

Art + Social Justice

A Study of Social Transformation

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The world is in dire need of reform. From climate change, the growing wealth gap, to the criminalization of Black people, there are a myriad of social issues that are directly affecting the lives of millions of people. Classically referred to as social justice issues these topics are a significant focus of scholarly research, especially within sociology. And while there is ample research to validate these claims of injustice, it frequently seems like change is not happening quickly enough. Sociology plays both a powerful and sometimes passive role in disseminating information—it states what studies have concluded about our social world, and offers up suggestions for moving forward. Yet, there is still a disconnect between the information learned and the social response for reform. Sociology as a discipline was largely created to provide a science of the social world and of social reform. One area deserving of further exploration within this body of research is the relationship of the arts to social change. There is significant research that study the power of arts conceptually. While many have made a wide variety of cultural contributions, e.g., music, performance, community projects, dance, and visual arts, we are left wondering what other impacts these efforts have made. Of all the research done in this arena, little is known as to whether art can cause consumers to take social action on various social issues. The research question this study will ask is two-fold: 1) What impact do the arts make to social change? And, 2) How do people in the arts get audiences to participate in social change?

Traditional means of research and education has garnered some traction in educating on social issues. However, more integrative means of education is more effective in producing understanding and social action the way sociology intends. Multiple studies have demonstrated how the infusion of art within sociological contexts enable audiences to resonate with topics in

profound ways. Using art as a means of sociological education opens up possibilities of connectivity and growth. It can serve as a way of comprehending the complexity of our socio-political world, while cultivating empathy within these essential conversations. Art can also serve as a bridge to exploiting social issues and the actions that can cultivate social transformation.

Using art-informed research and qualitative analysis, this study intends to explore the connection between art and social change. More specifically, this inquiry is designed to evaluate whether individuals are more inclined to take action on a social issue once they have experienced curated, interactive and participatory artful expression.

Why Art-Informed Research

In Ben Barry's "Enclothed Knowledge: The Fashion Show as a Method of Dissemination in Arts-Informed Research" (Barry, 2017) advancement of social justice is presented as the focus of study. According to Barry, art exhibitions have the ability to "transform narrow, stereotypical understandings of marginalized identities." When social justice issues revolve around the discrimination of marginalized identities, it becomes imperative that these identities are understood and respected. When curated in narrative fashion, art events hold the capability of shaping a new perspective while engaging diverse audiences. Using such events as a means of sharing research, especially within the sociological field, can be a great means of advancing social justice issues. The platform, whether it be a fashion show, exhibition, performance, or any other art show, serves as a space where rigid perspectives can be comfortably made uncomfortable.

This study resembles Elliot Eisner's encouragement of the "expanding array of research methods that account for the diverse ways in which individuals develop and connect with one another." Art-informed research has the ability to create a more "holistic" understanding of human development, one that engages audiences in "oral, literal, visual and embodied" art forms that speak to the "multiple dimensions [that] form the human condition." This methodology encourages a transformation of perspective of key figures and interact with participants that makes art more accessible. Even more, "While academics study inequality in ways that provide statistical as well as narrative understanding of causes and consequences, [art expression] deepen our understanding of that inequality by giving powerful voice to its effects," as said by Jennifer Miles in 'The Art of Social Justice.' (Miles, pg. 2) It is this "interpersonal dialectic" that inspires and evokes empathy in audiences, which has the power to incite social action.

In the endeavor to broaden exploration and research, social scientists have called upon art as a means of discovering, understanding and transforming the world around us. As bell hooks argued, the arts have the power to "transgress boundaries by making people reflect, pushing our understandings of ourselves beyond racial, sexual, gender, and class[ist]" confines. (hooks, 1994) When she refers to boundaries, hooks is referring to the way in which we are socialized in modern society. Socialization occurs when an individual(s) adopt an identity that learns the norms, skills and belief systems that are fitting for a particular social position. This socialization is created, taught and perpetuated by social institutions that are governing forces in our society, i.e religion, media and schools. These boundaries, especially for marginalized identities, place limitations on the way we perceive ourselves and others. Whereas not all individuals are privileged to obtain a sociological education that could liberate restricting dogmas, art helps

make knowledge accessible. Art gives consumers the opportunity to transcend paradigms that lead to transformation.

In this research, art is defined not by the quality or skill of a piece of work, but includes “forms of human expression including certain forms of ‘visual material culture’ (Eglinton, 2017) or human-made forms, artifacts, and performances (including, for example, music, dance, digital media, photography, fashion, and the like) to which people assign meaning.” (Eglinton, pg.4)

A Topic For Social Work?

Many articles addressing the topic of art and social justice put an emphasis on social work. The research study, “A Challenge to the Social Work Profession? The Rise of Socially Engaged Art and a Call to Radical Social Work,” by Hee Chul Kim is an analysis of how social work is affected by socially engaged art. (Kim, 2017) It examines how each play a role in social justice and whether it is feasible to conflate the two. Socially engaged art is defined as a “medium that stimulates social imagination and envisions social change through public participations balancing between activism, art and real life” in the pursuit of social justice. (Kim, pg 2) Social work is seen here as a professional and private sphere of influence within social justice initiatives that may or may not have dated practices of going about transformation. “Radical social work” is defined as the proper term to use within this article, as it is rooted in activism, and support of people who combat systems of oppression. It is this kind of work that aligns with socially engaged art. And with both sharing the similar values, the authors question why they cannot work together for the same goal.

It is argued that socially engaged art, while very good at “empowering the disempowered,” also does not serve as a solution to deep-rooted issues. (Kim, p. 5) In fact, artists producing socially engaged art are seen as “non-experts,” organizers who can sometimes be “morally questionable,” Pablo Helguera asserted. In this regard, social workers are as better change agents due to their credentials and “responsibility” to the social movement. (Kim, p.5) This is, of course, if the social worker is operating within an activist-based community, something not prevalent within this field. According to Aravindhan Natarajan and Heather Sloane in “Growing Out of the Academic Box: Social Justice through Art and Collaboration,” (2008) social work is “often framed as a blend of art and science, [as] the profession prides itself on being both an art and a science.” (p. 60) However, what they regretfully express is that regardless of discussion concerning the importance of art, it is rarely practiced or taken seriously. Their article analyzes how and why arts-informed research would greatly benefit social work and raises the question: Are we relegating the work of social revolution to the field of social work? Maybe. It could be because social work is one of the only professions that is rooted in social protest and justice. Unfortunately, social work has become increasingly quantitative in its approach to social reform, leaving us to wonder what its impact will become.

On the other hand, creative arts therapy has been viewed as an effective tool in addressing interpersonal growth and transformation. Creative arts therapy is a structured form of healing in which the arts are explored for participant self expression and development. The intention of creative arts therapy based on Randall Boldt’s “Building a Creative-Arts Therapy Group at a University Counseling Center, ” (2011) is to “draw [participants] in, invite insight and introspection, [and] facilitate outward sharing as they build intentionally meaningful

relationships.” (Boldt, p. 1) This method of therapy enables participants to become connected to both their creativity, and internal blockings that prevent them from living as their authentic self. Art-making within these intentional spaces “allows the expression of ‘unacceptable’ emotions, can free up inhibitions, and can stir up an individual’s anxiety toward taking action.” (Boldt, p. 3) What the article suggests is that creative arts therapy can move people to action, though it is not specific toward what aim. The arts therapy group focused on in Boldt’s study had an emphasis on relationship with self and others. The study consisted of various students at a university, dealing with illnesses such as depression and anxiety. The research followed these participants, their growth, and the effectiveness of the art group therapy as a whole. Its effectiveness was judged by the way in which participants were willing to share themselves with their group mates. It was also judged by the way in which participants exhibited transformation in their perspective of themselves. While these are all attributed to their artistic processes, therapy in this form is still considered based within the field of psychology, not social work. The result is that creative arts therapy focuses primarily on the treatment of mental health issues that are individualistic in nature, even if done within a group setting.

Participation Matters

In Quaylan Allen’s study of Black middle-class male youth in “Photographs and stories,” (Allen, 2012), he explores the effects of participant photography. Participant photography is a method in which “research participants are encouraged to visually document their social landscapes through [photo taking] and reflect on their photos to produce personal narratives.” (Introduction) Participant photography is said to “[situate] research subjects as co-collaborators

in the knowledge creation process and provides the space and opportunity for people to reflect on issues concerning them with intent to spark qualitative social transformation.” (Allen, p. 3) Allen uses interview methods as well as field interpretations to analyze his findings. Through his observation, it is found that allowing the participants enables new themes to emerge and replace the notions the researcher had conjured up. While Allen is a African American researcher with a background similar to the boys he was studying, he found their autonomy in photography dictated the research in ways he had not considered. While he had set questions and points of inquiry, what the students documented trumped in conversation. Their perspective informed the researcher what was most important to analyze -- their stories.

To Allen, it wasn't easy getting these students to see the importance of their participation. “In order to ‘activate’ participant photography as an empowering method,” said Allen, “I had to convince my participants that their voices mattered by demonstrating my knowledge of the problems Black men face, showing deep interest in their well being and what they had to say, and conveying the social and political implications of not including the Black male voice into the public discourse on Black men and masculinity.” (Allen, p. 17) And although they may not have felt empowered at the start of the study, the boys began to enjoy their photography as time went on. All of the participants left the study more confident in themselves, as observed by the researcher, teachers and parents. Taking the results of the study, Allen disseminated this information to all the teachers and administrators of the host schools with the intent to have them better understand the insights of the students and their identities.

In Kristen Ali Eglinton's study, “Digital Storytelling as Arts-Inspired Inquiry for Engaging, Understanding, and Supporting Indigenous Youth,”(2017) the effects of participant

narrative creation are analyzed. The intention of this study was to engage Native youth living in Alaska in producing digital accounts of their identity. This population was targeted due to the overwhelming suicide rate of these adolescence, which was 18 times that of Americans.

Similarly, their substance abuse rate is quite high, “associated with cultural discontinuities and accompanying feelings of historical trauma, rootlessness and cultural identity conflicts.” (p.8)

Using digital storytelling, researchers in collaboration with a local tribal health organization sought to create space in which the youth can develop their own stories that would combat their traumas in a healthy way. In doing this they hoped to gain access into the “worlds, identities, struggles and concerns of these particular youth.”(p.8)The researchers believed it would be digital media that granted voice to indigenous youth, helping them create their own identity in the midst of cultural confusion. The creation of these digital stories enabled participants to expand their understanding of their identity, simultaneously enabling others to understand their narratives. This puts the power back into the hands of those being researched. In this analysis, the participants are seen as “researcher-artists / artist-researchers.” (p. 4) It was believed that the stories created by these young people would serve as a foundation in building programming designed to support their community and interpersonal needs.

The results of this research indicate that the digital stories created by these young indigenous students served as “‘polyvocal’ spaces or platforms [that] elicit the multiples voices , perspectives, and solutions to issues”(p.17) important to them. The researchers concluded that these young people were “actively shaping both themselves, and the cultural world they lived” by their symbolic creativity through digital storytelling. Upon concluding this, they argue that digital storytelling was in fact a form of “democratic action.” This action is proven by the way in

which they refashion private identities and “contributing to the transformation of public spheres, citizenship, and democracy.” (p. 17) And while these are all great findings from this art-based inquiry, the questions remains whether the students involved felt similarly in their experience as storytelling participants. Were participants moved? Were they aware they were partaking in democratic action? Did the experience lead them to change behavior, or an awakening in consciousness of the transformation possible in their communities? These questions serve as the guiding forces in continued research on art and social change.

Challenges

Considering the limits of the studies reviewed here, the challenges for this study include obtaining research that examines the relationship of art consumption with social action.

Socially-engaged art is seen as a means to connect people, however it is also seen as “temporary and event-based,” meaning it doesn’t serve to create long-lasting impact. (Kim, p. 5) To address these challenges this research explores how art can motivate social action.

I begin my inquiry with an understanding that social justice is subjective and what may be perceived as fair to some may be deemed unfair by others. While social justice issues can include a plethora of issues, the American Academy of Social Work identified twelve grand challenges facing the social world including: “healthy development for all youth, [closing] the health gap, [preventing] family violence, [advancing] long and productive lives, [eradicating] social isolation, [ending] homelessness, [creating] social responses to a changing environment, [harnessing] technology for social good, [promoting] smart decarceration, [reducing] extreme economic inequality, [building] financial capability for all, and [achieving] equal opportunity

and justice.” (Natarajan, p. 62) Although these are all encompassing challenges, they can also be politically charged issues, which skew the perspectives of what is actual social progression.

Thus, what can be considered appropriate social action? “In a just society, all lives have equal value, equal opportunity, and equal chances for success,” noted by Allan Ornstein, author of “Social Justice: History, Purpose and Meaning.” (2017) Social justice means “[putting] people first - not property or profits.” (Ornstein, p. 547) Therefore, creating and advocating for equality, or civil rights would be an example of taking social action. This study seeks to explore the varying ways in which people take social action and how art becomes a factor in their choices.

Methodology

The intention of this study is to explore what impact the arts make to social justice, and how people within the art get audiences to participate in social change. Even more, it seeks to understand how we define social actions, and how it manifests.

My journey navigating this project taught me that much planning has to be executed for research of this nature. In order to study the correlation among art, education and social justice action, would ideally required that I curate a socially engaged art experience for non-art communities involving a contemporary social justice issue. Then I would have used participant observation and interviews to analyze the art’s effect on others. Unfortunately, socially engaged projects take time to develop and execute, as explained by Pablo Helguera, author of “Education for Socially Engaged Art.” (2011) Developing an art project that addressed a very specific social issue to a non-art oriented audience, requires answers to necessary questions such as: What issue is worth conceptualizing? To what community will this project serve? Will collaboration (with

other artists, community leaders, etc.) be necessary? Helguera asserted that unsuccessful socially engaged art projects typically stem from “unrealistic goals in relation to the expected time investment.” (Helguera, p. 19) Answers to these questions require a thorough understanding of the community or audience, how much funding will be needed, and a realistic timeline for the completion of the venture. Due to lack of time and financial resources, I settled on research methods using qualitative, secondary, and case study data as it would still enable me to get an adequate understanding of how people are inspired to action by engaging in art.

In Pablo Helguera’s pedagogy and analysis of socially engaged art, he observed that there is a lack of documentation about this art form. He notes that true documentation of community projects must include the experience of the participants, as they are the “primary recipients of a transformative experience.” (Helguera, p. 74) Documentation is used “as proof, as a relic [and to reflect] the legacy” of a project. (p. 74) It should incorporate useful and appropriate reporting of what transpired within socially engaged art projects, and art experiences as a whole. This would include research that “generally consists of film or video or a series of photographs... as well as word-of-mouth accounts, written descriptions and interviews.” (Helguera, p. 74) Instead of attempting such an approach I will analyze the results of projects implemented by art organizations and community organizers and their impact through critical analysis of participant feedback from within social media. I will examine how participants report their review and how the exhibit stimulated participatory aspects of arts-informed initiatives, which aspects of the art moved participants, and what action was prompted afterward. Social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook have become ideal outlets for such an inquiry and will aid in my investigation. The strengths of this method include the diversity in responses I will be able to

examine for patterns. I will also have access to individual perspectives that are not easily accessible in person. A limitation of this method is being unable to interview individuals that would guide them in response to my research question. And a bias will be in the orientation of persons who typically participate in social media. Nevertheless, this method enables me to explore various stories of individuals across the globe, a methodology that is both affordable and informative for my research question.

Findings: Socially Engaged Art

Christopher Robbins is a sculpture artist and teacher who co-created the Ghana Think Tank, an international collective that develops artistic solutions to first-world problems. Its approach to public art is to think innovatively about social issues, while simultaneously deconstructing and overcoming stereotypes of all parties involved. The network is comprised of “third-world” countries and patrons that includes a “group of bike mechanics in Ghana, a rural radio station in El Salvador, Sudanese refugees seeking asylum in Israel, an artist collective in Iran, and a group of incarcerated girls in the Boston penal system,” and others.

(<http://www.ghanathinktank.org>, 2018) These “third world” groups coalesce to create proposed solutions are then implemented and evaluated as to whether it aligned with its social purpose.

Part of what makes the collective successful is its selectivity of the projects they chose to take on. Unsuccessful socially engaged art, as said by Pablo Helguera, typically includes artists who “inserted themselves in social environments with populations that usually had not called for their presence and art not expecting intervention via an art project.” (Helguera, p. 30) What makes socially engaged art successful is “understanding the social context in which [a project]

will take place and how it will be negotiated with the participants or audience in question.”

(Helguera, p. 30) Instead of going to different communities to enact change, The Ghana Think Tank do not take on a project unless they are invited to do so. This enables participants to be the initiators of the collaboration, as well as give them voice as to what they are needing within their community. Even more, whereas artists are typically asked or invited to solve a problem within a community, these artists have inverted that norm. Instead they ask other people, non-artists, to solve the problems of communities they may or may not engage in. Whether the social issue is solved or not is not seen as the most important factor for the collective. What is prioritized is the creation of spaces that allow for cross-culturalism.

Some question whether Ghana Think Tank projects are considered art and John Ewing (co-creator of the collective) argues that it is. “[What we do] changes perception, which good art does.” What is important about the collective is their emphasis on cross cultural exchange and, building what PBS called, “the empathy gap.” This empathy transcends customs and dogmas to connect groups of people from vastly different lifestyles. At a point in time when people are “struggling with having civil discourse with people we find different from us,” the Ghana Think Tank demonstrates how diversity can solve social justice issues.

The Ghana Think Tank’s current endeavor, The American Riad, is a three-year project implemented in Detroit to combat disunity and housing displacement within the community. The program was developed by the Moroccan Think Tank with the intention of creating an Islamic Riad promoting communal living within a “beautifully designed courtyard.”

(<http://www.ghanathinktank.org>, 2018) This courtyard aims to turn the current abandoned buildings and lots within Detroit into architecture that houses 8-10 units of affordable housing, as

well as six businesses that serve the community of North End. In this respect, the project serves as a double edged sword in creating an effective way to prevent displacement within the community by adopting “elements of Islamic and African Culture.” In a period of such high Islamophobia in America, this project acknowledges that “we have more to learn from groups we find threatening.” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZRqJ-qPFvko&t=13s>, 2016)

The results thus far? Some of the think tanks include Sudanese Refugees or prison think tanks. “In a world where they are told what to do, [everything] is being dictated to them, we ask them for help and do what they say,” explains Chris Robbins in an interview with the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. This serves as a way to empower them, and demonstrate the various ways in which their voice matters. “Working with these [think tanks], especially the Sudanese Refugees, I have never seen a group of people who felt so disconnected from any purpose,” Robbins continues. By working with these groups they have been able to feel purposeful, and powerful, knowing they are contributing to the betterment of the world.

Ultimately, what is most significant is how both the “first world” and the “developing” world confront their own preconceived notions of the other group. In Robbins interview with Banff, he recounts a project done in Westport, Connecticut. Westport was a town struggling with cancer due to having too many golf courses. On the surface, this was a big issue caused by something that’s “hard to be concerned about,” admits Robbins. Simultaneously, the El Salvador Think Tank was experiencing death threats and vicious pursuits due to social issues in their area. The founders were reluctant to send these problems to the group knowing that they were experiencing their own trauma. However founders were also committed to not treating them as “victims.” What that meant was that, although what El Salvador was going through was much

worse that the problem that was being sent to them, Robbins and the other co-founders thought it imperative to treat them as equals. It was at great surprise to the team when El Salvador showed genuine concern for Westport, even while commenting on the privilege the United States were responsible for. And in that moment, “there was a new reality for the both of us,” comments Robbins. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCzbKEAZ4I8&t=1437s>, 2016) Their ability to see the El Salvadorian team as equals, and not victims, and the Think Tanks ability to cultivate empathy even while experiencing comparatively worse circumstances, created a paradigm shift for both parties.

Individual Transformation

Marcus Ellsworth is an openly gay Black man living in the South. As a spoken word artist he often performs at local venues, vocally expressive of the identities he claim. One night at the Mocassin Been Brewing Company in St. Elmo, Tennessee, Marcus found himself performing in front of a diverse crowd, some of which held “rebel” flags of pride on their outerwear. And among that group, there was one man who stood out. We’ll call him Bob.

Captivated by the performance, Bob, who had not taken his eyes off of Ellsworth the entire performance, approached him with full force. “People like you... People like you... I never thought about people like you that way before. That y’all just want to live your lives and be left alone. And there’s so many people out there who want to do and say all these terrible things to y’all.” He paused. “I have done and said terrible things to people like you.”

Marcus was taken aback, to say the least. He engaged in conversation with Bob, and later learned while during the show, Bob had reached out to his friends. “Y’all gotta hear this, ya’ll

gotta hear what this man is saying,” he texted his buddies. Bob was trying to explain that he was sitting here listening to a gay poet talk about his life experiences, and was moved by it. Their response wasn’t as inviting. Instead they responded, “Man you need to get out of there. That’s crazy. Nope, nope. Go. Leave. Just get out.” And Bob was frustrated. He couldn’t seem to articulate how this specific art experience had transformed his relationship to “people like” Marcus.

That was the first and last time Marcus saw Bob. He has no idea what Bob has been up to, or what other actions Bob has taken since then. But it was a transformative experience for both the artist and the audience member. It was the first time Marcus saw this artistry as a tool for connectivity, and activism. And it was Bob’s first time cultivated empathy for “people like” Marcus. We do not know if Bob went on to become a leading civil rights activists. What we do know, though, is that his one experience of art lead him to take one small action -texting his buddies about his experiences. Bob was so moved, he wanted to share the experience. Even more, he was so touched that even his languaging change. He referred to Marcus as “people like you” as an awkward attempt to be inoffensive. It had occurred to Marcus within this conversation with Bob, that Bob had only referenced terms such as “gay, homosexual, or queer” as terms of insult or disrespect. Not only was Bob trying to convey his newfound empathy to his friends, he was making an active effort to be considerate. The personal and emotional content of Marcus’ self expression enabled Bob to think critical about an identity he had previously disregarded.

Marcus’ artistry was actually the fine art of storytelling. By poetical articulating his struggles, he was able to grasp the attention of someone who abhorred “people like” him. His

story resonated so deep with Bob, it inspired empathy.

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KLg8LMK_Ct4&t=375s, 2014)

On the other side of the world, there is a Caroline Watson, and her work in participatory theatre for young migrant workers. Caroline Watson considers herself both an artist and an activist, located in Beijing, China. In her Ted Talk on “Theatre for Personal & Social Transformation,” Watson explains how she has been both an experiencer and facilitator of social action through art.

Watson was born and raised in Hong Kong, China, where she had a “privileged upbringing” and “the opportunity to witness abject poverty in the developing world.” The inequality Watson was witness to inspired her desire to make a difference in any way she could. When she began going to an international school and university, Watson had the opportunity to take part in theatre plays every week in which she discovered her love for the art. While doing theatre at her university, Watson became fascinated with the work of Augusto Burrell. Brazilian theatre practitioner Augusto Burrell didn’t believe theatre should be consumed by being spectators and simply listening to what was happening on stage. He believed we should be “active agents for change in the drama unfolding, and in our own lives too.” It was upon her discovery of Burrell’s work that Watson decided to commit herself to both theatre and social justice.

After graduating university, Caroline set out to explore Burrell’s techniques at a local migrants women’s shelter in Beijing. As China was undergoing a massive migrant movement (as of 2015), she found that there were many migrant workers looking for work, though not happy with their way of living or how they were being treated. Of the migrant workers, the women

experienced oppression as it related to sexual harassment, or societal expectations of their role as a woman.

There was one particular workshop in which a woman named Dom Lee mentioned having conflict with her husband. Her husband wanted her to go back to their home village, while Dom Lee thought it best for her to stay, work and make money for the family. “The workers set up this particular drama within their production, and asked Dom Lee to play herself and another participant in the workshop to play Dom Lee’s husband. The conflict ensued,” and Watson then asked the two to switch roles. “We continued the drama and suddenly a light bulb went on,” explains Watson, “[Dom Lee] had the opportunity to quite literally step into the shoes of her husband, to understand the conflict from his perspective. And thereby develop a more compassionate understanding of what he was going through. She left the workshop visibly moved, and returned the following week telling us how she had managed to dialogue with her husband, develop a better way of communicating with him, and that they were more in harmony about how they worked their challenges out.”

After seeing the shift in reality for Dom Lee, Watson asked herself: “If such a simple exercise could lead to such transformation in an individual, what would we do if we could scale these techniques?” Watson founded Hua Dan, “a Beijing-based organization that uses participatory theatre as a tool to empower the migrant worker population.” To uplift these women, Hua Dan uses “creative games, exercises, character, narrative and storytelling, as a way for migrant workers to come together, share their experiences, and dialogue about solutions to the challenges they face.” Many of the workshops facilitated by Hua Dan addresses themes of

“ethical global leadership, supply chain, cross cultural management, gender issues” and enable migrant participants to develop their own production with these issues at the forefront.

To sum up her experience working in art and social justice, Watson says, “It is theatre that enables us to get rid of our sense of self, our ego, and in that process access the very truth of who we are.” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGP8Q30aDF4>, 2015)

Something Bigger than Ourselves

Rosie the Riveter was the female icon of World War Two. The influential poster made by J Howard Miller depicted revolutionary symbols of a Rosie wearing a red hair bandana, flexing her bicep under the slogan, “We Can Do It!” The poster served as a call to action, telling women to go out and find work in support of their husbands sent off to war. Accompanied by the poster, a song titled, “Rosie the Riveter,” furthered the government-led mission to get women in industrial jobs. The lyrics begin with:

While other girls attend their fav’rite
cocktail bar
Sipping Martinis, munching caviar
There’s a girl who’s really putting
them to shame
Rosie is her name

All the day long whether rain or shine
She’s a part of the assembly line
She’s making history,
working for victory
Rosie the Riveter
Keeps a sharp lookout for sabotage
Sitting up there on the fuselage
That little frail can do more than a
male will do
Rosie the Riveter

Rosie serves as a status symbol of what women should be doing in honor of their country. The song's opening immediately shames women who were not on the assembly line. The intent of these art efforts was to glamorize patriotism. The rhythm itself is characterized as catchy enough to get stuck in one's head for days, even weeks. It continues with:

Rosie's got a boyfriend, Charlie
Charlie, he's a Marine
Rosie is protecting Charlie
Working overtime on the
riveting machine
When they gave her a production "E"
She was as proud as a girl could be
There's something true about
Red, white, and blue about
Rosie the Riveter

The song served to persuade women, and get them to step up to the plate in what would be their part in winning the war. Rosie, and women like her, were considered true Americans, as they were willing to endure whatever necessary for their country. "There's something true about / Red, white and blue about / Rosie the Riveter." Patriotism was highlighted and praised. This is also seen in Norman Rockwell's rendition of Rosie, as depicted on *The Saturday Evening Post*. This Rosie is illustrated as a brute, dirty and dignified woman. She is wearing overalls and loafers, a custom that was not prime for women up until this campaigning. There was no need to manufacture metal protected loafers for women, for they were rarely ever working dangerous jobs. Rockwell's image also included a gun positioned on Rosie's lap, as she sits behind a large American flag. As a result, over six million women got war jobs.

While patriotism was one of the primary means of getting women into the job force, it was actually the desire of women to be connected that moved them to action. Patriotism wasn't simply having pride in the country. It was about standing for a victory much larger than oneself.

Participating in this social movement was considered the equivalent to participating in the success and growth of America. As said by a former Riveter, “ It didn’t matter the color of your skin or race you were. And no one was trying to outdo another. We worked as a team.” They were motivated by contributing to victory. They felt both accomplishment and pride in their work.

What was also prevalent about this art movement was that it was first time women dominated the public image. Up until then, women were only observed in domestic settings. But Rosie the Riveter represented the strong, competent mother. The “We Can Do It” slogan was perceived as a declaration that women could step up and take on male dominated tasks. Even while only receiving half what the men earned, they worked with dignity.

The *Soundtrack of a Revolution* is a documentary that highlights the role of music within the Non-violence Black Freedom movement in America. The movie opens with an iconic quote by Harry Belafonte, “You can cage the singer, but not the song.” It is by this quote that civil rights activists lived, whether intentionally or unintentionally. In post World War 2, Black Americans, who were just serving their country in combat, came home to hostile racial tension. The South, especially states like Mississippi and Alabama, was home to aggressive white supremacist law and order. It had the most repressive socio-political infrastructure of America. Music helped activists to develop courage, and pursue the equality they deserved. Freedom songs were evolved versions of slave chants, and melodies from Black Churches. Songs and spirituals were incorporated into various sit downs and protests as a means of maintaining solidarity, tenacity and faith. Freedom songs were sung in jail cells, on picket lines, in meetings, and

everywhere else. “It was the music,” said Congressman John Lewis, “[that] gave us courage.” (Guttentag, 2010)

Why was music so significant to this movement? As former Civil Rights Activist Lynda Lowry put it: “You can break my arm, [and] you can break my bones. But you cannot break my spirit.” Music was all they had. When everything was taken from them, their voice was the only thing that couldn’t be taken away. “They can take everything else, except our songs. Which meant we kept our souls,” said another activist. That fact alone was enough to strengthen the fortitude of young freedom fighters. It brought them so much comfort, they would sing loudly, and proudly, while being arrested or chastised. Through degradation and humiliation, the Civil Rights activists sang to keep their spirit high, and maintain their dignity.

In this demonstration, music was crucial to liberation for Black People and ally’s. Each protest was accompanied with a song. In these instances, it is clear that music was a powerful change agent. It encouraged participation in the movement, and made it a spiritual experience. Music they sung was infectious, and empowered activists to continue their fight nonviolently. “Singing [is what] got us involved,” a former activist noted. “It was the music that [served as our] sign of solidarity.” Music was both a form of

“We Shall Overcome” became the anthem for the Civil Rights movement because it directly touched on the heart of the struggle. “Songs, [and that song in particular] helped to reinforce that we [were] going to win,” said a Civil Rights Activist. What is most important about this song, was its ability to transform the mind of President Lyndon B. Johnson. Up until 1965, only 20% of African Americans were able to vote, despite the ratification of the 15th Amendment guaranteeing all citizens the right to vote in 1870. One of the biggest concerns of

The Civil Rights movement had been that of voter discrimination. The movement had protested against Southern States and their inhibition of equal opportunity in voter registration, ultimately bringing their concerns to the White House. To the surprise of Martin Luther King Jr. and other leaders of the time, Lyndon B. Johnson assumed presidency, after the death of John F. Kennedy, and advocated for equal voter rights. In his speech to Congress, he called on the country to “eliminate from this nation every trace of discrimination and oppression that is based upon race or color,” (Johnson, 1965), and endorsed the “We Shall Overcome” slogan as a means of reconciliation. In August of 1965, President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, putting an end to voting discrimination.

What is profound about the signing of this law is not only the victory of the nonviolent movement, but the shift in perspective demonstrated by President Johnson. Just years prior, when Lyndon B. Johnson was a leader in Senate, he made tremendous effort in weakening the Civil Rights Act of 1957. Nowhere is it stated how and why President Johnson changed his mind on Civil Rights so dramatically. However, there is an assumption that he too was affected by brutality inflicted, and the tenacity represented by African American activists. He titled his speech after the Civil Rights anthem, mentioned the atrocities of the Selma march, and asserted, “The real hero of this struggle is the American Negro.” This speech was evidence of a significant ideological conversion. (Johnson, 1965)

Did the music play a part? We would assume so. When, on the night of March 15th, 1965, the long motorcade drove away from the White House, heading for Capitol Hill, where President Johnson would give his speech to a joint session of Congress, pickets were standing outside the gates, as they were singing the same song that was being sung that week in Selma,

Alabama: 'We Shall Overcome.' They were singing it in defiance of Johnson, because they did not trust him. (Caro, 2008)

If we were to answer what impact the arts had on social change, we would find that music was essential in communicating the perseverance of African Americans and allies. It was also essential in empowering activists, and inspiring others to join the cause. As a result, music led Civil Rights leaders to persist, eventually achieving the victory they had sacrificed for. It also led to the enactment of the Voting Rights Act, and a shift in perspective by a world leader. "Their cause must be our cause, too. Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us, who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice," comments President Johnson, ending his sentiment with: "And we shall overcome." (Johnson, 1965) In this event, art assisted in the social transformation that activists had yearned for.

Discussion

The work of Marcus Ellsworth and Caroline Watson demonstrate how art can cause individual change and create a huge impact interpersonally. It was Marcus Ellsworth's vulnerability that led him to have a strangely inspiring event happen to him. Being a man of various marginalized identities, Ellsworth uses his intersectional experiences as inspiration for his poetry. On the one particular evening in which he was performing in St. Elmo, Tennessee, Ellsworth was able to witness the diminishment of an ideology. Bob, a man present at the show, exposed his stereotypical ideologies of Ellsworth's identities by initially referring to the artist as "People like You." However, Ellsworth's art managed to "transform [the] narrow, stereotypical understandings of marginalized identities" that Barry asserted art could do. (Barry, 2017) As Bob

confronted Ellsworth on his performance, he simultaneously expressed his own self reflection. In the moments following Ellsworth's spoken word, Bob was able to identify the feelings Ellsworth communicated, empathize with them, and understand the role he had previously played in marginalized "people like" Marcus.

After coming to empathize with the identities Ellsworth wore proudly, Bob went on to enrolling his friends into changing their perspective as well. Although their reaction was not as encouraging, Bob had been an actual audience member, whereas his friends were receiving a second-hand account. Still, Bob's attempt at persuading his friends to accessing his new insight proves how transformative art can be to the psyche. His self awareness, and empathy lead him to take small but meaningful action toward sharing this experience with those in his life.

Ellsworth's vulnerability through storytelling lead an unlikely individual to connect with his sharing.

Watson's theatre work in Beijing has led her to experience and witness paradigm shifts for herself and the lives of the migrant workers who participate. "Art-making allows the expression of 'unacceptable emotions, can free up inhibitions, [as well as] offer an enormous relief.'" (Boldt, pg. 3) Dom Lee's experience in Watson's theatre workshop can be described as the workings as vulnerability and empathy. By following artist Augusto Burrell's technique of participation, Watson was able to curate an environment in which Dom Lee and others could comfortably share their stories. As a result, Dom Lee was able to express her unhappiness, and also see the perspective of her husband, who was not even in the room. This allowed more space for Dom Lee to process her feelings and cultivate empathy for her husband. It also enabled Dom to confidently address the situation her and her husband were facing. Earlier we found that art

was very good at “empowering the disempowered.” (Kim, p.5) As the migrant workers were of a disempowered population, the theatre workshops supported their need to feel empowered.

The relationship between theatre and the migrant workers can be compared to creative-arts therapy. As mentioned in the literature review, the intention of creative-arts therapy is to “invite insight and introspection [and] facilitate outward sharing [to] build meaningful relationships.” (Boldt, p.1) Theatre for the migrant workers in China act in this way as it encourages reflection and sharing of one’s experiences, hopefully changing the relationships of workers in their interpersonal lives. While the article wasn’t specific as to how creative-arts therapy moves people into social action, based on Watson’s work we find that migrant workers, like Dom Lee, were inspired to take action in transforming the areas in their lives that caused them heartache. Even more, Watson’s theatre work eventually empowered workers to share their stories in productions that encapsulated significant social justice issues.

What’s more important in this discussion of Watson’s theatre workshops is how important participation of non-artists are to the art-making process. Part of ensuring the workshops are successful include “convincing participants that their voices matter,” as Allen said was imperative to his work. (Allen, p. 17) And similar to that of Allen’s research, Watson found that although the migrant worker may not have felt empowered at the start of their time together, the women opened up to the process, eventually finding solace in the art form. Through encouraging participation, vulnerability and empathy, Watson was able to empower migrant workers in China to share their stories, ultimately taking social action on the issues that affect them directly. Their seemingly small personal transformations lead them to take actions in both

their relationships and the art they choose to make. Conclusively, the impact is all due to the art-making process.

The *Soundtrack of a Revolution* exemplifies the effects of “art expression [and] exchange [that] often inspires protest and action [within impoverished communities.]” (Natarajan, p. 61) Although the movie did not follow the journey of an “impoverished community,” it followed the triumphant story of an oppressed social group within the United States. Through musical expression, Civil Rights activists were able to convey both their trauma, and hope. Singing, for them, served multiple purposes. It was the one thing that couldn’t be taken from them. At a time in history when Black people were regarded as less than, singing empowered activists to let their voice be heard. Their songs reflected that of freedom songs. They sung their hardships, and they sung their testament of faith. Because music gave them courage, they would sing at every protest, and every sit down. They would sing while being beaten, while being arrested or violated. Their spirituals promoted comradery, was a tool to keep the focused, and helped them to persevere. Creating this art cultivated “communicative power” and was “an attempt to be understood.” (Boldt, p. 3) Eventually, they found their music to be a great influencer of the social transformation Civil Right activists were yearning for.

In this event it was not challenging for leaders to rally up activists in fighting for Civil Rights. In fact many activists were eager and proud to fight for their liberties, despite the abuse and possibility of death. Getting young people to participate in social change was simple. Young Black activists were first handedly experiencing the racial trauma they so desperately wanted to be liberated from. Non-black advocates fought alongside the struggle not wanting to be witnesses to the brutality. They knew there were fighting for something much bigger than themselves.

They understood how necessary equality was for their future. And so they sang their way to transformation.

In writing my literature review, I discovered bell hooks' take on art and the human perception. The arts have the ability to "transgress boundaries by making people reflect, pushing our understanding of ourselves beyond racial, sexual, gender, class[ist]" confines, she asserts. (hooks, p. 30) Art's ability to transgress racial boundaries was proven true by Lyndon B Johnson's shocking change of heart. Johnson was once the practitioner of injustice against Black people. While there was ample evidence that exemplified the suffering of Black Americans, it was their musical expression of their pain that "deepened [the] understanding of that inequality by giving voice to its effects," restating Jennifer Miles. (Miles, pg. 2) This "interpersonal dialectic," as Miles describes, is what one would say caused President Johnson's empathy. Touched by the movement's anthem, "We Shall Overcome," his empathy caused him to enact into law what would transform America's future, and the future of all Black Americans.

Similar to the Civil Rights movement, the Age of Rosie the Riveter inspired people to join a cause much bigger than themselves. Using both music and visual art, the government was able to enlist women into joining the workforce during World War Two. Art demonstrated here would be considered propropaganda, however it doesn't take away from how effective it was at mobilizing a movement. The music was catchy and coaxing, romanticizing patriotism and heroism. This is also apparent in Norman Rockwell's Rosie the Riveter posted on The Saturday Evening Post in 1943. "Visual art has a powerful way of evoking thought and emotion in the viewer, holding within it joy, pain, love, hate" and numerous other states of being. (Boldt, pg. 3) This particular piece of art blared nationalism, as it depicted a large American flag anchored

around Rosie, the Riveter standing on a German book, appearing both brute and noble. And while nationalism is about love and support of one's nation, at its core it represents belonging. When in an interview, Christopher Robbins admitted that the basis of Ghana Think Tank is that "everyone like to complain, and everyone likes to feel needed." Feeling needed created a sense of purpose among the women of this time. It was this sense of purpose that led them to find industrial jobs and do them well--so well that many were considered better workers than their male counterparts. In these instances, art created social movement.

We revisit hook's quote once again as it perfectly sums up the impact of Ghana Think Tank. The Think Tank transcends cultural boundaries by connecting social issues and solutions to these social issues to international groups, groups of seemingly opposing lived realities. With such differences, feelings of disconnect are considered normal within our social conditioning. There is a perception that others of diverse experiences and backgrounds cannot begin to relate to one another. Many times there is fear and ridicule associated with people who do not look like or follow customs the way we do. By sending issues of "first world countries" to be solved by groups in developing nations, Ghana Think Tank quite literally transforms our societal isms the way bell hooks pronounced. Caucasian people make up about 76.9% of America's population, and the network of Think Tank participants are primarily People of Color; the members of the Think Tanks are comprised of various gender identities; and the creation of solutions by groups of "third world" nations erases the notion that developing countries are populated with uneducated individuals due to poverty. In this case, the "assumed power dynamics" of race, gender and class are "turned on its head," as coined by Christopher Robbins, and demonstrate

that dissolving preconceived notions on these topics creates possibilities in way we have not yet imagined.

Ghana Think Tank is revolutionary due to its ability to transcend debilitating ideologies by encouraging empathy and connectivity between two or more seemingly opposing social groups. The organization has done this in many remarkable ways. Collaborative participation has been the model in which the collective operates. In collaborative participation, “the visitor shares responsibility to developing the structure and content of the work in collaboration and direct dialogue with the artist.” (Helguera, 15) In this case, the Think Tanks are considered and treated as the artists, designing solutions to the social issues presented, and the co-founders, commit themselves to producing the proposed solutions, no matter how silly or undoable it is perceived to be. This reverses the assumed roles of both the co-founders (all whom are known artists), with that of the Think Tank members, those who are “outside the regular circles of art and the art world.” (Helguera, 12) This sort of socially engaged art is what Pablo Helguera would call effective, as it creates a “platform or network for the participation of others, so that the effects of the project may outlast its ephemeral presentation.” (p. 12)

Ghana Think Tank has been successful due to its ability to “[activate] members of the public in roles beyond that of passive receptor.” (Helguera, p.11) They have done this by empowering the voices and solutions of marginalized identities, offering purpose to groups who have experienced hardship (such as the Sundanese Refugees), and treating these Think Tanks as equals, even if their circumstances seemed more dire (like in the case of the El Salvadorian team). As a result, Ghana Think Tank was able to the garner the international participation of global social transformation.

Conclusion

One of the challenges of finding research through Youtube was finding answers to my very specific research questions. I was exploring how people are motivated into social action after experiencing art, and how their actions manifest. I frequently came across videos examining why art and social justice are important. However, they only provided conceptual evidence to a claim I already made. Similarly, I have found tons of Youtube videos of art activist organizations and projects. However, these videos often displayed overarching themes of missions and intentions but not evidence of how they transformed individuals and communities. Instead of answering the how and to what degree social action occurred, I mostly found videos explaining what their organization did and why it was important.

Art is known and appreciated in our culture for its ability to shift perspective. “Artists have always been at the cutting edge of new ways of thinking,” says Caroline Watson, “of imagining possibilities that we can’t always see right now.”

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGP8Q30aDF4>, 2015) Art is typically a reflector of what is happening in our society. It makes specific commentary that either challenges a social norm, or offers a new ethos. What has made the Ghana Think Tank so successful is its ability to take “assumed power dynamics, and flip it on its head,” as said by Christopher Robbins. And what is similar in all of the instances of art within this research is the effort and success in transforming a single (and eventually multiple) perspective.

Can a shift in perspective be considered a social action? The social action examples presented in this research demonstrate first a shift in perspective from the experiencer of art. We have definitely seen it manifest into social action by the way in which Bob told his friends of his transformative experience at the Mocassin Been Brewing Company, and the way in which former President Johnson enacted a whole new law for the sake of civil rights. And even Watson urges people to “think about what it really means to shift thought to a different place.” Then, like in the cases of Bob and Dom Lee, these transformed individuals attempt to change the dynamic of their relationships. We find here that the shift of perspective is the first step to taking social action. In that regard, it is the most imperative. Because art enables consumers to envision, and almost comprehend, a different reality, it has the ability to actually alter one’s state of mind. A shift in perspective creates space for new possibilities, and ultimately, new behavior.

What can also be argued is that vulnerability is essential in art and social action. Art created from the voices of Civil Right Activists, global Think Tanks, and spoken word artists ooze of vulnerability, as it is has been (and continues to be) a depiction of lived experiences. As vulnerability researcher Brene Brown would say, art and innovation derives from vulnerability. Vulnerability, as she would define it, “is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage and creativity... It is the source of hope, empathy, and authenticity.” If shame and vulnerability work hand in hand, it is fitting to say that it is essential to art and social justice. “A social wound needs a social balm, and empathy is that balm,” Brown explains. (Brown p.52) Therefore empathy is what causes social action to occur. (Brown, 2015)

Based on this research, when an artist has chosen to be vulnerable, when one’s perspective has shifted, when empathy has been cultivated, when people are invited to

participate, and when there is a sense of belonging, social action takes place. Sometimes it is not in this order. Sometimes not all components are necessary. However these methods of social transformation have been tried and proven. When answering what impact the arts make to social change, we have found that has the potential to change laws, regulations or culture within a community. At the very least, it can shift a perspective, creating new insight into possibilities unperceivable before. And when answering how people in the arts can get audiences to participate in social change, we find that authentically sharing our voices, developing compassion, and encouraging collaborative participation helps us get closer to peace. Ultimately, peace is social justice.

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