. Critic Dinah Ryan felt that the “inhospitable affect…grew self-revelatory through repeated visits and lengthy contemplation like the slow reading of a complex but peculiarly austere poem,” which ultimately resulted for her in a “warm and lilting chatter.” By not specifically involving the Old North community, Hamilton appealed more to art professionals and frequent museum visitors (some after multiple visits), leaving the majority of the population somewhat uncomfortable or unaware of the installation.

Differing from Hamilton, Lacy reached a large number of people in a relatively short amount of time. It is difficult to assess the overall social outcomes and the relationships produced thanks to such a large performance. Lacy personally evaluates the effectiveness of a project by determining whether it functioned as a work of art and whether “people participating feel their issues have been well represented and they feel proud of their engagement.” By providing a forum for dialogue, Lacy not only gave participants a chance to voice their opinions and concerns, but also involved the Brooklyn Museum in a continuing feminist dialogue.

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96 Ibid.
97 E-mail from Lacy.
CHAPTER 4

COMMUNICATION AS FORM: DIALOGUE IN STYLIUS AND BETWEEN THE DOOR AND THE STREET

The communication that exists in both Hamilton and Lacy’s works acts as both artistic medium, but also constitute the end product of their works. Hamilton is primarily concerned with acts of speech that fulfill the sensorial effects of her installations. Lacy’s use of communication results in exchanges that exemplify the category of dialogical art coined by art historian and critic Grant Kester to explain how artists are using conversation as a medium to produce a work of art. Grant Kester’s book Conversation Pieces explores the practices of dialogical art that have emerged over the past thirty years as a result of the dematerialization of the art object and the emergence of participatory art forms of the 1970s and 1980s.¹

Many of these projects that require dialogue to fulfill the work of art can also be labeled as new genre public art practices. Lacy’s writings on new genre public art and Kester’s texts on dialogical art both focus on works that take place outside the walls of the museum or gallery in order to promote activism. The main difference is that Kester focuses largely on the dialogical exchanges that take place within a performance whereas Lacy primarily focuses on the site-specific and community-based activism. With an emphasis on the conversational aspects, Kester, like Lacy, concentrates on the processes of communication within a performance rather than on its aesthetic characteristics. These artistic practices require the participant to engage in dialogical exchanges that challenge

¹ Grant Kester, Conversation Pieces, 9, 53.
fixed identities and, in turn, shift the participant’s perception. Unlike objects in a museum, dialogical performances are public, temporal, and require “a cumulative process of exchange and dialogue” to alter the discourse on social issues in the public sphere.

Dialogical performances do not necessarily seek to solve the problems of a specific community, but begin a dialogue as a stepping-stone for ongoing social action and discussion.

**Communicative Acts in Between the Door and the Street and stylus**

Processes of communication have been present in both Hamilton’s installations and Lacy’s performances. Hamilton and Lacy have had the opportunity to create opportunities for communication as artists who were visitors to the communities in which they created these projects. Both artists have also used public institutions as backdrops for artistic interventions. Lacy’s *In Mourning and In Rage* (1977) used the Los Angeles City Hall to catalyze dialogue regarding the recent rape and murders of women in the area. Hamilton’s *indigo blue* (1991) confronted divisions of class present within Charleston through the installation of a pile of thousands of blue work shirts placed inside of a local garage. While it is fair to say that both Hamilton and Lacy’s works exhibit dialogical qualities, their methods, level of engagement, and outcomes of their projects are considerably different. Lacy acts as researcher, planner, and mediator for the implementation of successful dialogic engagement between participants. Hamilton has focused largely on language as form within her work. Through various forms of communication, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing, Hamilton uses

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3 Ibid., 12.
language as a visual or aural element, rather than as a means for establishing conversations on specific social issues among art participants.

In an essay included within the *stylus* exhibition catalogue, art critic Steven Henry Madoff explains Jürgen Habermas’s theory of communication acting as a method to reach a mutual understanding on social and political matters in order to achieve democracy.\(^4\) Through his analysis of Hamilton’s installation, which he prefers to label a sensorium,\(^5\) Madoff describes Hamilton’s use of language in *stylus* as a “proposal of repair work, the task of recuperation.”\(^6\) Using Habermas’s theory, Madoff claims that Hamilton’s use of language in this installation acts as a means to create a situation for a unified community—to “reknit what has become unraveled.”\(^7\) Madoff argues that what needs to be mended are the communicative acts that are ultimately dividing communities, but a look at this area in St. Louis demonstrates rather an absence of communication. I assume that Madoff is referring to the segregation of races delineated by the Delmar Divide, but he does not directly address specific groups. Madoff argues that the repair work set forth through Hamilton’s communicative acts will lead to the formation of “a unifying yet tolerant community.”\(^8\) Madoff explains that the engagement that visitors encounter in the installation constructs an opportunity for the community to achieve “agency and meaning-making,” through active participation by means of both touch and

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\(^4\) Madoff, *stylus*, 57.

\(^5\) Ibid., 51.

\(^6\) Ibid., 57.

\(^7\) Ibid., 57, 58.

\(^8\) Madoff, *stylus*, 57.
speech. Hamilton refers to these elements throughout the installation as acts of bodily extension—“the hand to touch and the voice to space”—methods in which the body can extend itself into a space, producing moments of “call and response.” The viewer’s participation is needed in order to activate the space of the Pulitzer and to fulfill Hamilton’s theme of call and response. Hamilton attempts to confront the viewer’s perception regarding communication through visual and auditory stimulation that is activated by the speech or touch of the viewer. Although it is undeniable that language is used throughout Hamilton’s *stylus*, Madoff’s comparison of Hamilton’s installation to forms of language that create moments of repair work for a community is ambitious. The aspects of “call and response” that produce dialogic components in Hamilton’s installation attempt to engage the neighborhoods that surround the Pulitzer, but are more successful in engaging the individual visitor of the institution.

The Pulitzer’s online description of *stylus* outlines the basic themes behind the installation, noting the “fundamental acts of communication” found in the work that “spilled outside the walls of the building into the physical and social environments of Grand Center, St. Louis, and beyond.” The bell speakers attached to the roof were intended to call out to the neighborhoods surrounding the institution to initiate the viewer’s dialogue with the Pulitzer. On the *stylus* webpage, visitors were encouraged to “CALL IN and read to the night sky, a story, a poem, a message, a history…and sing to

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9 Madoff, *stylus*, 60.


the night sky, a lullaby, a vocal call…”12 While the incoming calls were few and far between, the messages left by the public were projected along with sounds and language from the installation. The resulting projections were muffled and disjointed with interjected moments of clarity.

Similar to Hamilton’s *stylus*, Lacy’s *Between the Door and the Street* also used the exterior of the institution as a platform to draw in a large audience for the performance held in October. For ten days during the performance, the questions posed on the steps of the Brooklyn Museum challenged not only those that visited the museum, but also those individuals in Prospect Heights that passed by. The stark contrast of the large, black lettering forming questions such as “Is RACE a feminist issue?” and “What’s in it for the MEN?” on the yellow background would have been difficult to ignore, much like the yellow scarves that were worn by the women on the day of the performance. Questions that were being posed to those involved in the execution of the performance confronted individuals merely through a quick look in the direction of the museum.

While Hamilton’s auditory projections attempted to draw visitors into the space of the institution, Lacy’s questioning at the entrance of the museum drew visitors into the surrounding neighborhood, further from the front door of the museum, which is common practice in dialogical projects.

Lacy’s artistic intervention on the steps of the museum is only a small part of how she initiated dialogue with the participants of the performance. Throughout the six-month performance, Lacy conversed with Prospect Heights’ residents and individuals from the eighty New York organizations participating in the project. Lacy was heavily

12 http://annhamilton.pulitzerarts.org/explore/exterior/#/02.
involved in this process, along with Creative Time. Lacy’s active involvement in the planning process of her projects creates what Kester calls “a safe, ‘discursive space’”—one that is achieved by the artist’s willingness to listen. By consulting with Park Place residents, Lacy and Creative Time laid a base for both accessible and authentic conversation for the residents and participants involved. Kester discusses the importance of the active involvement of the community members who are hosting a performance.

Without interacting with or addressing the needs of the residents of the community in which the artist is a guest, the artist risks further alienating certain community members, while continuing to create a work for the usual museum visitors, art critics, and the elite alike.

Lacy and Creative Time mediated the dialogue that ensued from Between the Door and the Street. Guidelines were given to the participants throughout the planning sessions, as well as broad topics, such as gender, race, work, family, religion, and questions similar to those found on the Brooklyn Museum’s stairs to address during the public performance. The participants in Lacy’s project were largely responsible for the direction of the conversation. The freedom allotted to the participants created an unscripted and reactionary experience that was able to take place because of the months of planning with Lacy. The dialogue of other participants drove the responses and flow of the conversation to a point that Lacy could not plan or script.

Hamilton essentially directed the experience of the visitor through the objects’ controlled reactions to touch and sound, although the results were slightly differentiated.

13 Kester, Conversation Pieces, 116.

14 Ibid., 21, 24.
depending on the visitor’s level of engagement. While the viewer was responsible for the activation of the installation through touch (pressing stylus to pad, fingers to piano keyboard), the sounds that resulted from this participation were programmed to play in predetermined galleries and consisted of the recordings of Yadegari’s soundtrack that were unaltered by the viewer’s participation. However, the viewer could insert additional sound to play over Yadegari’s recording by speaking into the microphone or playing a record, creating an immersive and raucous soundscape in the space of the Pulitzer.

In her book, *The Participatory Museum*, Nina Simon discusses a site-specific project by artist Janet Cardiff that was commissioned by the Hirshhorn Museum in 2005 that immersed the visitor in sound similarly to Hamilton’s work. Cardiff created an audio walk entitled *Words drawn in water*. In the project, participants wore earphones, which played instructions dictated by Cardiff that led them on a 33-minute tour around the National Mall (figure 36).15 The instructions were punctuated with sounds such as soldiers marching, bees flying, music, and pieces of historic speeches and interviews.16 Cardiff’s participatory work was intended to be a private, personal experience, but in an exceptionally public setting.17 The audio recording was intended to evoke memories, as participants listened to various sounds while moving through the space of the Mall.18 Cardiff’s work created an out-of-body experience, as the viewer experienced the


17 Simon, 169.

physicality of the location, but was immersed in sounds that switched back and forth from those that could possibly exist in the present to those that were recorded from the past.19

Cardiff’s work relied heavily on communication as a means to create the work; however, the act of communication constructed an intimate, individualized experience for the participant that was led by the artist. Similarly, while Hamilton’s *stylus* included varying modes of communication through audio recordings, books, and music, Hamilton produced an experience that created an intimate relationship between the visitor and the space of the Pulitzer. From the moment that the viewer began to participate in the installation, she engaged in a dialogue with the space. The touch of the viewer affected a response that resonated throughout the building, joining the sounds playing throughout the building from Yadegari’s sound program. In addition to the sounds of the piano and vocal recordings, various records (including bird songs, amusement park sounds, a greyhound bus, a tuning radio with static, restaurant background, riot crowd effects, a baseball crowd, vacuum sounds, and animal roars) played by the visitor added yet another element of sound.20 Additionally, the Mexican jumping beans’ pattering on the steel table, amplified with microphone throughout the building, joined the eerie and indiscernible operatic singing and piano music.


20 http://annhamilton.pulitzerarts.org/explore/entrance-gallery/#/08.
The layering of sounds over language made it difficult for the visitors of the Pulitzer to understand any kind of message or story— not to say that there was a fixed one. Those that participated through speaking into the microphone or those who called into the Pulitzer to have their communicative acts projected into the public space surrounding the museum could say, sing, or ramble anything that they preferred. Much like the concordances created and printed each day by a local print shop (including random streams of sentences comprised of keywords from *stylus* pulled from newspapers each day), the language used lacked clarity and became unintelligible. Rather than focusing on the content and message of communicative acts, Hamilton instead explored the actions of speaking and listening alone. The opportunities for communication provided to the viewer by Hamilton allowed the viewer to experience language as an intrinsic, collective act rather than as a means to convey information.

While Hamilton is more interested in language as a process of establishing a sense of collectivity and bodily extension into a space, Lacy uses dialogue as a means for explicit social change. The dialogue in Lacy’s *Between the Door and the Street* led to meaningful exchanges between participants. Despite the intentionality of the dialogue for its participants and the public sphere, the voices of the participants were indiscernible for a majority of the performance’s audience members. The audience participants strolled through the street as the stoop participants conversed amongst themselves on the steps. The setting of the neighborhood created a situation for convivial conversation between people in the streets as the performance unfolded. The conversations in the street combined with those of the stoop participants, which made it difficult to pick up on any one conversation unless the audience participant joined in. Stoops were also within five
feet of one another, which caused stoop participants’ conversations from different organizations to become indiscernible as voices layered over one another.\footnote{Jillian Steinhauer, “An Artist Takes Feminism to the Stoops,” \textit{Hyperallergic}, October 24, 2013 (Accessed April 13, 2014), http://hyperallergic.com/89980/an-artist-takes-feminism-to-the-stoops/.} If an audience member wanted to listen in on a conversation at one of the stoops, the audience participant had to make a concerted effort to become an active listener because the participants’ conversations were not projected through any kind of microphone or speaker system. Audience members were required to stop and work their way into a spot that allowed them to strain to listen to the conversation by leaning in or over the railings that divided the space between the participants and the audience members.\footnote{Ibid.} These railings, mostly concrete or iron, were a part of the structure of the brownstones’ stoops, separating the properties from the sidewalk (figure 37). The participants sat on the stairs in the intimate and small spaces of the entrances while the audience members had to stay on the sidewalk or street. With over eighty organizations participating in the conversation, audience members had to be selective in which groups they stopped and listened to before they moved onto another stoop. The stoop participants did not directly engage in dialogue with audience participants until after the hour-long performance. Because the audience participants could not join in on the conversation initially through speaking, the audience was expected to be involved in a process of active listening to fulfill the performance despite the challenges involved.

Writer and editor Jillian Steinhauer remarked on the acoustics and struggles that were presented to the audience of the performance: “It was an inconvenience, but one
that seemed to suggest a deeper meaning: participating in these types of conversations requires effort. Sustained effort. It’s trying, often, to talk about gender politics, to be a woman and be forced to prove your case to men over and over and over.” For an audience participant in Lacy’s performances, the act of listening has often been challenging. Lacy addresses difficult issues in her performances through the dialogue between participants. Through listening, the effort of those participating in the dialogical process is reciprocated by her audience members. Lacy produces environments for her performances that require the audience members to engage actively in the listening process by overcoming certain obstacles, heightening the potential for agency so that one overcomes the role of mere witness eventually. Lacy often creates disconnects between the performers and the audience through both the divided space between performers and audience members and multiple aural elements. In the 1987 performance The Crystal Quilt in Minneapolis, hundreds of women were seated at tables in groups of fours in the center of the IDS Center’s atrium while audience members looked down from the next level, leaning over railings to watch the performance (figure 38). As the women conversed, their arms shifted positions in unison. These gestures had been rehearsed and choreographed—set to a soundtrack of stories in various languages with sounds of Minnesota. Audience members were able to listen to the prerecorded narratives of some of the women involved, but were not able to hear the conversations taking place in real time.

23 Steinhauer, “An Artist Takes Feminism to the Stoops.”
24 Irish, Suzanne Lacy, 97.
25 Ibid., 97.
Despite the public nature of these performances, Lacy manages to maintain a level of privacy for the performers. *Between the Door and the Street* differed from *The Crystal Quilt* by allowing the audience to be more intrusive and, in turn, included in the conversation, but the audience member had to make an attempt to do so. In *The Roof is on Fire* (1994), 220 teen students participated in dialogue inside various cars on the roof of a garage while a thousand audience members leaned over to hear their stories.\(^{26}\) The teen participants were separated from their audience, but were still able to be heard through the audience’s effort. In *Between the Door and the Street*, performers were contained on the stoop away from the sidewalk space of the audience members. Those audience members that became actively engaged heard accounts of domestic abuse and experiences with gender inequality and how it applies to such topics like religion and sexuality.\(^{27}\) Through listening to the experiences and narratives of the participants, the audience members encountered multiple perspectives other than their own, most notably The Sex Workers Project that provides services to individuals who participate in sex work whether by their own free will or force.\(^{28}\) Stoop participants also encountered groups that held different beliefs or ideals that may have conflicted with their personal opinions. Despite the disparities between the different organizations, Lacy, throughout her career, has tried to find a common thread that demonstrates the “interconnectedness” between participants while acknowledging and respecting the differences between

\(^{26}\) Irish, *Suzanne Lacy*, 153.

\(^{27}\) Steinhauer, “An Artist Takes Feminism to the Stoops.”

\(^{28}\) sexworkersproject.org.
individuals. In this performance, the topic of gender issues created a significant and relatable discussion that could serve as a step to foster relationships and respect between differing groups. In his review of *Between the Door and the Street*, art critic Ben Davis, while recognizing the amount of planning and effort that went into *Between the Door and the Street*, acknowledged that despite the diverse backgrounds of performers, the performers were in conversation with their peers rather than forming new bonds with those from other organizations.

Perhaps the project was not intended to build bonds or relationships between the participants from differing and, at times, opposing organizations. In her account of the project, Jillian Steinhauer asks, “Who was *Between the Door and the Street* for?,” concluding that perhaps the performance was for the participants rather than the audience members, due to the aspects of the performance that seemed “more like a block party or a festival than a critically engaged public artwork.” As people gathered in the block to talk to friends or neighbors, the women on the stoops continued their conversations, no matter if the audience was listening. The one-hour, public performance in October was a small portion of what the women had worked to achieve over the months of meeting, planning, and rehearsing. Lacy’s performance, like many of her other projects, became not so much about the audience members, but the individuals involved having the chance

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31 Steinhauer, “An Artist Brings Feminism to the Stoops.”
to recount stories and opinions that have shaped their lives. Kester stipulates that a
dialogical work of art is not solely defined by the act of conversation, but rather by how
successful the artist is in catalyzing “emancipatory insights through dialogue.” Women
were cited discussing gender issues revolving around topics such as domestic violence, as
noted previously, as well as immigrant labor, murdered women, gun violence, and the
wage gap. Lacy provided a platform for these women by attempting to create an
opportunity for democracy through inserting their voices into public discourse, although
the efficacy of the project was challenged by the unintelligibility of the conversations and
the divisive space between the participants and the public sphere.

Though both Hamilton and Lacy produce projects that call for the
viewer/performer to participate through speaking, the communicative actions of Hamilton
are driven by the sensorial experience of the viewer. The chattering of the installation
filled the sparse space of the Pulitzer to create a full-body experience that focused on
more or less linguistic methods of communication. The bell speaker projections sought
to invite Grand Center and Old North residents into the Pulitzer by extending the sounds
from the installation and the voices of those who called in and left a message into public
space. Hamilton’s interest in language is rooted in its intimacy—how language shapes
our experiences and how we use sounds to communicate our experiences. Although
there has not been any kind of social action that has been reported in the aftermath of the

32 Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 69.

33 Aimee Walleston, “Eavesdropping with Suzanne Lacy,” *Art in America*, October 21,
features/news/eavesdropping-with-suzanne-lacy-/

performance as in her other works (e.g. *In Mourning and In Rage* and *Code 33*), Lacy’s six-month performance created an opportunity for women to share experiences, as well as speak out and against certain gender issues that have an effect on their lives. The collaboration that did occur in Lacy’s performance established an opportunity for collectivity and bonding between various organizations and residents. Hamilton’s focus on the sensorial in the space of the Pulitzer created a personal experience for the viewer by using forms of communication to make the visitor aware of her body and perception. The relationship between the individual and the collective that was present in *stylus* resulted from the participation of individual visitors to transform the Pulitzer into a cooperative aural atmosphere. The individualized nature of *stylus* did not lead to repair work, as Madoff has claimed, but rather an opportunity for exploration to engage in a personal dialogue with the space of the Pulitzer or to make one’s voice heard in a public setting. Lacy and Hamilton in their respective works have acted as facilitators of communication. Hamilton and Lacy have altered the perceptions of their viewers/participants by providing experiences that revolve around communicative acts.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

The question remains whether these collaborations between artists Suzanne Lacy and Ann Hamilton and the respective art institutions, the Brooklyn Museum and the Pulitzer, imparted a substantial degree of communication between the museums and their surrounding communities. Language was prevalent in both works, but the mere presence of communicative exchanges does not necessarily guarantee effective relationships between the institutions and nearby residents. These projects differed in both process and participant experience, but the institutional goals, despite artist expectations, were similar regarding the potential social experiences the Brooklyn Museum and Pulitzer wished to provide for their communities and the relationships they intended to gain from the projects.

The disparities in artists’ methods and processes require different methods of evaluation as both Hamilton’s and Lacy’s projects vary significantly. The effectiveness of Between the Door and the Street was largely dependent on Lacy’s ability to produce a platform for participants to insert their narratives into public discourse. Considering that hundreds of participants were able to share their opinions and stories to colleagues, friends, family, and thousands of audience members, it can be assumed that the project fulfilled Lacy’s expectations. Because of the sheer volume of participants and audience members that came to Brooklyn for the project, one could also assume that the Brooklyn Museum’s expectations were also met.
It is difficult to discern or measure whether *stylus* fulfilled Hamilton’s goals of challenging the visitor’s perception of language in her sensorial environment. However, evidence does show that *stylus* alone did not fulfill the institutional mission of community outreach. The Pulitzer compensated for the installation’s lack of community engagement by enlisting the services of its programming department, which facilitated public performances and workshops with area schools. The Pulitzer relied on its programming department since Hamilton did not fulfill the museum’s social expectations, nor was it her intention.

Taking into account the similar expectations of both institutions and the roles each museum played in the projects, it becomes clear that the Brooklyn Museum was more successful at providing a social and meaningful experience between the institution and the participants. The effectiveness of the project can largely be attributed to the presence of a third party that was an autonomous entity from the art museum. As a public arts organization separate from the Brooklyn Museum, Creative Time was able to maintain a level of antagonism that, according to Claire Bishop, is necessary in achieving a truly democratic project. Creative Time allowed for Lacy’s intentions for the project to take precedence over any institutional objectives. By partnering with Creative Time, Lacy was able to facilitate dialogues that served participants and area residents without having to accommodate expectations beyond the participants’ and her own concerns.

*Stylus* provided an opportunity for its viewers to communicate within the space of the Pulitzer through Hamilton’s focus of “call and response,” but did not specifically
address the identities and needs of neighboring communities in order to achieve the Pulitzer’s need to broaden accessibility. The Pulitzer’s programming department attempted to bridge the gaps left unfilled between the museum and its communities by collaborating with area schools. Instead of relying on the efforts of its programming department to create these moments of community engagement, the Pulitzer could have potentially partnered with a third party similarly to Lacy and the Brooklyn Museum. By connecting with a few nearby community organizations, the Pulitzer could have introduced a level of antagonism in its practice to create a shared social and democratic experience. The organizations could have helped the Pulitzer address the needs of nearby residents and perform services more relevant to nearby communities, especially the Old North neighborhood. Instead, the Pulitzer’s use of its own department to facilitate these connections serves the museum’s priorities rather than the actual social needs of the surrounding neighborhoods. Through its programming department, the Pulitzer was able to appear as a socially relevant and invested institution without any real community outreach or feedback. Dissimilarly, Lacy’s work with Creative Time and the Brooklyn Museum allowed Between the Door and the Street to act as a platform that fostered the individual voices of the participants. The mediated dialogue that resulted from Between the Door and the Street provided participants with a sense of authorship in the work while strengthening their identities. Through the actions of Lacy and Creative Time in Between the Door and the Street and the programming department in stylus, the Brooklyn Museum and Pulitzer were able to extend their influence into their local communities to
be perceived as socially relevant institutions. Though the experiences resulting from these collaborations with the Pulitzer and the Brooklyn Museum differed significantly both aesthetically and aurally, both Hamilton and Lacy’s communicative acts sought to challenge the perception of the public as an entity standing at the stoop of the museum.
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VITA

Renae Ashley Williams was born on July 14, 1988 in Key West, Florida. As the daughter of a Navy Chief, Ms. Williams had a fairly nomadic childhood, transferring regularly to various military bases across the United States. In 2001, her family settled in Kansas City, Missouri. After graduating from high school in 2006, Ms. Williams attended the University of Missouri-Kansas City where she received her Bachelors degree in Secondary Education with an emphasis in Art (K-12) in 2011.

Upon completion of her undergraduate coursework, Ms. Williams began her current role as an art educator in the North Kansas City School District. She also assumes the role of Family Programs Educator at the Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art in Kansas City, Missouri. Providing accessible and meaningful art experiences to young audiences from varying diverse backgrounds in her classroom promoted Ms. Williams’s interest in the ways in which institutions can offer opportunities for engagement through education and community programming.

After graduation, Ms. Williams will be working as an intern in the Interpretation department at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri. She will be pursuing a career in museum education and interpretation.