Forgotten Relations: Revisiting Papergirl Vancouver’s Feminist and Social Practice Art Roots

by

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B. Mus., Mount Allison University, 2010

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in the School of Communication Faculty of Communication, Art, and Technology

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Abstract

Papergirl Vancouver is part of a global network of community art projects that redefine street and participatory art by combining philanthropy, bicycles, and the gifting of art. Papergirl is not alone in explicitly challenging the art market economy, but its simultaneous reaction against neoliberal and postfeminist discourses and absorption by them makes it the site of productive contradictions.

Using interviews with participants and fieldwork, this thesis situates Papergirl's roots in the Second Wave feminist art movement. As part of the repudiation of feminist politics, feminist art's contributions to contemporary art have arguably been absorbed into and forgotten by social practice art. Elements of social practice art are compatible with neoliberal discourses, contributing to its depoliticization.

This thesis questions the depoliticization of Papergirl Vancouver. It aims to reconnect Papergirl Vancouver to the activist roots of social practice art and considers ways to reclaim and reignite feminist art activism within the project.

Keywords: Feminist Art; Social Practice Art; Community Art; Relational Aesthetics; Art Activism; Creative City
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CDA      Critical Discourse Analysis  
RCARC    Roundhouse Community Arts and Recreation Centre  
SFU      Simon Fraser University
Chapter 1.

Introduction

Papergirl Vancouver is a community arts project that attempts to redefine street and participatory art by combining art, philanthropy, and bicycles. It began in Vancouver in 2011 and takes place on an annual basis. The project is participatory, analogue, non-commercial, and impulsive. It begins with an open call for art; the art is then exhibited in a non-juried and uncurated public exhibition. On the final day of the exhibition, each piece of art is taken down and rolled up. Teams of volunteer cyclists, in the style of American “papergirls”, distribute the art to completely unsuspecting strangers on the streets of Vancouver (Ronniger, Ed., 2009).

Papergirl Vancouver is part of a larger global arts movement. Aisha Ronniger, an art student in Berlin, founded Papergirl in 2006, partly in response to a media debate that was trying to equate the prosecution of public poster ing with graffiti. Ronniger and her friends wanted to explore other means to make and share art in increasingly regulated public spaces. Papergirl has since spread worldwide, including projects in Mexico City, San Francisco, Toronto, Wollongong, and Manchester. Papergirl projects challenge the traditional art market economy by gifting art and making art accessible to all, and aim to effect social change in varying ways (Mateus, Ed., 2014). Papergirl is not alone in explicitly challenging the art market economy (through a “giftervention”), but its simultaneous reaction against neoliberal and postfeminist discourses and absorption by
them does make it the site of productive contradictions.¹ Surprisingly, Papergirl Vancouver has garnered little academic attention and minimal scholarly research exists on the project.

Using interviews with participants and fieldwork, I situate Papergirl Vancouver’s roots in the Second Wave feminist art movement. As part of the repudiation of feminist politics in the neoliberal era, feminist art’s contributions to contemporary art have arguably been absorbed into and forgotten by social practice art. Social practice art literature, however, largely fails to acknowledge this (Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994; Cottingham, 2000; Moravec, 2012; Parker & Pollock, 1987; Reckitt, 2001, 2013). Elements of social practice art are compatible with neoliberal discourses of entrepreneurial subjects and creative cities, contributing to the depoliticization of much community-based social practice art (Bishop, 2012; De Cauter et al., Eds., 2011; Léger, Ed., 2011; McRobbie, 2001, 2009; Peck, 2005; Raunig et al., Eds., 2011). This thesis questions the depoliticization of Papergirl Vancouver. It aims to reconnect Papergirl Vancouver to the activist roots of social practice art and considers ways to reclaim and reignite feminist art activism within the project.

Social practice art emerged in the 1990s. In contrast to earlier political art movements (i.e. the modernist avant-garde), social practice art is defined by open participation and audience involvement, a reaction against commodification and consumerism, and a collaborative partnership between the artist and participants. Social practice art projects take place in local settings and are centered on facilitating dialogue between community members, with an underlying goal of catalyzing social change

¹ Purves (Ed., 2005) cites many examples of gift giving-based art practices. Examples include: Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s candy piles (visitors are invited to take a piece of candy); Ben Kimmont’s street actions (the artist approached strangers on the street and offered to help them with their housework); Jorgen Svensson’s Bus 993 (1993; the artist offered free bus rides between cities in Sweden); and Rirkrit Tiravanija’s pad thai (1990; the artist cooked and served food to exhibition visitors) (p. x-4). Unlike Papergirl Vancouver (which gives the gift of art) these practices gift other things or services and may take place in gallery settings. Also, in contrast to most of the practices Purves describes, in Papergirl Vancouver the audience gives and receives (versus the transfer of goods and services from the artist to the audience) and the project is not facilitated by a single artist (but many artists and volunteers).
(Bishop, 2006a; Kester, 2004). Critics, however, question the intrinsically democratic relations that social practice art projects supposedly establish, doubt the projects’ relevance, and accuse projects of being apolitical (Bishop, 2004, 2006; Mouffe, 2008; Thompson et al., 2004).

By comparison, Second Wave feminist art is characterized by its political activism and its ties to the larger women’s liberation movement. The Second Wave feminist art movement began in the 1960s, a period of great political activism and cultural change. It was determined to transform the art world in which the male “creative genius” dominated, and the wider culture that both suppressed women’s perspectives and discriminated against women (Moravec, 2012; Parker & Pollock, 1987). The artistic contributions of the Second Wave feminist art movement reflect these apparent political ties and include: the use of personal experiences (generated by consciousness-raising) in performance art; the blurring of private and public boundaries in participatory art (integrating the feminist rallying cry of the “personal is political”); decentering the individual artistic genius by elevating the role of collaboration in the art-making process; de/reconstructing race and gender representations; and reacting against dominant (modernist) art conventions and culture (Broude & Garrard, 1994; Reckitt, 2001). Feminist scholars recognize these contributions as substantial. Broude & Garrard (Eds., 1994) argue: “feminist art and art history helped to initiate postmodernism in America” (p. 10). Reckitt (Ed., 2001) similarly points out that many of contemporary art’s major innovations are indebted to feminism: “feminist artists have revised the possibilities of art as a political and aesthetic practice” (p. 1).

2 Kester (2004) discusses two widely cited examples of social practice art: Austrian arts collective WochenKlausur’s *Intervention to Aid Drug-Addicted Women* (Zurich, 1994-1995) and Suzanne Lacy, Annice Jacoby, and Chris Johnson’s *The Roof Is On Fire* (California, 1994). By staging “floating dialogues” on boat cruises WochenKlausur aimed to create conversation between politicians, journalists, sex workers, and activists to address Zurich’s drug addiction and prostitution issues. Lacy et al. staged a series of improvisational dialogues on a rooftop between high school students and the Oakland Police Department to address media stereotypes and racial profiling of young people of colour (p. 1-6).

3 I recognize that my approach to Second Wave feminist art is centered on American feminist art; I discuss this American-centrism further throughout this thesis. The minimal literature on social practice art, which does acknowledge the genre’s historical roots in Second Wave feminist art, presents limitations: it largely discusses only American feminist artists.
Feminist art critics and historians discuss the ongoing need to reclaim second wave feminist art activism and acknowledge the feminist historicity of social practice art, but cite a lack of political urgency to do so (Broude & Garrard, Eds., 2005; Lacy, 2010). For example, Lucy Lippard states:

> It’s not just nostalgia that keeps calling me back to the pioneering feminist art of the ’70s, but the ever-more obvious affinities with what’s going on in the ’90s. It seems politically and aesthetically crucial that the work done then not be forgotten now, and that its connections to the succeeding decades be clarified. (Quoted in Lacy, 2010, p. 185)

Lacy (2010) similarly states:

> “This larger vision of feminist art – embracing art as an agent in social transformation – is a radical legacy that must be reclaimed, since the questions asked today by younger artists are so similar to those upon which work in the seventies was built.” (p. 193)

Lacy (2010, p. 168-171) and Broude & Garrard (Eds., 2005, p. vii-viii) both comment on “forgotten” feminist history and the repeated suppression of women artist’s perspectives and agency despite their efforts to challenge patriarchal art history. Since the 1990s, however, there have been noted efforts to revive, restage, and reexamine second wave feminist art works. Examples include: Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz’s The Performing Archive: Restricted Access (12 small television monitors displayed video interviews with young women artists born during the 1970s or early 1980s who addressed their relationship to feminism); and Laura Cottingham’s NowHere exhibition (1996; a survey of works by second wave feminist artists from Europe, Japan, and the United States) and video essay Not For Sale: Feminism and Art in the U.S.A. during the 1970s (1992).

My intention in this thesis is not to discount the work of second and third wave feminist artists and their efforts to reclaim feminist art activism; rather I seek to contribute to and further the work that still needs to be done. Similarly, while much community-

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4 Lacy has been deeply immersed in feminism since the late 1960s and has been especially influential in mapping out feminist art history and its complicated relation to socially engaged art practices since the 1970s (Roth in Lacy, 2010).
based social practice art is arguably depoliticized (an argument further supported by the participants I interviewed), there are examples of political community-based art. For example, Kester (2011) summarizes several effective arts for social and political change projects, including the art and environmental organization Ala Plástica in Argentina; the artistic and cultural project Huit Facettes-Interaction in Senegal; the Park Fiction project in Germany; and the non-profit arts organization Project Row Houses in the United States.

1.1. Informed by Feminist Values

This thesis revisits Papergirl Vancouver’s feminist and social practice art roots (that I have identified) in attempt to partly address the forgotten feminist relations of social practice art. It also seeks to critique social practice and participatory art from a feminist perspective. My research, thus, is informed by and grounded in feminist values. I define feminist values as: identifying art as socially constructed and acknowledging the social production, signification, and reception of art; understanding the institutional factors behind the production of art and their role in determining an artist’s success; exposing the value system and inherent patriarchal hierarchies of the art economy; and ultimately effecting social change. This thesis also tries to acknowledge the external influences on social practice art. I do so by situating Papergirl Vancouver in a wider framework of neoliberalism, postfeminism, and creative city discourse.

Feminist art curator and critic Helena Reckitt has been especially influential in guiding my feminist approach to research. In completing a Directed Readings in Summer 2013 (entitled Social Practice Art: Feminist Art and Relational Aesthetics) I became increasingly aware of and frustrated by the elements of Second Wave feminist art that

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5 Parker & Pollock (Eds., 1987) argue: “To be feminist at all work must be conceived within the framework of a structural, economic, political and ideological critique of the power relations of society and with a commitment to collective action for their radical transformation” (p. 80). Similarly, Nochlin (1971) states: “art is not a free, autonomous activity of a super-endowed individual, ‘influenced’ by previous artists […] but, rather, that the total situation of art making, both in terms of the development of the art maker and in the nature and quality of the work of art itself, occur in a social situation […] and are mediated and determined by specific and definable social institutions”.

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were present in, but rarely acknowledged by, social practice art. Reckitt’s article, ‘Forgotten Relations: Feminist Artists and Relational Aesthetics’ (2013), from which I draw the title of this thesis, provides a much-needed feminist critique of Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics and the absence, or “forgotten relations”, of feminism in relational artwork. Her critique can easily be extended to social practice art; the need to do so was a driving force in my research. Given, however, social practice art’s highly interdisciplinary nature, my research also similarly required an interdisciplinary approach (see Chapter Two; Bishop, 2012). Papergirl Vancouver invites a feminist art historical perspective and critique, but to provide greater depth and complexity to my analysis, I have also used perspectives from wider art history, political philosophy, cultural policy, and critical theory (see Appendix A, Research Design & Methodology: Other Critical Perspectives).

In my feminist approach to research, I define Papergirl Vancouver as a community arts project from a feminist perspective. Feminist artists have defined community art as:

art produced for a group that is rooted in a common experience distinct from the outside world. The group’s common bonds or continuity through geographic boundaries and/or cultural ties are shared by its members. Deep connections between community members help create distinct art forms that are representative of the depth and history of the group’s traditions. The relationship formed by individual artists and the community at large shapes the development of acceptable forms. (Bettie-Sue Hertz in Heresies Collective, Inc., 1987, p. 2)

1.2. Research Design and Methodology

Papergirl Vancouver is used as a descriptive case study for this thesis. I also studied the original Papergirl project in Berlin to situate Papergirl Vancouver within the wider context of the global Papergirl movement. My case study commenced in October 2013 and concluded in April 2014. I completed qualitative data collection on Papergirl Vancouver in the form of fieldwork in Metro Vancouver. My fieldwork included semi-structured active interviews with Papergirl Vancouver project founders, artists involved in the project, and project volunteers; and my own involvement and self-immersion in the project as a volunteer Community Ambassador (2012-2013) and Team Leader (January
2014 to present). My fieldwork was imperative to the completion of my research due to the small amount of scholarship available on the subject. Bishop (2012) also argues that fieldwork is essential to the study and critique of social practice art; visual analyses alone cannot grasp the participatory elements of social practice art and the affective dynamics of and motivations behind participation.  

My self-immersion in the project was imperative due to the nature of Papergirl Vancouver (an ephemeral social practice art project). My role as Team Leader provided me with a greater understanding of how the project functions from an organizational standpoint, and allowed me access to a multiplicity of Papergirl Vancouver documents (i.e. partnership agreements, project charter, etc.). Bishop (2012) similarly acknowledges the importance of long-term self-immersion, stating: social practice art "tends to value what is invisible: a group dynamic, a social situation, a change of energy, a raised consciousness. As a result, it is an art dependent on first-hand experience, and preferably over a long duration" (p. 6). Consequently, during the research process I also adopted a self-reflexivity accorded to hermeneutic phenomenology wherein "the biases and assumptions of the researcher are not bracketed or set aside, but rather are embedded and essential to the interpretive process" (Laverty, 2003, p. 17). Even though onsite commitment is needed to fully understand a social practice art project, this makes it increasingly difficult for the researcher to remain objective as they become more involved in the project and form personal relationships with its participants. After determining Papergirl Vancouver would be my focus of study, I made these intentions clear to the project’s participants. However, the relationships and trust I have established with the project’s participants seemingly improved the quality, depth, and candidness of my interviews with them. Finally, it is unlikely I would have chosen

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6 Lacy (in Cartiere & Willis, Eds., 2008) also provides a useful discussion of three “fruitful directions” for the critical analysis of social practice art (p. 22). Of her three strategies (close reading critique, multivocal critique, and continental theory canon), close reading critique directly relates to my methodological approach. In this approach, the writer “[...] with intimate access follows the process of the work, describing and analyzing, somewhat like being in the studio from inspiration to exhibition” (p. 22).

7 Like Bishop, Lacy (in Cartiere & Willis, Eds., 2008) emphasizes the benefits of immersing oneself in the practice: “[...] close reading expands, amplifies, and adds complexity to the discourse” (p. 22).

8 See Appendix D, Study Details, for a more technical summary of my research design and methodology.
Papergirl Vancouver as my area of research, had I not known about, understood, or been involved with the project first.

1.3. Thesis Structure

This thesis begins with a summary of the background of Papergirl Vancouver and the development of Papergirl in Berlin. Chapter Two provides a literature review of social practice and feminist art. I attempt to define and establish a historical trajectory for both art practices. Chapter Three discusses neoliberal, postfeminist, and creative city discourse. I identify the absorption of social practice and feminist art by these discourses and discuss the implications of this. Chapter Four summarizes my research findings and emphasizes several key findings: Papergirl Vancouver’s (mis)identification as political art; participants’ non-identification as activists; Papergirl’s feminist denial; and the project’s productive contradictions (i.e. its complicated absorption by and reaction to neoliberal and postfeminist discourse). Finally, Chapter Five summarizes challenges facing social practice art today and suggests solutions for revitalizing political social practice art and reigniting feminist art activism. I situate Papergirl Vancouver as a potential site for implementing these practices.

1.4. Papergirl Vancouver Project Background

Aisha Ronniger originally founded Papergirl in 2006 in Berlin. Ronniger was applying for art school in Germany at the time and was finding it difficult to get in (she was later accepted). She became increasingly frustrated by and felt isolated working on her art alone in her studio. A friend of Ronniger’s who had recently moved to Berlin from New York City suggested that they go out pasting together.\(^9\) Pasting proved extremely influential on Ronniger’s artistic practice and life: it provided her with new artistic perspective, a sense of liberation and fun, an accessible way to show her art in public, and a sense of community and friendship with other artists, cyclists, and community

\(^9\) Pasting is widely used by guerrilla street artists to post and display their art. A mix of wheat flour and water is used to stick or paste paper artwork to a vertical wall surface.
members. During this time, a media debate was also trying to equate the prosecution of public posterling or pasting with illegal graffiti. As an alternative to pasting, Ronniger’s same friend suggested that they throw their art in strangers’ faces in the style of American paperboys, and Papergirl was born (Ronniger, Ed., 2009; Ronniger, personal communication, November 27, 2013). Ronniger recalls: “We were thinking, ‘there must be other ways of making art in the public space’ – not so much out of fear of possible punishment, but the desire to try out new things” (Ronniger, Ed., 2009, p. 10). She also makes clear, somewhat detracting from the initial political character of Papergirl: “Papergirl is not a reaction against graffiti or pasting: it is just what helped the idea come along. I wasn’t scared of penalties or anything. It was just something that brought up a discussion” (Ronniger, personal communication, November 27, 2013).

By comparison, Papergirl Vancouver is run out of the Roundhouse Community Arts & Recreation Centre (RCARC). In 2011, a RCARC volunteer who was on exchange from Germany presented the idea of Papergirl to the RCARC’s Volunteer Program Coordinator. Admittedly, Papergirl may at first appear best suited for an art programmer’s portfolio. The Volunteer Program Coordinator, however, saw potential to develop the volunteerism element of Papergirl, particularly the fact it is fuelled by volunteers, and the meaningful and unique engagement it could offer (for RCARC volunteers and the wider community) through the arts. The Program Coordinator added that similar means of engagement were not yet being done at the centre (Mateus, personal communication, November 25, 2013).

Ronniger describes Papergirl as an impulsive and urban action: “The basic idea of the project is to present art to the public in an unconventional way, to surprise people with unexpected gifts and bring them into contact with art in their everyday life” (Ronniger, Ed., 2009, p. 4-5). Papergirl’s slogan “the gift of giving art” is central to the

10 The wider, and potentially problematic, institutional context of Papergirl Vancouver is discussed in Chapter Four. It is a project supported by and associated with the RCARC and City of Vancouver Parks Board and is consequently subject to specific parameters. The impact of neoliberal and creative city discourse is apparent, particularly in the City of Vancouver’s Culture Plan for Vancouver, 2008-2018, Creative City (2008) and the City’s Cultural Services website (2014).
project and is frequently repeated by Papergirl Berlin, Papergirl Vancouver, and projects in other cities (Mateus, Ed., 2014).

Despite the project’s global reach, all Papergirl projects are expected to adhere to six core themes developed by Ronniger (Ed., 2009): 1) curated versus uncurated; 2) digital versus analogue; 3) inside outside; 4) gift giving versus receiving; 5) happiness versus fate; and 6) commercial versus non-commercial.\(^{11}\) Ronniger developed these core themes in partial fulfillment of her Master’s degree and after seeing the need to provide greater background and depth to Papergirl:

> After all these years of just doing it, I had so many talks and discussions with people that I felt there was content and definitely something to talk about, otherwise why is it so moving for so many different people. (Ronniger, personal communication, November 27, 2013)

Ronniger also hopes that these themes (detailed in the Papergirl Manual, Ronniger, Ed., 2009) will help to prevent other Papergirl projects from making the same mistakes that she has made with the project.

Essential to its classification as social practice and feminist art, Papergirl is process-based and multi-phased. The project is divided into four sections, which form the main body of Papergirl: Open Call, Exhibition, Action, and Development. These four sections are sub-divided into the arms and legs of the project: Documentation, Workshop, Art-Roll, Reactions, Camp, and Financing.\(^{12}\) While the action or distribution of art is the main event and integral to Papergirl, Ronniger advises that the other elements shape the project but are not essential (Ronniger, Ed., 2009, p. 4-5).

Challenging, however, its classification as social practice art, Papergirl’s open call tries to reach a wide, diverse audience; there are no specific target groups in mind or

\(^{11}\) Ronniger describes the project as analogue: “Since the works of art [received] are neither printed nor reproduced by us, but created by the participants themselves” (Ronniger, Ed., 2009, p. 10-11). This is considered in part a reaction against digitalization and the loss of public space.

\(^{12}\) Papergirl Berlin organized a camp for sister projects to meet, get to know each other, and exchange ideas. As a result, Ronniger became aware of Papergirl’s dependence on location and the need to consider various parameters specific to the location (i.e. the public’s receptivity to biking, the weather, how many people spend time outside, etc.).
attempts to form a politically coherent community.\textsuperscript{13} Ronniger encourages the use of multiple media channels to announce the project: “Therefore we call Papergirl \textit{PARTICIPATORY} and let every channel of communication awake the interest of a different audience. Through e-mail, blogs, posters, flyers and word-of-mouth, we try to reach a vast variety of people” (Ronniger, Ed., 2009, p. 10-11). Similarly, Papergirl Vancouver is active on multiple social media channels and attempts to engage and build community (online and offline) in this way. For example, Papergirl Vancouver’s website has detailed interviews and studio visits with local artists; it helps to support and promote other Papergirl projects; and its regular blog postings appear to provoke discussion and/or educate readers on Papergirl and general art history (Mateus, Ed., 2014).\textsuperscript{14} In addition, and integral to the project’s ethos, artists of all ages and abilities are encouraged to submit artwork and there are minimal submission requirements.\textsuperscript{15} Papergirl Vancouver repeatedly states: “The best part about it is that anyone can be a Papergirl; male, female, amateur, hobbyist, doodler and professional artists are all welcome!” (Mateus, Ed., 2014). This is evidenced in Papergirl Vancouver’s 2013 “Call for Entries” poster (see below, Figure 1.1).

\textsuperscript{13} Kester (2000) argues that social practice art processes are “most easily facilitated in those cases in which the artist collaborates with a politically coherent community, that is, with a community or collectivity that has, through its own internal processes, achieved some degree of coherence, and a sense of its own political interests, and is able to enter into a discursive collaboration on more equal footing”.

\textsuperscript{14} Past blog post titles include: “The Price of Art” (July 24, 2013); “The F-Word: Free Art” (July 5, 2013); “Impression(ist)s of the Street” (June 21, 2013); “Bicycle Up-Cycling Inspiration” (June 5, 2013); and “10 Ways to Connect with Others” (May 24, 2013) (Mateus, Ed., 2014).

\textsuperscript{15} Papergirl Vancouver requires that submitted work be: flexible (i.e. it can be rolled up or folded); a reasonable size; dry and fixed (but open to whatever medium the artist chooses to use); free of “blatantly racist, sexist, or otherwise overtly offensive and derogatory content”; and created by the artist that submits it (Mateus, Ed., 2014).
Figure 1.1. Papergirl Vancouver’s 2013 “Call for Entries” Poster

Note. Papergirl Vancouver’s accessibility and inclusivity are emphasized in its 2013 “Call for Entries” poster. Poster used with permission by Michele Mateus.

The project’s exhibition is juryless and uncurated. Ronniger (Ed., 2009) acknowledges the influence of Berlin’s long-standing tradition of juryless and uncurated
exhibitions. But, she also establishes Papergirl as unique, clearly situating Papergirl outside the art market economy: Papergirl’s exhibition has “a contemporary character [in different ways] that jury-free exhibitions have lost over time as market mechanisms, means of reception and strategies of conveyance have changed profoundly” (Ronniger, Ed., 2009, p. 11). Ronniger seems to establish the traditional gallery exhibition as an ideological space in close proximity to the art market economy. Consequently, the exhibition is a site of challenge or space of contestation for Papergirl: “The more radical break with the principles of the art market is performed, of course, by Papergirl. The art is given away! Recipients have it practically forced upon them – with a charming wink” (Ronniger, Ed., 2009, p. 15).

The purpose of the exhibition is to: inform participants and other community members about the participating artists; increase the visibility of the project; and build suspense for the project’s ride out: “Of course, the exhibition period before the street action is also important to give the participating artists, bicyclists and others involved a glimpse of the impending happening” (Ronniger, Ed., 2009, p. 13). As well, unlike many traditional art institutions, guests are encouraged to touch the artwork. To foster this more informal, fun, and relaxed atmosphere, Ronniger (Ed., 2009) encourages “improvisational curating” and suggests using clothespins to hang the artwork (Papergirl Vancouver has adopted these practices). Papergirl Vancouver’s “improvisational curating” is shown below in Figure 1.2.
Figure 1.2. Papergirl Vancouver’s 2013 Exhibition

Artwork is hung by clothespins and strung up on twine in Papergirl Vancouver’s uncurated and non-juried 2013 exhibition. Photo used with permission by Julie Nicole Photography.

Following the exhibition, Papergirl’s action involves the distribution of artwork by volunteer cyclists. It is random, humorous, unexpected, and described by Ronniger (Ed., 2009) as “an ambush on the street” (p. 13).¹⁶ As noted earlier, the action is integral to Papergirl. Ronniger seemingly locates Papergirl’s powerful effects in the action: “The moment of enchantment that transports us, when art unfolds its effect. Papergirl achieves this with abundant charm, happiness and lightness in the unexpected moment

¹⁶ In 2013, Papergirl Vancouver’s ride out took place in Stanley Park and along the Vancouver Seawall as part of the City of Vancouver’s Stanley Park 125th Anniversary Celebrations.
of randomness” (Ronniger, Ed., 2009, p. 15).17 Interesting, is the contrast between Papergirl’s rather charming art distribution, and that at times abruptness or aggression attributed to other interventionist, activist, and modernist avant-garde art (i.e. Situationism). Evidently (as if fearful of offending), Ronniger reiterates: “It really is not our intention to offend anyone. It’s all about making unexpected presents to strangers, depending on luck and chance. That is also the reason why [the ride out] route and/or date are not published” (Ronniger, Ed., 2009, p. 20-21).18 Papergirl’s emphasis on the action is comparable to the centrality of performance art to feminist art (see Chapter Two). Photographs from Papergirl Vancouver’s 2013 ride out are shown below in Figure 1.3 and Figure 1.4.

17 Papergirl Vancouver’s “action” is also integral to the project’s uniqueness and potential political power and disruption. Purves (Eds., 2005) discusses the failure, cooption and institutionalization of many gift giving based-art “detournments” or disruptions due to their fixture in a single place (p. 38). Instead, he argues: “For gift economies to keep functioning as heretical detournments, their emergence must be unheralded and their exit swift, with a reappearance elsewhere similarly unexpected. This is the essence of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ), a concept developed by the scholar Hakim Bey as a way to envision the contemporary possibilities for social resistance and freedom” (p. 38).

18 Fittingly, Bishop (2012) identifies a trend amongst contemporary social practice art works as being cautious and fearful of offending people: they “insert themselves unannounced into the everyday flow of street life, preferring to risk being overlooked entirely than to announce themselves to an audience whose responses might be predetermined by this knowledge” (p. 126).
The engagement of (hopefully) everyone is apparent in the project's multiple layers. Papergirl Vancouver encourages anyone to be a cyclist on the ride out and strives to create a sense of community amongst the cyclists and core volunteers. For example, in Figure 1.4 below, a volunteer Papergirl Vancouver cyclist enthusiastically speaks with artwork recipients during the 2013 ride out.
Ronniger (Ed., 2009) similarly discusses the enjoyment and gifts cyclists, artists, and art recipients all receive: “The challenge of overcoming the urge to own and letting go instead, makes the feat all the greater upon seeing the reaction of a recipient to the unexpected gift! This is the priceless gift we get in return” (p. 30-31). A relationship, albeit likely temporary, is established between the artist, cyclist, and art recipient (i.e. Figure 1.4, above). Both Ronniger (Ed., 2009) and Papergirl Vancouver (Mateus, Ed., 2014) emphasize the collective-forming power of the social practice of gift giving and bestowing (i.e. gift giving is attributed with the power to hold together a community). The sense of gift-giving and sharing art underlies Papergirl and is key to Papergirl Vancouver’s efforts for social change. In Papergirl Vancouver’s 2013 Mission Statement they write:
In 2012, the Vancouver Foundation came out with some solid research on the number one problem faced by Vancouverites: one quarter of our population suffers from isolation and loneliness, and a majority of people complain on some level about the difficulty of meeting new people, and a lack of community. Papergirl Vancouver is taking steps to combat this problem by using art as a vehicle for social change. (Mateus, Ed., 2014)

In attempt to further this temporary relationship, art recipients are encouraged to contact their artist (contact information is optionally provided on the back of each artwork, artists are listed on Papergirl Vancouver’s website, and artwork is documented on Papergirl Vancouver’s Flickr). This is also intended to provide a space for artists and is seen as a reciprocal action: “This way the artists are given a platform in return” (Ronniger, Ed., 2009, p. 16-17).

Papergirl’s development includes the project’s associated documentation, workshops, the art-roll, and financing. Due to Papergirl’s ephemeral nature, documentation of art is seen as essential: “A project whose main strength lies within transience has to be especially well documented, even more so when it is unrepeatable” (Ronniger, Ed., 2009, p. 16-17). Workshops are commonly developed around “up-cycling” or repurposing old bike parts. For Papergirl Vancouver, workshops are an integral part of their wider community outreach and engagement and are key for securing government and other grant funding. In 2013, Papergirl Vancouver offered several three-hour workshops at the RCARC that taught participants how to print-make with up-cycled materials such as old bike parts. In keeping with Papergirl’s action, wider project ethos, and themes of social practice art, the workshops’ emphasis is on the process and relations established in and by artmaking: “After all, it doesn’t really matter what is produced in the workshop, it’s about doing things together. Whether it is printing, painting a mural, or pimping bicycles” (Ronniger, Ed., 2009, p. 28-29). Papergirl Vancouver’s “pimped out bicycles” for the 2013 ride out are shown below in Figure 1.5.
Papergirl projects are grassroots, largely volunteer-run, and function on very small budgets. The RCARC Association and the City of Vancouver Parks Board primarily fund Papergirl Vancouver (lending the project a more institutional character than the ad hoc character of Papergirl Berlin; see Chapter Four). Additional funding, sponsorships, and in-kind donations are sought from various granting bodies (including the Awesome Foundation and Vancouver Foundation), other community organizations, and local businesses (including local artisan boutique Bird on a Wire).

In the Papergirl Manual, Ronniger (Ed., 2009) comments on the international growth and global spread of Papergirl: though she did not expect or intend for Papergirl to become a global movement and worries about the project’s commercialization, Ronniger is also pleased and excited by it:

At the same time we worried that the project might lose its principles out of our hands. But we would want nothing less than to claim ownership of
a project whose main aim is giving instead of possession. We do not own this idea – it’s like an open-source project – and we are thrilled by the development of sister-projects. (Ronniger, Ed., 2009, p. 48-49)

While Ronniger has expressed desire to revive the project in Berlin, the final instalment of Papergirl Berlin took place in 2010 (Ronniger, personal communication, November 27, 2013).

1.5. Situating Papergirl in the Feminist and Social Practice Art Movements

This thesis situates Papergirl Vancouver’s roots in the Second Wave feminist art and social practice art movements. I identify elements from both movements in the project. Papergirl contains the following strands of social practice art: street art, relational aesthetics, dialogical aesthetics, public art, graffiti, community and participatory art, performance art, and Happenings, amongst others. Ronniger openly acknowledges the influence of street art: “Bearing in mind the streets and street art as the origins of Papergirl, where no one dictates what is shown or not, we certainly do not want to impose on anyone if or what to contribute!” (Ronniger, Ed., 2009, p. 10-11).

Themes shared by social practice art, Second Wave feminist art, and Papergirl include: public and widespread accessibility to art (i.e. “art for everyone”); interventionist approach; do-

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19 I do not identify Papergirl Vancouver as strictly a form of conceptual art; however, social practice art and feminist art have adapted and use elements of conceptual art (i.e. the dematerialization and anti-commodification of art; emphasis on process; refusal of modernism; linking art practice with wider ideological and institutional structures; see Lewitt, 1967). There are (political) limitations to conceptual art; in particular, Second Wave feminist artists had to adapt “its methodological premises to their growing awareness of the vital struggles of the civil rights and feminist movements, which in turn constituted a crucial shift in the notion of how art could have a critical social and political resonance” (Wark, 2001, p. 44). Conceptual art arguably also denies subject-centered inquiry and personal experience, elements essential to Second Wave feminist art (Wark, 2001).

20 Other additional influences, outside the scope of my research, include: mail art and the gift economy. Purves (Ed., 2005) notably identifies a gift “trend” in social practice art and identifies such recurring themes of: gift and generosity, democracy and exchange, charity, hospitality, and non-monetary exchange systems. Works embody gifts; art is more audience-oriented; and a more meaningful exchange and underlying connection are established between the active receiver/audience member and the giver/artist. See Cheal (1988) and Mauss (2000) for a detailed discussion of the gift economy.
it-yourself (DIY) mentality (i.e. “everyone is creative”; blurring the boundary between the
professional and amateur); highlighting the role of the spectator as integral to the
process and project; dematerialized and ephemeral; use of media as a form of
communication; attempts to bring art into the everyday (bridging the gap between art
and life); community building; and process-based. Finally, characteristics shared by
specifically feminist art and Papergirl include: female-powered; the emphasis on
collective action and creation; participants’ identification as makers versus artists (see
Appendix C, Participant Profiles); goals of decentralizing the art world; goals of
challenging single ownership and individual creative genius; inside outside; and the
importance of craft and collage (i.e. the collage aesthetic of Papergirl’s exhibition).21
Social practice art and feminist art are further explained in Chapter Two.

Papergirl, however, challenges and at times redefines these established art
forms, and it is thus difficult to classify Papergirl as a singular art practice. Papergirl’s
inherent, but productive, contradictions are discussed in Chapter Five. In the next
chapter, I provide a literature review of social practice art and feminist art. I attempt to
define and establish a historical trajectory for both art practices and address social
practice art’s activism roots.

21 “Inside outside”, a key theme of Papergirl as established by the project’s founder Ronniger
(Ed., 2009), a strategy of accessibility for second wave feminist art. For example, Lacy (2010)
writes (in reference to second wave feminist art): “The study of power and its uses and
abuses leads to a consideration of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. In the seventies, ‘inside’ was high art
as revealed through glossy art magazines; ‘outside’ was the streets, the community, the
homes of the working class.” (p. 164)
Chapter 2. Defining Papergirl Vancouver’s Feminist and Social Practice Art Roots

2.1. Introduction

The (American) Second Wave feminist art movement began in the 1960s, determined to transform the art world in which the male “creative genius” dominated, and the wider culture that suppressed women’s perspectives and discriminated against women. Realized in a period of great political activism and cultural change, the Second Wave feminist art movement is described as a social movement in itself and as part of the larger women’s liberation movement (Moravec, 2012; Parker & Pollock, Eds., 1987). Whilst highly individualistic, feminist art is also an integral political tool for feminist activism, especially used in the 1970s. Art provides feminists with a medium to express their convictions and challenge cultural institutions, and a means to “align cultural production with a clearly defined set of [feminist] political values” (Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994, p. 264) changing the meaning of art in the process.

An increased focus on theory and critiques of essentialism in the 1980s distracted from the feminist art activism agenda; however, the contributions of the feminist art movement to subsequent art activism are significant (Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994; Lippard, 1980; Reckitt, Ed., 2001). Reflecting feminist artists’ apparent ties with the women’s movement, these contributions include: the use of experiences (generated by consciousness-raising) in performance art; the blurring of private and public boundaries in participatory art (integrating the feminist rallying cry of the “personal is political”); elevating the role of collaboration in the art-making process; de/reconstructing race and gender representations; and reacting against dominant (modernist) art conventions and culture and providing a socially-concerned alternative
(Lippard, 1980). In addition, Broude & Garrard (Eds., 1994) argue “feminist art and art history helped to initiate postmodernism in America” (p. 10).

The feminist art movement’s impact on contemporary social practice art is of particular importance. Since the 1990s, contemporary art has been increasingly defined by: social practice, interdisciplinarity, collective and participatory art practices, and the changing role of the spectator or viewer. Scholars root these changes in earlier political art traditions, such as Dadaism, Situationism, the Russian Avant-Garde, and the Happenings, amongst others (Alberro, 2009; Bishop, Ed., 2006; Felshin, Ed., 1995). Bourriaud (2002) and Kester (2004) are noted for their theoretical contributions and attempts to critically define this “new” genre; their respective theories of relational aesthetics and dialogical aesthetics are discussed below (Section 2.2).

Feminist scholars argue that feminist art practices “laid the foundations” for current theories in social practice art (Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994; Lacy, Ed., 1995); comparatively, Bourriaud (2002) denies any historical predecessors to relational aesthetics, while Kester (2004) makes only faint reference to feminist art practices. Reckitt’s (2013) argument is of particular note here: she identifies the absence of feminism (the “forgotten relations”) in relational artwork. Reckitt bases her critique on Bourriaud’s rejection of relational artwork’s historical predecessors (deemed a “memory lapse” and the “ultimate feminist critique”) and the unacknowledged feminist labour aspects of relational artwork; particularly, its emulation of forms of affective and immaterial work, long areas of female activity and feminist analysis (p. 9). Reckitt (Ed., 2001) similarly points out that many of contemporary art’s major innovations are indebted to feminism: “feminist artists have revised the possibilities of art as a political and aesthetic practice” (p. 1).

Despite these contributions and the evident similarities between Second Wave feminist art and social practice art (established below in Section 2.4), literature on social

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22 Wallen (2001) explains the significance of the “personal is political”: “The prevailing ideology was that through the sharing of the personal women could make connections and realize that their experience was the result of specific social/political conditions” (p. 53).

23 Notably in Kester’s more recent work The One and the Many (2011) he does acknowledge the contributions of feminist artists and collectives to social practice art (including Womanhouse, the Guerilla Girls, Lacy, Labowitz, and Ukeles).
practice art largely fails to acknowledge feminism’s contributions (see Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994; Cottingham, 2000; Moravec, 2012; Parker & Pollock, Eds., 1987, Reckitt, Ed., 2001; Reckitt, 2013; Wallen, 2001). This paper serves as starting point to explicitly identify the contributions of feminist art practices (mainly those of the 1970s) to Papergirl Vancouver (a social practice art project). As discussed in Chapter One, my intention is also to contribute to the ongoing research that identifies and advocates for feminist art’s contributions to wider social practice and contemporary art. In Chapter Five, I argue that recognizing these contributions may be integral to re-politicizing social practice art (particularly in the case of Papergirl Vancouver).

In the sections that follow, I provide an overview of changing contemporary art practices, with emphasis on Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics (2002) and Kester’s dialogical aesthetics (2004). Section 2.3 provides an overview of the Second Wave feminist art movement and discusses feminist art’s ties to activism and the women’s movement, and the difficulty of defining a feminist style. Section 2.4 establishes feminist art’s contributions to and shared practices with social practice art. Section 2.5 offers a brief critique of social practice art with further critique discussed in Chapter Five.

2.2. Changing Contemporary Art Practices

2.2.1. Defining Social Practice Art

Social practice art refers to a collection of art practices: activist, relational, dialogical, conversational, community, participatory, social sculpture, street performance, and new genre public art, amongst others. It is collaborative, performative, socially-

24 For instance, Lacy (in Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994) states: “Although the 1990s has seen a resurgence of art works in which artists make contact with (marginalized) ‘others’… and from these connections develop more or less collaborative representations, art criticism has not recognized the precedents of this practice in 1970s feminism and performance art” (in Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994, p. 268).

25 There are evident ties between social sculpture’s proponent Joseph Beuys, his Free International University (FIU), and feminist artists: “many conceptual feminist artists of the late 1970s and 1980s germinated in the ground of the FIU. Beuys’ institutionally centred conceptual projects served as a point of departure for these engaged conceptual artists” (Mesch & Michely, Eds., 2007, p. 213).
and politically oriented, and process-based (versus object-based) art practice (see Bishop, Ed., 2006; Bourriaud, 2002; Cartiere, 2010; Kester, 2004; Lacy, Ed., 1995; Thompson, Ed., 2012). Reflecting the influence of the avant-garde, social practice art “appropriates social forms as a way to bring art closer to everyday life” (Bishop, Ed., 2006, p. 10). The artwork’s form is difficult to characterize as social practice art typically takes place outside traditional art venues; evidently critics question its aesthetics and “if it is art” (see Bishop, Ed., 2006; Bishop, 2006a; Felshin, Ed., 1995). Simplistically, however, social practice art can be defined as durational projects taking place in local settings and centered on facilitating dialogue between community members through the “creative orchestration of collaborative encounters and conversations” (Kester, 2004, p. 1). Social practice artists “either choose to co-create their work with a specific audience or propose critical interventions within existing social systems that inspire debate or catalyze social exchange” (Goldbard, 2013).

Bishop (Ed., 2006) identifies three central concerns of social practice art: activation, authorship, and community. Social practice art desires to “create an active subject, one who will be empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation”; single authorship is replaced by non-hierarchical collaboration; and it aims to restore the community’s social bond (broken by capitalism and consumerism) “through a collective elaboration of meaning” (p. 12). Many critics argue for an expanded definition of participation with respect to critical social practice art. Goldenberg & Reed (2008) state participation “should be understood as comprising not only a hands-on, ‘active’ interaction, but also includes exit, indifference, non-participation, and forms of spectatorship”. Bishop (2012) similarly suggests participatory art projects operate with a twofold gesture of opposition and amelioration by opposing capitalism but attempting to ameliorate social bonds and create social change (p. 12-13).

Kester (2005) also discusses empowerment in relation to this new form of participation; he describes audience engagement as a “haptic experience actualized by immersion and participation in a process” through which individuals attain a sense of empowerment (p. 6).

It should be acknowledged that Bishop is both highly contested and widely referenced in the social practice and contemporary art fields. While one can find issue with several of her arguments (particularly her suggested “fear” of the artist surrendering their autonomy to collaborators; see Charnley, 2011; Kester, 2011) I found that her work accurately and explicitly exposed the shortcomings of much community-based social practice art.
Social practice art largely rose out of: conceptual art in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, the Parisian Dadaists, and Allan Kaprow’s Happenings. Conceptualism was defined by its: “critique of the art object and formalist aesthetic strategies and its desire to narrow the distance between art and audience and art and life” (Felshin, Ed., 1995, p. 17). It should be noted that the struggle to bridge the gap between art and society or everyday life has been an ongoing concern and integral element of multiple aesthetic movements (particularly twentieth-century avant-garde); social practice art attempts to bridge the gap in a different way (see Kester, 2004). These changes in art during the 1960s parallel those occurring in the “real world” and anti-Vietnam War era; e.g. a move toward “greater participation, inclusivity, and democratization of existing institutions” (Felshin, Ed., 1995, p. 17; see Lacy, Ed., 1995). Later changes in art during the 1990s are primarily tied to the shift from Fordism to Post-Fordism and Symbolic Economy and a reaction against capitalism and neoliberalism (see Chapter Three).

Social practice art seeks to: challenge dominant cultural representations; react against commodification and consumerism; expand aesthetic boundaries and operate outside traditional art venues; and ultimately, catalyze social change. Comparable to (most) feminist artists, Kester (2004) suggests social practice artists share a general

Augusto Boal, a Brazilian director, “developed an influential mode of theatrical therapy geared towards social change while in exile in Argentina in the 1970s” (Bishop, 2012, p. 105). Theatre of the Oppressed (amongst Boal’s other innovations) bridges artistic actions and Leftist politics and serves a variety of political and pedagogic goals. Spectators are reconceptualized as “spect-actors” and participate in a “rehearsal of revolution”. Bishop (2012) highlights the contribution of Boal’s work and argues: it “seems to be the hidden precursor of innumerable performance-based artistic experiments in public space that operate unannounced and unframed by a gallery apparatus” (p. 126).

Formalism sought to define each artistic medium in terms of its self-defining characteristics; it emphasizes art’s purity relative to other disciplines and areas of life (Felshin, Ed., 1995, p. 10). Lewitt’s seminal article (1967) discusses conceptual art: “In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.”

Rosalind Krauss’s essay Sculpture in the Expanded Field (1979) is cited as a major influence on the move outside the traditional art venue. Her essay defined works that moved beyond the historically recognized boundaries of modern sculpture by establishing a model of exclusions. Because of the continued evolution of art in the public realm, Cartiere (in Cartiere & Willis, Eds., 2008) has further developed Krauss’s model: “by adding an additional layer to include place-specific and site-specific public art, component sculpture, and installation” (p. 12).
dissatisfaction with the authority and traditions of the institutionalized art world, in which the critic or historian is viewed “as part of this larger legitimating apparatus” (p. 187-188). Mishmash or collage combining traditional and readymade objects is often used in social practice works to “mock” high and/or mass culture (Foster in Bishop, Ed., 2006). In its efforts to catalyze change, social practice art joins critical aesthetic practices with “elements of activism and community organizing” (Felshin, Ed., 1995, p. 26).

In part a reaction against formalism, social practice art operates in between and makes use of multiple art practices and disciplines. Its interdisciplinarity also facilitates its efforts for social change: interdisciplinary exchange can enable more open dialogue between diverse groups and communities, exploratory thinking, and critical perspective (Kester, 2004). In addition, social practice art may address controversial issues (i.e. WochenKlausur’s Intervention to Aid Drug-Addicted Women, Zurich, 1994-1995) but it does so outside the bounds of bureaucracy. This allows political officials and others participating in the social art process to be “insulated from direct media scrutiny” and to “communicate outside the rhetorical demands of their official status” (Kester, 2004, p. 2). By affirming their role as artists, versus activists, social practice artists are arguably relieved from local pressures and can gain greater power to act “as catalysts to local action” (Miles, 2010, p. 28; Heartney in Felshin, Ed., 1995).

Since the resurgence of community-based and social change-oriented art practices in the 1990s, apparent changes have occurred in the genre, particularly as a result of new digital communication and technologies. For example, Lacy (2010) comments on the political and social practices of post-millennial artists emphasizing “[…] the sophisticated ‘culture of display’ practiced by successful artists who use advertising and production technologies available as never before” (p. 236). In addition, digital communication has enabled the creation of diasporic communities and artists who “[…] reveal through art a world of interdependence and global significance, a world in which local issues are now understood as internationally relevant” (Lacy in Cartiere & Willis, Eds., 2008, p. 21).
2.2.2. Defining Political Art

Critics and participants alike often seem to distinguish between participatory social practice art and political social practice art (see Chapter Four). While social practice art can be viewed as inherently political (in part because of its: political content, emphasis on collectives and collaboration, and reaction against dominant institutions and conventions), critics argue that for social practice art to be truly and effectively political, the tension between art and politics must be sustained and encouraged (Bishop, 2012; De Cauter et al., Eds., 2011).\(^{31}\) Rancière (2004, 2009) theorizes the politics of autonomy versus the politics of heteronomy: artists are autonomous practitioners and art must remain autonomous in order to effect change (autonomy) versus art is fused with reality (heteronomy). Rancière also establishes a third way or grey zone in which: art intervenes in political issues without compromise; politics transcend the boundaries of art; and the tension between autonomy and heteronomy is sustained (attempts to resolve it are discouraged).

Bishop (2012) amongst others (see Section 2.5) argues that artistic/political dissensus and Rancière’s grey zone must be re-established to revitalize political and critical social practice art. These scholars see much social practice art today as simply collapsing into consensual order, thus depoliticizing it. Gablik (in Lacy, Ed., 1995) emphasizes the undesirability of this autonomy: “Autonomy, we now see, has condemned art to social impotence by turning it into just another class of objects for

\(^{31}\) Rancière (2004) states art and aesthetics are always political as art contains the utopian promise of a better world; one cannot conceive of an aesthetic judgment without also making it a political judgment. Mouffe (2007) similarly does not distinguish between political and non-political art; rather all art is political. See also Carterie, 2010; Léger, Ed., 2011. Iskin (in Heresies Collective, Inc., 1977) offers similar perspective in reference to feminist art: “The art was perceived as offensive precisely because it was not placed in a neutralizing environment like a gallery […] The art invaded their own daily working sphere where it threatened how they were viewed in their professional positions” (p. 76).
marketing and consumption” (p. 74). Significantly, feminist critique and deconstruction have been essential in exposing contemporary art’s lack of autonomy and its ties to a patriarchal capitalist ideology.

Expanding on this collapse of tension, Rancière (2004, 2009) and others also discuss the aestheticization of politics, and vice versa (the politicization of aesthetics). Leslie (in Raunig et al., Eds., 2011) for instance, observes: “Art movements have fused with the business of politics in a number of ways. Politics has become an art of display [...] We live in a world of mediated political spectacle that enforces passivity and knee-jerk reactions” (p. 188). Leslie (in Raunig et al., Eds., 2011) then offers his helpful definition of “real” political art:

For what is produced by the real politicization of art is not that which we have become accustomed to in galleries – politically correct art that largely satisfies itself with and within the gallery and grant system, competing within the terms of the creative and cultural industries. Rather the politicization of art means a thorough rejection of systems of display, production, and consumption, monitoring and inclusion as well as elitism and exclusion, as art disperses into everyday practice and becomes political, that is democratically available to all as practice and matter for critique. (p. 189)

Damien (2013) offers a second definition (easily applicable to feminist art) of political art: “Political art can thus be understood one way as the non-neutral strategy of using visual culture within social and protest movements to achieve certain ends”.

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32 Autonomy is the subject of heated debate between Kester and Bishop (which suggestively began following the publication of Bishop’s article ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents’ in the February 2006 edition of Artforum). Charnley (2011) aptly summarizes their “clashing” opinions: “Bishop argues that the autonomy of the artist is indispensable to the critical function of collaborative art, and that this is impeded by an ‘ethical turn’ in criticism that promotes ‘the sacrifice of authorship in the name of a ‘true’ and respectful collaboration’. By contrast, Kester affirms that ethical reflection is a central feature of collaborative art, where the artist must overcome their own privileged status in order to create an equal dialogue with participants.” (p. 37) Kester’s disagreement with Bishop is exemplified in Chapter One of his book The One and the Many (2011).

33 Lacy (2010) explains feminist artists’ political use of deconstruction: “Deconstruction was tied to an activist project of shifting power relationships in daily life, rather than a theoretical exercise in a rarefied language addressed to an art world viewership.” (p. 186) Lacy and Labowitz’s In Mourning and in Rage (1977) is cited as an example (the artists deconstructed gender representation in sex-violent news).
2.2.3. **Nicholas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics**

Bourriaud’s relational aesthetics (2002) though highly critiqued, is one of the first attempts to characterize the changing artistic practices of the 1990s. Relational artworks try to: “establish intersubjective encounters (be they literal or potential) in which meaning is elaborated collectively rather than in the privatized space of individual consumption” (Bishop, 2004, p. 54). Bourriaud (2002) argues that relational aesthetics is a new way to approach art, outside of the shadow of 1960s art history, and replace bourgeois aesthetic judgment. He maintains that relational works are no less politicized than artworks of the 1960s. Bishop (2004) clarifies Bourriaud’s distinction between the 1960s and the 1990s:

> The main difference, as he sees it, is the shift in attitude toward social change: instead of a ‘utopian’ agenda, today’s artists seek only to find provisional solutions in the here and now; instead of trying to change their environment, artists today are simply ‘learning to inhabit the world in a better way’; instead of looking toward a future utopia, this art sets up functioning ‘microtopias’ in the present. (p. 54)

Bishop (2004) counters Bourriaud’s amnesia around relational aesthetics’ historical predecessors and she connects relational artwork to “the premium placed by performance art on the authenticity of our first-hand encounter with the artist’s body” (p. 54). Despite feminism’s strong ties to performance art, Bishop fails to mention feminist artists. This is indeed problematic; Withers describes performance art as the “theatricalized extension of feminist consciousness-raising” (in Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994, p. 160). Beginning in the 1970s, performance art was seen as the perfect medium

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34 Kester (2011) similarly comments on this historical amnesia, stating: “Bourriaud’s caricature, which collapses all activist art into the condition of 1930s socialist realism, fails to convey the complexity and diversity of socially engaged art practice over the last several decades.” (p. 31)
It allowed (feminist) artists to: react against conventions, blur the boundaries of traditional/non-traditional and public/private, and openly experiment. Examples of feminist performance artists include Suzanne Lacy, Nancy Buchanan, Leslie Labowitz, Barbara Smith, and Adrian Piper.

Unsurprisingly, however, Bishop argues that relational artwork is indeed depoliticized (in comparison to the 1960s). Evidently, her description of relational artwork (provided above) suggests a sense of complacency with and acceptance of the current situation, rather than trying to actively provoke change. Thompson (in Thompson et al., Eds., 2004) is more direct with his criticism; he discusses the passive role of art interventionists today:

They do not preach. They do not advocate. As opposed to providing a literal political message, these artists provide tools for the viewer/participant to develop their own politics. In this sense, the political content is found in a project’s use. They supply possibilities as opposed to solutions. (p. 138-139)

By comparison, feminist art arguably embodies the political in its form, content, and practice, and is direct with its political message and political alignment (see Section 2.3).

Defining features of relational artwork are consistent with wider social practice art. Relational artwork “is seen as a direct response to the shift from a goods to a service-based economy” and as a means to counter the virtual relationships created by

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35 Artists clearly distinguish between performance art and theatre. The Marina Abramović Institute (2014) offers a helpful definition; the similarities to social practice art are also evident. Performance art “is a diverse and experimental art form that is not easily defined and may even actively attempt to subvert or resist its own definitions. At its core there are typically four variables: time, space, the performer’s body, and a relationship between performer and audience […] What differentiates performance art from visual arts such as painting and sculpture is its main goal: the creation of an event rather than a physical art object […] What differentiates performance art from the performing arts such as theater is that performance art is not a space of make believe”. Cottingham (2000) similarly comments on performance art’s emphasis of “authenticity of experience” and “intense valuation” of shared experience between the artist/performer and audience (p. 123).

36 Expanding upon this, feminist artist Cheri Gaulke (quoted in Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994) states: “And in performance we found an art form that was young, without the tradition of painting or sculpture. Without the traditions governed by men. The shoe fit, and so, like Cinderella, we ran with it” (p. 160). See Lacy (2010) for further discussion on the relationship between feminist performance art and community-building.
the Internet and globalization (Bishop, 2004, p. 54). Bourriaud (2002) views the failure of modernity and its promised emancipation as the impetus behind relational aesthetics. Elements of discursivity and sociability, characteristic of other social practice art, can also be identified in relational artwork (Foster in Bishop, Ed., 2006). Emphasis is placed on the work-in-progress, rather than the completed object, thus relational artwork is described as: “open-ended, interactive, and resistant to closure” (Bishop, 2004, p. 52). Transitivity is suggested to enable intersubjective relationships: a tangible property of art, lending itself to the “forever unfinished discursiveness” of relational works (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 26-30). Similar to other social practice art, relational artwork operates in opposition to the art establishment, institutions, and conventional art practice. In contrast to modernism and its conception of the “discrete, portable, autonomous” art work, in relational aesthetics, the “audience is envisaged as a community: rather than a one-to-one relationship between work of art and viewer” and the “viewers are not just addressed as a collective, social entity, but are actually given the wherewithal to create a community” (Bishop, 2004, p. 54).

2.2.4. Grant Kester’s Dialogical Aesthetics

Kester’s (2004) dialogical aesthetics provides an alternative theoretical framework and aesthetic paradigm from which to approach social practice art. Dialogical works are process-based (versus object-based) and traditional art materials are replaced by sociopolitical relationships formed between the artist and collaborators. Conversation is an integral part and dialogue is: “re-framed as an active, generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities, official discourse, and the perceived inevitability of partisan political conflict” (Kester, 2004, p. 8). Non-hierarchical and democratic conversation is encouraged and dialogical works openly solicit participation and involvement; Kester (2004) references Habermas’s reciprocal exchange in his discussion of dialogical exchange.

Bishop (2004) categorizes relational artwork as part of the popular laboratory paradigm in which the white cube model of displaying contemporary art is reconceptualized as an experimental laboratory, construction site, or art factory. This concept, particularly used by European art venues and curators in the 1990s, is meant to differentiate contemporary art institutions from the “bureaucracy-encumbered collection-based museums” (p. 51-53).
Unlike Bourriaud (2002), Kester (2004) recognizes the valuable influence of modernist avant-garde (amongst other art movements) on dialogical aesthetics, but is quick to distinguish between the two. Kester describes avant-garde art as rooted in shock and dislocation and “based on the assumption that the work of art should challenge or disrupt the viewer’s expectations” and the viewer “requires this disruption to overcome his or her reliance on habitual forms of dislocation” (Kester, 2004, p. 17).^38^ Dialogical aesthetics seemingly reconceptualizes the avant-garde in a “friendlier” way; Kester (2004) asks if it is “possible to reclaim a less violent and more convivial relationship with the viewer while preserving the critical insights that aesthetic experience can offer to objectifying forms of knowledge” (p. 27). Hence, in dialogical work the change in the viewer’s perception is achieved through conversation (or dialogue) and collaborative production. Feminist interventions encourage a similar shift in perception by making demands of and actively involving the viewer in the artwork (Parker & Pollock, Eds., 1987). In contrast to avant-garde work, the collaboration required of participants by the artist in dialogical artwork produces intersubjective (versus specular) relationships between participants and the artist; the identities of all involved are formed through these situational encounters. Kester (2004) identifies these new forms of intersubjective experience as directly linked to social and political activism (seemingly suggesting identity formation is a political process).

The “locus of (modernist) aesthetic meaning” is also affected in dialogical works:

This catalyzation of the viewer, the movement toward direct interaction, decisively shifts the locus of aesthetic meaning from the moment of creative plenitude in the solitary act of making […] to a social and discursive realm of shared experience, dialogue, and physical movement. (Kester, 2004, p. 54)

Consequently, dialogical work acquires multiple registers of meaning, no longer centered on the physical object or single viewer. Lippard (a feminist critic) and Chandler are

^38^ Kester (2004) terms this the “orthopedic aesthetic” in which modernist art aims to aggressively transform the viewer’s flawed consciousness through an overwhelming encounter with art. It also stipulates a lack of concern for or acknowledgement of the viewer’s presence (Kester 1999-2000; 2004).
among the first to identify this shift in meaning in their seminal article ‘The dematerialization of art’ (1968).\textsuperscript{39}

In this section, I have attempted to identify the at-times unacknowledged roots of social practice art in the Second Wave feminist art movement. In the following section, I discuss the Second Wave feminist art movement and highlight its ties to activism and contributions to social practice art.

\subsection*{2.3. Second Wave Feminist Art Movement}

\subsubsection*{2.3.1. Goals of the Second Wave Feminist Art Movement}

The feminist art movement began in the 1960s, closely aligned with the emerging women’s movement, as both sprang from the same political agenda: the transformation of gender, race, and class inequality (Lacy in Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994, p. 264). The initial goals of the feminist art movement included: equal representation of women in galleries and museums; establishing gender as socially constructed; de/reconstructing representations of gender and race; investigating the relationship of art practice to public life; revealing the social production, signification, and reception of art; challenging modernism and traditional art history; and exposing the sexist structuralism of art establishments (Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994; Parker & Pollock, Eds., 1987; Reckitt, 39

\textsuperscript{39} As mentioned earlier Kester has since written \textit{The One and the Many} (2011). Seemingly more critical and questioning of social practice art (including the supposed intrinsically democratic relations it establishes) than \textit{Conversation Pieces} (2004) Kester expands his focus beyond dialogical art practices to site-specific collaborative projects. He examines “[…] the broader methodological field constituted by recent collaborative and participatory art” while elaborating on dialogical aesthetics “[…] especially as it relates to questions of creative labour” (p. 8). In comparison to \textit{Conversation Pieces}, Kester (2011) appears to more thoroughly discuss the social and political context in which social practice and contemporary art is situated. For instance, through a series of case studies, he addresses: the “[…] complex and often contradictory interrelationship between collaborative art practices in the developing world and the operations of non-governmental organizations” (p. 16); and the “relationship between urban renewal, public art, and gentrification” (p. 17).
Specifically, feminists established a correlation between the sexually oppressive value system that sustained art institutions, the sexual divisions structuring society, and the modernist art notion of the individual genius as gender-specific (Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994, p. xiii). Marxist analysis proved central to much feminist analysis (see Pollock, 1988). Broude & Garrard (Eds., 1994) broadly define these goals as an effort to: “change the nature of art itself, to transform culture in sweeping and permanent ways by introducing into it the heretofore suppressed perspective of women” (p. 10). This definition has since been challenged given its suggestion of a singular perspective of women. Similar to Kaprow’s Happenings and the avant-garde, but with a gender dimension, Lacy (in Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994) argues that the “theoretical substratum” for feminist artists is the “wishing to unite art, the conditions of women’s lives, and social change” (p. 269).

40 Most active in the 1970s and early 80s, feminists in the United States attacked museums and demanded museum reform. Well-known protests include the Ad Hoc Women’s Art Committee’s 50% campaign at the Whitney Museum of American Art. The committee demanded that 50% of the artists in a 1970 exhibition be women and half of those women be black. In 1971, the Ad Hoc Los Angeles Council of Women Artists protested the total absence of women artists in the Art Technology exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

41 This challenged definition also represents a clash in feminism (and a defining feature of the movement): “between the fundamental belief in the value of the individual women and her lived experience and the feminist critiques of individualism” (Parker & Pollock, Eds., 1987, p. 45). Parker & Pollock (Eds., 1987) argue that individualism clearly opposes feminism’s goals and: “denies that the individual is socially produced and formed, and proposes art as the privileged sphere of the non-social, self-creating, self-possessing fiction – the individual” (p. 45).

42 Notably, Second Wave feminist artists appear unafraid to bridge the gap between art and life, thereby decentering the artwork; this evidences the art movement’s contributions to social practice art. As Lacy (Ed., 1995) writes: “There is no reason to cut the ties that bind such art to its home in the community, which at worst constricts and regulates it and at best shares its concerns, offering response-ible criticism and support. Instead, the task is to establish an additional set of bonds radiating out to participant communities, audiences, and other ‘marginalized’ artists, so that the art idea becomes, finally, part of the center – not an elite center sheltered and hidden from public view, but an accessible center to which participants are attracted from all sides of art and life” (p. 126)
2.3.2. Feminist Art Movement’s Ties with Political Activism and the Women’s Movement

Reckitt (Ed., 2001) suggests the momentum of the women’s movement (itself sparked by the Civil Rights and anti-war movements in the US, the New Left, and the student demonstrations in France) was essential to “starting” Second Wave feminist art. Second Wave feminist art’s alignment with the women’s movement is reflected in its practices, the use of political strategies in feminist art, and the use of feminist art in political activism. As discussed in Chapter One, these practices include: the use of experiences (generated by consciousness-raising) in performance art; the blurring of private and public boundaries in participatory art (integrating the feminist rallying cry of the personal is political); elevating the role of collaboration in the art-making process; de/reconstructing race and gender representations; and reacting against dominant (modernist) art conventions and culture.

Feminist art’s ties to the women’s movement are unique and may help to explain the strong political power of feminist art, in contrast to current, arguably depoliticized social practice art. For example, Cottingham (quoted in Moravec, 2012) states: “There is no other historical example of artists literally borrowing and utilizing, as an aesthetic method, the same practices used by activists to further political change” (p. 36). Moravec (2012) also identifies the contributions feminist artists have made to the women’s movement’s various forms of activism. Reckitt (Ed., 2001), citing the Guerrilla Girls’ “accusatory graphic activism” of the 80s, suggests feminist political art gives a “striking aesthetic form to political imperatives” (p. 12). Finally, feminist artist Judy Chicago describes her art as inherently political:

The issue of politics for me arises at the point where my work interfaces with culture […] I never think about politics when I make my art; rather I think about being true to my own impulses, and for a woman to be true to her own impulses is, at this point in history, a political act […] (quoted in Heresies Collective, Inc., 1977, p. 71)

Further distinguishing feminist art from other political art forms or movements, the feminist art movement sought to actually transform art, artists, and art history; art is used for more than propaganda purposes or advertising feminists’ political arguments (Parker & Pollock, Eds., 1987, p. xiii). Instead, Reckitt (Ed., 2001) argues that feminists have
used art “as an arena for the visceral expression and exploration of [their] convictions” (p. 21). Unsurprisingly, activism largely becomes entwined with feminist artists’ identities. Lopez & Roth (in Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994) suggest: “For many women, protesting was inseparably fused with their identities as artists, critics, and historians” (p. 141).

Iconic images of protest can be found especially in the works of early feminist artists. These include: Faith Ringgold’s American People Series in the 1960s (challenges race representations and revived the African American story quilt); Betye Saar’s The Liberation of Aunt Jemima: Measure for Measure (1972; challenges popular racist representations of African Americans); and Nancy Spero’s War Series (1966-1970; an antiwar series focusing on women as victims of war).

2.3.3. Defining Second Wave Feminist Art

The Second Wave feminist art movement and feminist art at large are extremely difficult to define: it is not a set of unified styles nor a homogeneous entity, but rather a reaction against art history’s academic institutions. The highly differentiated forms of feminist art are also comparable to wider, diverse feminist ideology. Feminist artist Mary Kelly argues that feminist art’s ties to political activism problematize attempts to define it: one cannot define feminist art or pose it “in terms of cultural categories, typologies or even certain insular forms of textual analysis, precisely because it entails assessment of political interventions, campaigns and commitments as well as artistic strategies” (quoted in Parker & Pollock, Eds., 1987, p. 79). Others attempt to provide a general framework from which to conceive of feminist art. For example, Parker & Pollock (Eds., 1987) argue:

To be feminist at all work must be conceived within the framework of a structural, economic, political and ideological critique of the power relations of society and with a commitment to collective action for their radical transformation. (p. 80)

43 For instance, Freeman (quoted in Moravec, 2012) notes: “As of 1971, there is no comprehensive set of beliefs which can accurately be labeled women’s liberationist, feminist, neofeminist or radical feminist ideology” (p. 31).
For Lippard (1980), feminist art is more than an art movement: it “is an ideology, a value system, a revolutionary strategy, a way of life” and it is inseparable from socialism (p. 362). Beyond contributing artistic styles, feminist artists strive to change institutional structures: “Feminism’s contribution to the evolution of art reveals itself not in shapes but in structures. Only new structures bear the possibility of changing the vehicle itself, the meaning of art in society” (Lippard, 1980, p. 363). Finally, Lippard (1980) identifies collaboration as integral to and defining of feminist art. She grounds feminist art in three models of interaction: group or public ritual; public consciousness-raising and interaction through visual images, environments, and performances; and cooperative, collaborative, collective, and/or anonymous art making (p. 364). But she adds (unknowingly exemplifying feminist art’s contributions to social practice art):

Yet all these structures are in the most fundamental sense collective, like feminism itself. And these three models are all characterized by an element of outreach, a need for connections beyond process or product, an element of inclusiveness which also takes the form of responsiveness and responsibility for one’s own ideas and images. (Lippard, 1980, p. 364)

2.3.4. History of the Second Wave Feminist Art Movement

American feminist art cannot be defined as a homogenous style, but different periods of the feminist art movement can be loosely associated with particular art practices. The 1960s marked the beginnings of the Second Wave feminist art movement and the “feminist awakening”. Feminist art was centered in New York and Los Angeles and each city had its own style and approach to activism. Stereotypically, feminist art from the American East Coast has been associated with the intellectual and conceptual, while that from the West Coast associated with the non-intellectual, intuitive, and activist. The 1960s and early 1970s were the height of art activism, as artists began to address the Vietnam War, and issues of social justice, power, race, and gender (reflecting this in their art and political efforts). Numerous activist groups were formed including: the Art Workers’ Coalition, Black Emergency Cultural Coalition, Art Strike Against Racism, War

Comparatively Gouma-Peterson & Matthews (1987) argue feminist inquiry into art history began in 1971 with Linda Nochlin’s famous article ‘Why have there been no great women artists?’ (1971). Her article established art as a social construction and discussed the influence of institutional factors on artistic achievement and success.
and Repression, Women Artists Revolution, and Ad Hoc Women Artists’ Group (see Gouma-Peterson & Matthews, 1987). Early feminist art (particularly in Los Angeles) is characterized by: “collaborative processes, a savvy use of public space and media, innovative ways of transmitting didactic messages and presenting women speaking boldly for themselves – frequently in the medium of performance” (Lopez & Roth in Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994, p. 149). Miriam Shapiro and Judy Chicago were central to the development of feminist art on the West Coast, while Martha Rosler and Nancy Spero on the East Coast.45 During this time, feminist artists also became increasingly conscious of the relationship between the private and public, of misogyny, and “of cultural frameworks in which their labour was devalued, their art largely ignored and their bodies overly idealized” (Reckitt, Ed., 2001, p. 33).46

In the mid to late 1970s, feminist artists distanced themselves from the practices of the 1960s, influenced by poststructuralism, psychoanalysis, and subaltern theory. Earlier feminist artists (now defined as essentialist) were criticized for their “celebration of innate femininity, and the retrieval of traditional female culture, [as] confining women to separate biological and cultural spheres” (Reckitt, Ed., 2001, p. 11). Their emphasis on personal experience was deemed “narrowly individualistic and lacking an account of the unconscious” (Reckitt, Ed., 2001, p. 11). Feminist art also reflected wider theoretical trends (i.e. the rising popularity of film theory and critiques of visual pleasure), propelling “a new interest in women’s sexual pleasure and with it a new interest in both the images of the female body and the politics of the embodiment” (Reckitt, Ed., 2001, p. 31). This is expressed in feminist erotic art, heterosexual, lesbian, and bisexual art. Rush (2007) suggests video art and photography were also integral to feminist artists of the 1970s

45 Of great importance: Chicago founded the first feminist art program in 1970 at Fresno State College; Chicago and Shapiro collaborated on the famous “Womanhouse” Exhibition in 1971 at the California Institute of the Arts.

46 For a more detailed history of the women’s art movement (particularly on the West Coast) see Cottingham (2000).
and in granting them access to the art world (e.g. Martha Rosler, Adrian Piper, Carolee Schneeman, Susan Milano, and Julia Heyward).\textsuperscript{47}

Essentialist critiques continued into the 1980s; Chicago’s \textit{The Dinner Party} (1970) amongst her other works, was particularly critiqued for its female core imagery and attempts to define a uniquely feminine style. Focus continued to shift away from activism toward theory as the dominant discourse of feminist writing (Reckitt, Ed., 2001, p. 37). In the 1990s, similar to the resurgence of social practice art, there was a rediscovery and revival of earlier feminist art from the 1960s and 1970s. This is expressed in: revisionist projects; projects exposing the historical stereotypes of earlier periods; intersectional works (recognizing the intertwining forces of racism and sexism) and post-feminist projects (tied with post-colonial theory and trauma studies).

\section*{2.4. Feminist Art’s Contributions to Social Practice Art}

An overview of several features that are consistently found in Second Wave feminist art helps to make clear the similarities between feminist art and social practice art and social practice art’s indebtedness to feminist art.

First, elements of participation, collaboration, and community are inherent to feminist art and social practice art. Participation has been central to the success of feminist art as a form of activism. Feminist artists’ attempts to reach and engage diverse, widespread audiences have helped in developing a strictly feminist aesthetic language and in furthering activist goals (Lacy in Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994). Feminist artist Susan Hiller’s street performances, \textit{Street Ceremonies} and \textit{Dream Mapping} (1973-74), are noted for their large-scale size, accessibility, and collective involvement of large groups of participants. The early works of Carolee Schneeman and Adrian Piper are also

\textsuperscript{47} Rush (2007) also acknowledges the substantial influence feminist artists had on the development of video art in the 1970s and 1980s. Video art served as a means for feminist artists to explore the connection between body and self and to change the role of the audience. Lippard (1980) writes: “Video and photography are often used not so much to stimulate a passive audience as to welcome an actively participating audience, to help discover who they are, where their power lies, and how they can make their own exchanges between art and life” (p. 364).
important examples of feminist communal performances and public events. For example, Piper’s *Catalysis* was a series of unannounced performance events taking place in the streets, subways, elevators, and other public places in New York City during 1970. Similarly, social practice art, particularly dialogical aesthetics, emphasizes the need for democratic conversation and open-ended participation to allow for successful projects. Lacy (in Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994) clearly associates feminists’ aims to reach broad audiences, with the similar aims of social practice art (p. 271).

As part of their efforts to increase participation, feminist artists also make frequent use of populist, “non-high art” forms in their works. Reckitt (Eds., 2001) credits feminist artists of the 1970s with revitalizing decorative and craft-based arts and valorizing women’s traditional domestic craft-making.\(^{48}\) A similar use of collage or mish-mash can be found in social practice art; both movements conceive of this as a reaction against dominant culture and modernist conventions.

Collaboration in feminist art is also political, rooted in consciousness-raising and other strategies of feminist activism, and viewed as a reaction against and critique of the oppressive individualism of modernist art practices (Parker & Pollock, Eds., 1987, p. 3). Collaboration, non-hierarchical organization, and collectivism as a “force for non-elitism” are particularly notable in the community mural movement (Cockcroft in Heresies Collective, Inc., 1977, p. 14). Feminist artists arguably dominated the community mural movement in the mid-to-late twentieth century, including: Judith Baca (a leading Chicana muralist in Los Angeles); Caryl Yasko (leader of the Chicago Mural Group); and Mujeres Muralistas (a Latin American women muralists group in San Francisco) (Heresies Collective, Inc., 1977). Cockcroft (in Heresies Collective, Inc., 1977) highlights the overtly political content of community murals, the mural movement’s ties to the women’s liberation movement, and (feminist) muralists efforts to create a “people’s art” (p. 22).

\(^{48}\) Interestingly, Lippard (1980) suggests: “because women’s traditional arts have always been considered utilitarian, feminists are more willing than others to accept the notion that art can be aesthetically and socially effective at the same time” (p. 364). Parker & Pollock (Eds., 1987) emphasize the political significance of craft: the “political implications of the history of women’s crafts go far beyond the nature of a female sensibility, to encompass the discourse of power and powerlessness, radical impulses in female creativity, the history of art-making, and the ideology of repression as well” (p. 334).
Similar focus on non-hierarchical structure, collectivism, and collaboration, can be found in social practice art and Papergirl Vancouver.

The communal process of consciousness-raising, highlighting the shared oppression of women artists and women in general, has also been essential to the development of the feminist movement and growth of the feminist community (Moravec, 2012). Experiences generated by consciousness-raising are reflected in feminist autobiographical works and performance art suggestively validating the use of personal experience in art (Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994; Parker & Pollock, Eds., 1987). A similar emphasis on personal experience can be found in social practice art. In social practice art, the affects and experiences spurred by art in the viewer are valued over the art object, its interpretation and meaning (Alberro, 2009). Notably, Shaughnessy (2012) argues that affect and quality of experience are the central means for evaluating the efficacy of participatory artwork or social practice art.

Numerous feminist art activism collectives were formed in response to shared experiences of oppression, including those of the 1960s and 70s: Mother Art, The Feminist Art Workers, The Waitresses, and the Women's Workshop of the Artists' Union. The building of community (temporary or otherwise) and repairing of broken social bonds are also central to social practice art and resolving community issues is often the focus of these projects (including Papergirl Vancouver; see Chapter Four). In their efforts to effect social change, feminist artists and social art practitioners attempt to forge cross-disciplinary collaborations and work with local community organizations and institutions. Feminist artists' Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz's *Ariadne*, A Social Art Network (1978-1980) is recognized as a key predecessor for such collaborations. *Ariadne* is described as an: “affiliation of women in the arts, media, government, and feminist community dedicated to creating major collaborative works on specific social issues” (Stein in Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994, p. 233).

Second, performance art is central to and otherwise paradigmatic of feminist art. Experiences generated by consciousness-raising are used in feminist performance art and the medium serves as a means to explore the intersections between the personal and political. Performance is identified by feminist artists as a more immediate and effective means of artistic communication, serving as a political action in itself and as a
catalyst for other political action (Withers in Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994). For example, Lacy and Labowitz’s performance art piece *In Mourning and In Rage* (1977) is described as: “politically charged collective performances protesting against rape and other sanctioned forms of sexual terrorism towards women”, which later inspired “take back the night” marches and other political demonstrations against rape (Reckitt, Ed., 2001, p. 30). But, perhaps most similar to social practice art, feminist performance art also: “implies an active relationship between performer and audience which can render the activity and experience more collective and social, more immediate, communicative and also open-ended” (Parker & Pollock, Eds., 1987, p. 39). Social practice artworks (such as relational and dialogical aesthetics) are defined by their sociability, discursivity, and open-ended process, fostered by the performative elements of the work. Several Papergirl participants (including Papergirl Berlin’s founder) view Papergirl’s action (or distribution of artwork on bicycles) as a collective performance art piece in itself.

2.5. Summary and Critiques

Kester (2004) and Bourriaud (2002) have provided theoretical frameworks from which to interpret social practice; it is arguable, however, that these frameworks are largely gender blind, effacing social practice art’s feminist roots. More critical evaluative frameworks must be used (such as those created by feminist artists and critics) to clearly address the types of relations produced by social practice art, and to question the democracy and political efficaciousness of the practice.49 Kester (2004), Bishop (2004; 2006), and Foster (in Bishop, Ed., 2006) amongst others, express these concerns.50 Bishop (2004) questions the so-called “intrinsically democratic” relations set up by

49 For example, Lacy (Ed., 1995) suggests a more extensive evaluative criteria which considers: the quality of imagery; the artist’s intention and the effect of the work; the work’s method of conveying meaning; and the roles of the curator and critic. Lacy (2010) expands upon this suggesting three strategies of critique (close reading critique, multivocal critique, and continental theory canon).

50 As part of the need for more critical evaluative frameworks, Bishop (2006; 2012) argues that social practice art is not evaluated based on artistic criteria; rather it is focused on facilitating the creation of temporary communities and/or solving community problems. She labels this the social and ethical turns of social practice art. Consequently, social practice art is now evaluated on an ethical basis and the social goals of the artwork outweigh its intended artistic experience. This serves to further depoliticize the genre.
relational aesthetics, as “they rest too comfortably within an ideal of subjectivity as whole and of community as immanent togetherness” (p. 67). This arguably leads to a situation in which all social practice artworks are:

perceived to be equally important artistic gestures of resistance: there can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of participatory art, because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond. (Bishop, 2006a, p. 3)

Goldbard (2013) similarly critiques the false sense of participation and potentially hierarchical and exploitative relations of social practice art:

The work is seen to be valid if all participants – artists and other community members alike – have co-determined its intentions, aims, values and processes, jointly concluding that they have been satisfied. A great deal of social practice art engages community members in processes they have neither influenced nor shaped; and most often, it is validated by its art world reception. Typically, a work of social practice culminates in a gallery or museum exhibit, a publication, or other forms of documentation and exhibition in which the collaborators in effect are there to illustrate the artists’ concept.

Markedly, in our interview, Papergirl Participant No. 2 similarly identified social practice art projects as largely contained in the gallery or other spaces defined as “acceptable” for art (see Chapter Four).

Bishop (2004) argues instead for a model of relational antagonism in which the relations produced by social practice artwork are not “fundamentally harmonious” or the “fictitious whole subject of a harmonious community, but a divided subject of partial identifications open to constant flux” (p. 79). Kester’s (2004) warnings of dialogical determinism may also be useful here: the “naïve belief that all social conflicts can be resolved through utopian power of free and open exchange” (p. 182). Collaboration as simply representative of democracy is no longer sufficient, nor representative of political
action. The notion of using relational antagonism in revitalizing social practice art is expanded upon in Chapter Five.\textsuperscript{51}

Feminist analysis can play a productive role in attempts to evaluate the quality of relationships produced by social practice art. The evaluation of socially constructed relations is essential to feminist art analysis; Parker & Pollock (Eds., 1987) argue feminist artistic practices:

stress the condition of production of art as a matter of texts, events, representations whose effects and meanings depend upon their conditions of reception – where, by whom, against the background of what inherited conventions and expectations. (p. 80)

Feminist concepts of empowerment are also applicable; “empowered” participants are often cited as one of social practice art’s loosely defined goals.\textsuperscript{52} Hicks (1990) argues a feminist conception of empowerment is “sensitive to cultural diversity and the realities of political power and domination” and is grounded in a community of difference and concrete otherness, versus a disempowering community of sameness advocated by traditional concepts of empowerment (and as Bishop would argue, relational aesthetics) (p. 39).

The depoliticization of much social practice art must also be addressed. Foster (in Bishop, Ed., 2006) critically notes: “Art collectives in the recent past, such as those formed around AIDS activism, were political projects: today simply getting together seems to be enough” (p. 194). Sholette (in Thompson, et al., Eds., 2004) similarly comments on the depoliticized state of social practice artists: “they remain disconnected from comprehensive visions of radical social transformation. Their politics are vague or at best subdued” (p. 140). De Cauter (et al., Eds., 2011) identify a similar lack of critique and argue for the return of more subversive art: “the lack of critical distance, of

\textsuperscript{51} Unsurprisingly Bishop’s concept of relational antagonism has come under criticism (Charnley, 2011; Kester, 2011). Charnley (2011) argues that the concept is unethical: “As a number of commentators have suggested, this type of politics, however much it appears to be self-reflexive, is still addressed exclusively to those inside the enchanted circle of art and therefore re-enforces a structural inequality” (p. 40)

\textsuperscript{52} Several Papergirl participants cite Papergirl Vancouver as a source or means of female empowerment (see Chapter Four).
subversive urges, of eccentricity and the spirit of negation, the lack of protest, dissidence and resistance [...] the predominance of a culture of consent and conformism in the arts and intellectual life” (p. 9). In Chapter Three, I attempt to address several causes of this depoliticization and loss of critique, as identified in social practice art and wider public life. For example, others address the possibility that social practice art (particularly its participatory aspect): has been co-opted by capitalism, corporations, and the state; reproduces the dominant models it aims to critique; or is simply another form of postmodern spectacle (Bishop, 2004; Ed., 2006; Kester, 1999-2000; Mouffe, 2008). This uncritical understanding may even be detrimental to social practice art and its political efficaciousness: “Until a critical approach is realized, this work will remain relegated to outsider status in the art world, and its ability to transform our understanding of art and artists’ roles will be safely neutralized” (Lacy, Ed., 1995, p. 172-173).

Feminist art and analysis may again be useful in attempts to reclaim and revitalize political social practice art. First, the need to recognize the historicity of social practice art and its partial roots in feminist art is imperative. Lacy (in Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994) states:

When activism is disconnected from its history, the real political agenda must be continuously reinvented. The questions feminist and ethnic artists raised in the 70s, ones that signalled a profound departure from existing notions of art, are present today in the work of artists of color, performance artists, and public artists. This larger vision of feminist art – embracing art as an agent in social transformation – is a radical legacy that must be reclaimed, since the questions asked today by younger artists are so similar to those upon which our work was built. (p. 274)

Subversive art contains: a “disruptive attitude that tries to create openings, possibilities in the ‘closedness’ of a system” (De Cauter et al., Eds., 2011, p. 9). It aims to undermine or disrupt the dominant system and presents an alternative hierarchy of values and priorities. De Cauter et al. (Eds., 2011) however, argue experimentation and creativity (required by subversive art) have been absorbed by capitalism.

Like Bishop (2006), Kester (2000) correlates the rise of socially engaged art with the United Kingdom’s New Labour Policies and the pressure for art to engage a broader demographic. This has resulted in an emphasis on social inclusion and the pedagogic, therapeutic, and “correctional interactions” socially engaged art can offer (collapsing art and education). See Chapter Three for further discussion.
Several scholars also suggest the importance of realigning social practice art politically and encouraging interdisciplinary collaborations to reignite its failing activist element. Mouffe (2008) and Guattari (1992) both argue for the expansion of artistic intervention by “intervening directly in a multiplicity of social spaces in order to oppose the program of the total social mobilization of capitalism” (Mouffe, 2008, p. 300). Lacy (in Broude & Garrard, Eds., 1994) and Kester (2004) both suggest the aligning of social practice art projects with other social justice movements that have common values and points of collective action. But of greatest importance and of that requiring further research, is the suggestion to directly align social practice art projects with new New Left political movements (proposed by Sholette, in Thompson et al., Eds., 2004; De Cauter, et al., Eds., 2011; and Bishop, in Thompson, Ed., 2012). These scholars point to the success of the 1960s and 70s political movements, such as feminism, partly attributing this success to the movements’ convergence “around the cultural politics of the New Left” (Sholette in Thompson et al., Eds., 2004, p. 138). Chapter Five explores these possibilities in greater detail. It should be noted that similar questions of Second Wave Feminism’s cooptation by capitalism and subsequent depoliticization have also been raised (Fraser, 2009; Morini, 2007). I discuss this further in the following chapter.
Chapter 3. Social Practice Art’s Absorption by Neoliberalism and Creative City Discourse

3.1. Defining Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism, or the dominance of the market as a model for sound economic and social relations, has increasingly dominated political economic practice and thought since the 1970s. Harvey (2007) defines neoliberalism as:

a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (p. 2)

The process of neoliberalization has led to changes in institutional frameworks and powers and in divisions of: “labour, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought, reproductive activities, attachments to the land and habits of the heart” (Harvey, 2007, p. 3). Accompanied by the rise of cognitive capitalism and a network sociality (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005), neoliberalization has also been connected to the feminization of labour and increased precarization, individualization, entrepreneurialism, self-employment, flexibility, (a false sense of) freedom, and exploitation in the workforce. One’s social and cognitive abilities are highly valued, treated as productive resources, and exploited by capitalism. Formerly private activities also acquire new economic and public functions; specifically, the boundary between work and leisure is blurred, as various aspects of social life are incorporated into the

55 Regarding freedom, Léger (Ed., 2011) suggests self-precarization and freelance work “appears to cultural workers as a choice, a normalized ‘economization of life’ associated with liberal ideals of individual autonomy, lifestyle choices and even deviance or freedom from institutions” (p. 9). This, however, merely serves to encourage complacency with working conditions and reproduces neoliberal governmentality.
structure of the market, including the mass media. This furthers the economic and social inequities that are concealed by the market.\textsuperscript{56}

Boltanski & Chiapello (2005) draw on management literature and suggest that social life in the so-called network society and connexionist world (described as non-hierarchical and flexible) is reorganized into projects and the projective city is created. The project, which facilitates capitalism’s constant accumulation:

assembles a very disparate group of people, and presents itself as a highly activated section of network for a period of time that is relatively short, but allows for the construction of more enduring links that will be put on hold while remaining available. (p. 104)

Building upon an individual’s value as determined by their social and cognitive skills, one’s status is determined by the ability to (repeatedly) integrate into a new project and later, to generate a succession of projects. Boltanski & Chiapello (2005) explain: “the activity par excellence is integrating oneself into networks and exploring them, so as to put an end to isolation, and have opportunities for meeting people or associating with things proximity to which is liable to generate a project” (p. 110). Evidently, the project is temporary: engagement is short-term and supposedly “voluntary”, and full integration into an institution or environment is not intended. Unsurprisingly, projects perpetuate the inequities and lack of labour/class divisions created by neoliberalism: “activity in the projective city surmounts the oppositions between work and non-work, the stable and the unstable, wage-earning class and non-wage-earning class, paid work and voluntary work” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 109).

In addition to “hidden” inequities, scholars argue that critique is also silenced in the neoliberal era. Boltanski & Chiapello (2005) identify capitalism’s absorption and appropriation of critique, arguing:

\textsuperscript{56} McRobbie (2001) explains: the “disappearing structures are replaced by a ‘scene’ where the buzz of talent and the blurring of the interface between work and leisure conceal the material obstacles that limit the mobility and self-discovery of ‘talent’ on the grounds of poor location, poor education, poor access to the social capital of the network, and lack of access to funds to fall back on between jobs or while working for nothing in the hope of it being turned into a paid job” (p. 87).
This is how the forms of capitalist production accede to representation in each epoch, by mobilizing concepts and tools that were initially developed largely autonomously in the theoretical sphere or the domain of basic scientific research. (p. 104)

The projective city also helps to facilitate capitalism’s appropriation of critique:

Anything can attain the status of a *project*, including ventures hostile to capitalism. Describing every accomplishment with a nominal grammar that is the grammar of the project erases the differences between a capitalist project and a humdrum creation [...] Capitalist and anti-capitalist critiques alike are masked. (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 111)57

Recall Bishop’s strikingly similar criticisms of social practice art “projects” easily attaining the status of participatory or non-hierarchical discussed in Chapter Two.

Boltanski & Chiapello (2005) identify two strands of critique coopted by capitalism: the artistic critique and the social critique. The artistic critique’s (derived from 19th century Parisian Bohemia’s intellectual and artistic circles; and 1950s political and artistic avant-garde groups) sources of indignation toward capitalism include the: disenchantment, inauthenticity, oppression, standardization, commodification, dehumanization, absence of creativity in the spheres of family, work, and production, and loss of meaning, autonomy, and self-management, caused by capitalism. Evidencing capitalism’s cooptation of the artistic critique, these characteristics are considered desirable traits of the new economy’s ideal worker (i.e. autonomous and self-employed); the artist or cultural entrepreneur is oft cited as an ideal or model worker (McRobbie, 2001; Raunig *et al.*, Eds., 2011).58 Consequently, “accusations formerly leveled at capitalism out of a desire for liberation, autonomy and authenticity no longer seem to be soundly based” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 419).

57 Others echo these sentiments; for instance, Hallin (2008) argues: “Neoliberalism, moreover, has been very effective in creating political ideologies that can co-opt and incorporate rhetorics of empowerment and liberation and popular critiques of authority into legitimations of the market” (p. 52).

58 The artist then acquires a pedagogical purpose: the artist or cultural entrepreneur becomes a “point of reference for this new understanding of the relation between life and work, and for mediating it to broader audiences” (Osten in Raunig *et al.*, Eds., 2011, p. 137)
Comparatively, the social critique’s sources of indignation (associated with the history of the working class movement and its efforts to end worker exploitation) include: poverty, opportunism, egoism, and income disparity caused by capitalism. Given the shift in labour conditions (described above), notions of exploitation have also changed. There has been a shift in focus from labour exploitation to that of larger societal exclusion. As Boltanski & Chiapello (2005) state:

the included are those who are connected, linked to others […] by a multiplicity and diversity of bonds. By contrast, the excluded are those who have seen the ties that bound them to others severed and have thus been relegated to the fringes of the network. (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 348)

Similarities can again be drawn to the increased focus on social inclusion in social practice art; a focus on increasing social inclusion is also clear in Papergirl Vancouver (see Chapter Four).

The artistic critique and social critique are incompatible and have experienced varying degrees of popularity. In the early 1970s, the social critique was revived, eclipsing the artistic critique. In the mid 1970s, the artistic critique had its “revenge” in a period marked by such new social movements as Second Wave feminism. Both critiques have since been silenced, as capitalism has restructured and organizational forms (of labour and societal life) have changed. Boltanski & Chiapello (2005) explain capitalism’s attempts to silence critique by satisfying, circumventing, and transforming it; consequently, they argue that critiques of the 1960s and 1970s induced capitalism’s transformation in the neoliberal era and ensured its revitalization and continuation. They state: “it was by recuperating some of the oppositional themes articulated during the May [1968] events that capitalism was to disarm critique, regain the initiative, and discover a new dynamism” (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 168).

In the 1990s, there was a “faltering search” for new critical foundation and a period of “ideological disarray”; the critiques were outdated and the artistic critique was “still paralyzed by the incorporation of part of its thematic into the new spirit of capitalism”
(Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 346). Notably, this period also witnessed the apparent resurgence of social practice art forms. Similar to recent critics of social practice art (see Chapter Two), Boltanski & Chiapello (2005) reference the 1990s in their argument that there has been no genuine resistance to capitalism. They point to the disappearance of large-scale social mobilizations in the 1990s – in comparison to the 1970s – and stress the need to revive political action. Since, it is evident there have been a multiplicity of uprisings; i.e. the Occupy movement, the alter-globalization movement, and the rise of the anti-precarity movement in the 2000s.

3.2. Defining Postfeminism

Scholars have also identified connections between the ideal neoliberal subject and that of postfeminism: “the autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism” (Gill & Scharff, Eds., 2011, p. 7). Postfeminism is seen as both a response to feminism and as “partly constituted through the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideas” (Gill & Scharff, Eds., 2011, p. 7). Comparable to the artist as model worker of the new economy, women are also seen as privileged subjects of this so-called neoliberal social change. McRobbie (2004) however, stresses, the depoliticized implications of this: “the terms of these great expectations on the part of governments are that young women must do without more autonomous feminist politics” (p. 258). Women are rewarded with promises of freedom and independence (recall these same desirable traits of the artistic critique) for their abandonment of feminism; feminism is suggestively accounted for and satisfied by institutions (McRobbie, 2009).  

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59 Boltanski & Chiapello (2005) define the new spirit of capitalism as a virulent form, and connexionist and network variant, of capitalism. This third wave of capitalism is represented by neoliberalism and includes a legitimation of network forms of capitalism.  

60 Brophy & de Peuter (2007) discuss anti-precarity activism and its efforts to recompose labour politics. They “argue that discussions of the concept of precarity are opening a space of constructive criticism of certain shortcomings of the immaterial labor idea” (p. 178).  

61 In my interviews, several Papergirl Vancouver participants suggested feminism is accounted for (see Chapter Four).
Like capitalism’s appropriation of critique, postfeminism contradictorily and simultaneously incorporates and reviles Second Wave feminist ideals, including women’s empowerment, autonomy, and the ability to choose type of work and sexual/emotional lifestyles (Press in Gill & Scharff, Eds., 2011). McRobbie (2004) identifies a similar double entanglement in which: “neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life […] coexist] with processes of liberalisation in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations” (p. 255-256). Mirroring the individualization and self-focus, characteristic of neoliberalism, a sense of collective (strongly associated with Second Wave feminism) is replaced by a self-focused “me-feminism” (Lazar, 2007). This contributes to feminism’s depoliticization and undermining and “shifts attention away from the collective ‘we-feminism’ needed for a transformational political program” (Lazar, 2007, p. 154). Evidently, a formerly collective vocabulary is replaced by an individualized discourse. Feminism is substituted by this discourse, and the media, popular culture, and agencies of state use and spread this individualized discourse (McRobbie, 2004; 2009). As part of the focus on self, elements of a pre-feminist past are reclaimed, including an emphasis on women’s sexual expression and an exhibiting of extreme femininity (Gill & Scharff, Eds., 2011).

Comparable to the silencing of critique in social practice art and the neoliberal era, the “new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique, to count as a modern sophisticated girl, or indeed this withholding of critique is a condition of her freedom” (McRobbie, 2004, p. 260). Like neoliberalism, postfeminist discourse perpetuates new inequities and problems, including: a disarticulation of the field of sexual politics; a displacement and dismantling of same-sex desires; new forms of gender power; and new inequities and exclusions among/between race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and disability (Gill & Scharff, Eds., 2011; McRobbie, 2009).

There is urgent need to address the implications of postfeminist discourse. Press (in Gill & Scharff, Eds., 2011) states: “together with our culture’s backlash against

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62 See Gill & Scharff (Eds., 2011) for a discussion of the four origins of postfeminism. A similar notion to that of McRobbie’s double entanglement is suggested.

63 McRobbie (2004) echoes this depoliticization: The “over-shadowing indeed displacement of feminism as a political movement” (p. 258).
feminism, feminism’s ideals face true eradication at the cultural, and personal level, replaced by the increasingly fierce levels of coercion and surveillance represented in new third-wave and postfeminist images and ideas” (p. 131). This restructuring of power relations and the difficulty in identifying the “enemy” that results complicate feminist critiques. Budgeon (in Gill & Scharff, Eds., 2011) writes:

the ‘enemy’ has been increasingly decentralized and patriarchy itself dismantled as a primary object of critique [...] As such third-wave feminism does not privilege gender or sexual difference as its key site of struggle nor does it limit itself to any single issue. (p. 280)

Finally, Fraser (2009) argues that refocusing the feminist critique and repositioning feminism on the Left are necessary for reclaiming and reactivating feminism’s original goals. She envisions four defining features of a refocused post-neoliberal feminism: anti-economism (reconnect feminist critique to critique of capitalism); anti-androcentrism (reclaim critique of decentered work and valorized uncommodified activities); anti-etatism (reactivate participatory democracy and strengthen public power); and anti-Westphalianism (break down democracy’s exclusive identification with a bounded political community) (p. 116). Notable in this description of postfeminism are obvious aspects of Second Wave feminist art and current (ideal forms of) social practice art. Acknowledging feminist art’s contributions to contemporary social practice art and strengthening the relationship between these movements may prove essential in attempts to re-politicize social practice art and reactivate the feminist movement. These possibilities are further explored in Chapter Five.

64 Similar to the American-centrism of Second Wave feminist art historical literature (discussed in Chapter Two) it should be acknowledged that Fraser has received similar critique. Sangster & Luxton (2013) challenge Fraser’s reinterpretation of feminist history, arguing Fraser has reclaimed only the “best ideas” of a homogenized Second Wave feminism (p. 288). They advocate a feminist historical materialism approach and state: “We need to avoid an American-centric understanding of feminism, and [...] develop an analysis of class relations that thoroughly integrates gender and race and other systems of discrimination and oppression (p. 289). Finally, Sangster & Luxton suggest an “amnesia” of social feminism and point to resistance occurring, for instance, in the Global South.
3.3. Intersections of Social Practice Art, the Creative City, and Neoliberalism

Social practice art is positioned as a reaction against neoliberalism and capitalism: its emphasis on cooperation, collectivity, and non-hierarchical collaboration reacts against and challenges capitalism, and yet seemingly fits with the themes celebrated by and appropriated by capitalism.\textsuperscript{65} Unsurprisingly, the artist is presented as the ideal worker of the new economy (see Section 3.1).\textsuperscript{66} The artist as model worker is not without problems; Osten argues: “But this myth of the unrecognized, unsuccessful but still-talented, if misunderstood, artist cannot be easily integrated into the managerial discourse” (in Raunig et al., Eds., 2011, p. 138). Reflecting this complicated relationship with neoliberalism, Bishop (2012) argues: artistic practices “dovetail even more perfectly with neoliberalism’s recent forms (networks, mobility, project work, affective labour)” (p. 277). Examples of this dovetailing include: participation merges with spectacle, artists create works that are mere extensions of popular culture, and counter-culture aesthetic strategies and contemporary art practices are coopted by capitalism.

Despite these criticisms, there are reactions in the art world against neoliberalism (see Chapter One); it is rather, their efficaciousness or power against neoliberal and postfeminist discourse that is at issue.\textsuperscript{67} In addition, Bishop (2012) cites participatory art as symptomatic of the clashing of the artistic and social critiques (and the political upheaval and transition that accompanies this), seemingly suggesting the potential critical power of social practice and participatory art.

\textsuperscript{65}These productive contradictions are specifically identified in Papergirl Vancouver and are discussed in Chapter Four and Chapter Five.

\textsuperscript{66}McRobbie (in Raunig et al., Eds., 2011) goes further to suggest that women are mostly intimately tied to new forms of (creative) labour: “For these young women we could say new forms of work (what Lazzarato calls ‘immaterial labor’) become sites of ‘passionate attachment’. Creative work is a space of romantic idealization perhaps more rewarding than personal relationships” (p. 123).

\textsuperscript{67}Peck (2014) discusses “artful alternatives” to neoliberalism. He cites several European collectives and initiatives as prominent examples. These include Not in our name, brand Hamburg! Initiative. Their manifesto (2009) is a reaction against the creative economization and branding of Hamburg.
3.3.1. Commodification of the Art Experience and the Silencing of Critique

This cooptation of aesthetic strategies and critique evidently impacts artists and contemporary artistic practices. Evidenced in the United Kingdom’s New Labour rhetoric (Bishop, 2012) and more recently, in Canadian creative city rhetoric (see City of Vancouver, 2008; 2013), the arts and culture have become a model for how economic growth should be pursued and how it can be achieved. Cultural labour and economic productivity are closely linked and the terms art and artistic are replaced with notions of culture and creativity. Culture is also suggested (and instrumentalized) to promote social inclusion and urban regeneration (or gentrification) by appealing and speaking to disenfranchised or marginalized groups. Reflecting social practice art’s complicated position, Bishop (2012) argues that social inclusion, so strongly promoted by these artistic practices, is even coopted by capitalism and possibly made meaningless:

The social inclusion agenda is therefore less about repairing the social bond than a mission to enable all members of society to be self-administering, fully functioning consumers who do not rely on the welfare state and who can cope with a deregulated, privatized world. (p. 14)

The artist is forced to react and adapt to the neoliberal context and we in part witness the entrepreneurialization of the artist. Bishop (2012) identifies a shift in criteria for what defines a “successful” artist. Like the ideal worker of the projective city, successful artists are: “those who can integrate, collaborate, be flexible, work with different audiences, and respond to the [art] exhibition’s thematic framework” (p. 216). Comparable to capitalism’s silencing and “satisfying” of critique, BAVO (a German arts collective) identifies the following in social practice art: the “existing order mobilizes those very same values as a means to neutralize any deep resistance against its policies” (in Léger, Ed., 2011, p. 70). McRobbie (2001) similarly identifies a shrinking of critical space, stating: “art and culture have traditionally been spaces for thinking and reflection” (p. 85) but this role is undermined by the new economy’s fast capitalism. As a result, “the time of reading, arguing and intellectual activity becomes compressed” (McRobbie, 2001, p. 85). There is also a shift from critical or complex artistic practices and products, to more educational or pedagogical works (i.e. artists program events, seminars, and informative discussions). Bishop (2012) recaps this shift: the “dominant
goal [of projects] seemed to be the production of a dynamic experience for participants, rather than the production of complex artistic forms” (p. 246).

By instrumentalizing art and culture as an economy booster, art is arguably increasingly commodified. Boltanski & Chiapello (2005) identify commodification as capitalism’s means of recuperating and silencing critique:

Commodification is the simplest process through which capitalism can acknowledge the validity of a critique and make it its own, by incorporating it into its own specific mechanisms: hearing the demands expressed by the critique, entrepreneurs seek to create products and services which will satisfy it, and which they will be able to sell. (p. 441-442)

In the commodification of artistic practices, art simply becomes another (disposable) resource:

Art is conceived as an abstract quantity, another product, like baked beans, but the language of limited editions emulates the exclusivity inherent to art. This is art as commodity, another option on the supermarket shelf, conveniently delivered to your door or at least past it. It wants art to be a special, bonus-providing, life-enhancing substance, and, at the same time, it wants it to be on ‘the streets’, utterly accessible, completely everyday, so that its benefits might be widely distributed. (Leslie in Raunig et al., Eds., 2011, p. 185)

3.3.2. The Rise of the Creative Class

With the commodification of artistic practices and products comes that of creativity itself. Creativity (like an individual’s cognitive and social abilities) is treated as an individual resource and is valued as a symbol of status.68 Richard Florida’s “urban-development script” (Peck, 2005, p. 740) The Rise of the Creative Class (2003) exemplifies this; his book prescribes how cities can attract and nurture creative workers, particularly by developing the right kind of “people climates” – those which are open, diverse, dynamic, urban, hip, gay-friendly, artsy, and cool. The Creative City, based on

68 Raunig (et al., Eds., 2011) write: “In the tradition of the aesthetics of genius and charismatic imagination, a social selection is performed: the truly creative social actors, the designated elect who generate and release innovations, are marked apart – and marked up for symbolic ascension” (p. 1).
Florida’s three T’s of tolerance, talent, and technology, easily fits with cognitive capitalism. Evidently complicit with neoliberal development agendas (and contributing to the silencing of critique), creative city leaders:

are embracing creativity strategies not as alternatives to extant market-, consumption- and property-led development strategies, but as low-cost, feel-good complements to them. Creativity plans do not disrupt these established approaches to urban entrepreneurialism and consumption-oriented place promotion, they extend them. (Peck, 2005, p. 761)

Comparable to the effects of neoliberalism and postfeminism, creative city discourse regularly neglects issues of intra-urban inequality and poverty. Florida (2003) fails to acknowledge the consequences of an unrestrained workforce and flexible lifestyle; rather, they are glorified and naturalized in The Rise of the Creative Class. The progressive politics of the mid-twentieth century, including the civil rights, women’s, and labour movements, are “written off as relics of a defunct, preCreative era, the achievements of which apparently pale into insignificance alongside the transformative power of creativity” (Peck, 2005, p. 746).69

Finally, individualization both prevails and is reacted against, in contemporary artistic practices. Social and collective processes of creative production are replaced by individual creative talent and a network sociality (McRobbie, 2001; Raunig et al., Eds., 2011). The emphasis on individual empowerment decreases the need for bureaucracy and the role of the state:

The source of such talent is of course ‘the individual’ who, if provided with the right kind of support, can then be best left alone to his or her devices to explore personal creativity unhindered by bureaucracy and red tape. (McRobbie, 2001, p. 80)

Yet, there is this prevailing desire for collectivity and connection in social practice art and the wider connexionist world. Boltanski & Chiapello (2005) explain this preoccupation

69 McRobbie (in Raunig et al., Eds., 2011) similarly argues: in the creative city context “issues of race and ethnicity, of gender and sexuality have no space for expression because either it is assigned in this cultural field that such issues have now been dealt with and that equality is taken for granted, or else there is such competitive individualization that there is no forum, no space or time for such concerns to be aired in a public milieu” (p. 124-125).
with connection: “In a connexionist world, a natural preoccupation of human beings is the desire to connect with others, to make contact, to make connections, so as not to remain isolated” (p. 111-112). Projects are the primary means used to develop connections (ultimately for economic gains). The projective format and the use of management discourse are also found in contemporary art practices since the 1990s (including Papergirl Vancouver). Bishop (2012) argues that this is indicative of artists’ renewed social awareness and conversely, neoliberalism’s absorption of artists and artistic practices:

It is telling that in the projective city, a successful project is not one that has intrinsic value, but one that allows the worker to integrate him/herself into a new project afterwards [...] The parallels with artistic practice are highly suggestive [...] Although the project is introduced as a term in the 1990s to describe a more embedded and socially/politically aware mode of artistic practice, it is equally a survival strategy for creative individuals under the uncertain labour conditions of neoliberalism. (p. 216)

3.3.3. Everyone is Creative

The mantra of “everyone is creative” pervades creative city discourse, the mission statements of community art organizations, and the suggested outcomes of social practice art projects (including Papergirl Vancouver). Bishop (2012) explains the commodification of creativity that occurs: “Through the discourse of creativity, the elitist activity of art is democratized, although today this leads to business rather than to Beuys” (p. 16). Joseph Beuys is noted for his production of social sculptures and attempts to establish counter-institutional frameworks and forums for public debate in the mid to late twentieth century. Beuys sought to realize social and political reform beyond the cultural sphere of art and was actively involved in political causes. Pertinent to our discussion, he is often cited for his belief that “everyone is an artist” and “everyone is creative”. Beuys wrote:

70 Social sculptures are objects, installations, and/or action-performances representative of Beuys’ belief that everything is art and/or every aspect of life can be approached creatively and his efforts to foster public debate. They encourage: “the exchange of individual opinions within an open public dialogue and debate [...] a functioning and unmediated public sphere” (Mesch & Michely, Eds., 2007, p. 199). E.g. Beuys’ Organizational Office for Direct Democracy through People’s Referendum (1972).
Like labour power, but unlike talent – the notion on which classical aesthetics is based – creativity is the potential of each and every one, and, being the capacity to produce, in general, it precedes all division of labour. From this it follows that everyone is an artist and that art is not a profession. All productive activity, whether of goods or of services, can be called art; creativity is the true capital, and the exchange of goods is to the flow of creativity within the social body what the circulatory system is to the flow of vital forces in the individual body. (in Mesch & Michely, Eds., 2007, p. 142)

Beuys argued, however, in an uncanny anticipation of the present state, that this state of affairs would not be realized under capitalism: “Until the new order arrives, money is capital, not creativity. Everyone has not become an artist, and the art market continues to treat as commodities the productions exuded by the ‘creativity’ of those it recognizes as professional artists” (in Mesch & Michely, Eds., 2007, p. 143). Nevertheless, when excerpted from its layered context, the suggestion that “everyone is creative” complies with and fuels neoliberal and postfeminist discourse, and perpetuates related socio-economic inequities:

Creativity training demands and supports a liberation of creative potential, without addressing existing social conditions that might pose an impediment. On the one hand, then, creativity shows itself to be the democratic variant of genius: the ability to be creative is bestowed on everyone. On the other hand, everyone is required to develop her/his creative potential. The call for self-determination and participation no longer designates only an emancipated utopia, but also a social obligation. The subjects comply with these new relations of power apparently by free will. (Osten, in Raunig et al., Eds., 2011, p. 138)

Simply put, creativity becomes a means to mobilize the socially disadvantaged and creative skills are labelled as “good for business” (McRobbie, 2001). This can be tied to the artist as entrepreneur and the rise of self-branding. McRobbie (2001) also suggests ties to the rise of creative education amongst young people and an educational focus in artistic practice; for instance, artists and curators appropriate various educational tropes in their own practices (i.e. the format of lectures, seminars, workshops, publications, etc.). This poses further problems for social practice art and encourages its absorption and depoliticization: the “radical strands of the intersection between art and pedagogy...
blur easily with the neoliberal impetus to render education a product or tool in the ‘knowledge economy’” (Bishop, 2012, p. 242).

3.3.4. New Social Movements and Artistic Practices

One final comparison can be drawn between the new economy and contemporary artistic practices. Boltanski & Chiapello (2005) discuss the state of humanitarian action and the rise of new social movements in the wake of the neoliberalism. They argue that from the mid-1980s humanitarian action was reawakened:

Increased inequalities and the re-emergence of poverty in wealthy societies served to reawaken attention to the social question and social movements [...] Insecurity and poverty ceased to be treated exclusively as individual suffering whose alleviation was a matter of personal engagement, attaining the status of a social problem of the first importance and prompting the emergence of new social movements. (p. 349-350)

These new social movements, however, lack critique and are based on the common idiom of reintegrating the excluded – which Boltanski & Chiapello (2005) refer to as the “politicization of exclusion” (p. 351). The rise of these movements has also led to changes in activist structure, new repertoires of protest, and new forms of activist organization. For instance, activists now form networks (unsurprising in a network society):

In this network circulate people who are very different in many respects, with divergent opinions in many cases (the ‘patchwork’), but are able to come together and aid one another in actions against exclusion based upon a minimal definition of rights, which are often demanded with reference to a ‘citizenship’ whose definition remains fluid. (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005, p. 352)

71 McRobbie (2009) also highlights the role that art and culture play in feminism’s undoing (and potentially its revitalization) (p. 24).
72 Hallin (2008) proposes a similar argument; he states neoliberalism has interacted with and mutually reinforced the growth of populist anti-elitism, the rise of new social movements, and the merging of consumerism with citizen activism.
These activist organizations are described as: adaptable and flexible; taking on multiple projects; and having members who are involved in different ways with varying levels of commitment. Pluralism and heterogeneity are encouraged and members retain their individual identities; a similar organizational structure is observed in Papergirl Vancouver (see Chapter Four).73

Potentially contributing to criticisms of depoliticization in the neoliberal and postfeminist context, and to depoliticized social practice art, the new social movements are accompanied by the loss of organized social groups in the political public sphere and these groups' “centrality to people's lives and commitments” (Hallin, 2008, p. 47).74 There is also greater political ambivalence, witnessed in Florida’s creative class in which he “mixes cosmopolitan elitism and pop universalism, hedonism and responsibility, cultural radicalism and economic conservatism, casual and causal inference, and social libertarianism and business realism” (Peck, 2005, p. 741). With respect to art practices, De Cauter (et al., Eds., 2011) associates the rise of “NGO Art”, with that of the new social movements. NGO artists are not interested in initiating long-term political processes or changes; they operate like humanitarian or non-governmental organizations; they fail to focus on larger political issues and/or expose underlying structures; they have high measures of self-censorship; and they avoid tackling controversial political issues. This type of art ultimately becomes extremely vulnerable to being coopted politically and economically.75

Evidently, artists and artistic practices are questionably impacted by neoliberalism, postfeminism, and creative city discourse. In the following chapter, I

73 Brophy & de Peuter (2007) seemingly suggest elements of the new economy and this activist structure are used by a new generation of anti-precarity activists to their advantage: “This sphere of political action is one in which the skill-sets of immaterial labor are applied in self-organized research projects, counter-networks, alternative media, non-branded iconography, and protest planning […] Disenchanted by the hierarchical and bureaucratic structures of certain unions, the precariat has favored organizing in affinity-based networks and sector-specific agencies” (p. 184-185).

74 Hallin (2008) also comments on the commodification of political organizations, observing a “transformation from organizations intimately connected with the lives and identities of social groups into professionally run enterprises that target individual citizens as consumers within political markets” (p. 47).

75 See Kester (2011) for a detailed discuss of the complex interrelationship between social practice art and non-governmental organizations.
present my research findings on Papergirl Vancouver and situate these findings within, and as partly implications of, the neoliberal and postfeminist context.
Chapter 4. Research Findings & Data Analysis

4.1. Introduction

Demonstrated in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, as part of the repudiation of feminist politics (postfeminism), feminist art’s contributions to contemporary art have arguably been absorbed into and forgotten by much social practice art. In turn, elements of social practice art are compatible with neoliberal discourses of entrepreneurial subjects and creative cities, which contributes to the depoliticization of much community-based social practice art. Chapter Two and Chapter Three discussed the general impact of these discourses on social practice art and the depoliticized social practice art that often results. Using data from participant interviews and fieldwork, this chapter explores the specific implications of neoliberal, postfeminist, and creative city discourse for Papergirl Vancouver. I argue that Papergirl Vancouver has not become a political project, in part, because of neoliberalism and postfeminism.

First, I have identified the implications of neoliberalism in Papergirl Vancouver as demonstrated by: participants’ motivations to participate in Papergirl Vancouver; the project’s goals and organizational structure; how Papergirl Vancouver is perceived and described by participants; the project’s (mis)identification as political art; and participants’ non-identification as activists. Second, I have identified the implications of postfeminism in Papergirl Vancouver as demonstrated largely by the feminist denial surrounding Papergirl. Finally, this chapter will discuss Papergirl Vancouver’s complicated and contradictory reaction to these implications: its simultaneous reaction against neoliberal and postfeminist discourses and absorption by them. Papergirl’s distinct blending of elements from Second Wave feminist art and social practice art, and these productive contradictions, are what arguably allow Papergirl to resist complete absorption and what posit Papergirl as a potential tool for revitalizing political social practice art. This also situates Papergirl Vancouver as a potential site for reconnecting
new social art practices to their activist roots in considering ways to reignite feminist art activism and revitalize political social practice art.

4.2. Implications of Neoliberal Discourse: Papergirl Vancouver’s (Mis)identification as Political Art

I have identified the implications of neoliberalism in Papergirl Vancouver as demonstrated by: participants’ motivations to become involved in Papergirl Vancouver; the project’s goals and organizational structure; how Papergirl Vancouver is perceived and described by participants; the project’s (mis)identification as political art; and participants’ non-identification as activists. More specifically, Papergirl’s core themes directly dovetail with those of neoliberalism and postfeminism, such as: connection, reducing isolation ( politicization of exclusion), creativity, accessibility, flexible and non-hierarchical organizational structure, and neglecting to directly address political issues, amongst others discussed below. But, as I will discuss in Chapter Five, while Papergirl may demonstrate elements of neoliberal and postfeminist discourse, it does not necessarily accept nor is intentionally complicit with these discourses.

4.2.1. Motivations to Participate

Participants were asked why they became involved in Papergirl Vancouver. They largely cited personal, community building, and “feel good” reasons. Most participants, several of whom are artists (see Appendix C, Participant Profiles), described the Vancouver arts scene as exclusive and the arts “community” as isolating. Drawing parallels to the connexionist world, participants joined Papergirl Vancouver driven by a desire to: build community and reduce isolation amongst artists and between artists and the non-artist community; meet new, like-minded people; and encounter networking opportunities. Reflecting creative city rhetoric, participants identified Papergirl as a possible solution to isolation because of the project’s focus on inclusivity (i.e. everyone can participate), its efforts to break down barriers, and the opportunities to do art-making

76 All participating artists cited Papergirl as an opportunity for networking; several cited this as a reason for joining, while others found it to be an added benefit.
with other people it facilitates. As Participant No. 9 enthusiastically said, “It makes it about being creative, being yourself, with no restrictions or value”.\footnote{Participants’ names remained anonymous; however, I have randomly assigned numbers to each participant.}

Participants were also driven by a desire to give back and were attracted to and intrigued by Papergirl’s paying it forward mentality and altruistic ethos. Other secondary motivations for participation in Papergirl as identified by participants include: the opportunity to expand, revitalize and/or push the boundaries of one’s artistic practice and identity; curiosity surrounding the project; and intrigue of Papergirl’s “message in a bottle mystique”. Participant No. 8 suggested Papergirl provides her with a fresh perspective on and less academic approach to her artistic practice. Participant No. 12 stated: “It feeds my own practice. All of a sudden I am engaged with creativity […] it mutually informs what I do”.

4.2.2. Project Goals

In Papergirl Vancouver’s project charter, volunteer handbook, and website (amongst other documents), its intentions to build community are clear. For instance, Papergirl’s 2013 Mission Statement reads:

In 2012, the Vancouver Foundation came out with some solid research on the number one problem faced by Vancouverites: one quarter of our population suffers from isolation and loneliness, and a majority of people complain on some level about the difficulty of meeting new people, and a lack of community. Papergirl Vancouver is taking steps to combat this problem by using art as a vehicle for social change. (Mateus, Ed., 2014)

I argue that this mission statement and Papergirl’s intent focus on community-building and positive social change reflect the consequences of the network and connexionist society (see Chapter Three). Similar to other social practice art since the 1990s, Papergirl’s focus can be seen as a direct reflection of the politicization of exclusion, a defining feature of the new social movements, and the understanding of exclusion as being unconnected or un-linked to others by a multiplicity of bonds (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005).
4.2.3. How Papergirl Vancouver is Described

Participants were asked to describe Papergirl Vancouver. Their responses, notably lacking any significant reference to political or radical art, included a project that is: community-based, collaborative, inclusive, participatory, accessible, democratic, non-elitist, demystifying the gallery experience, deceptively simple, multi-faceted (providing a different experience for all involved), ephemeral, global, viral, impulsive, surprising, interventionist, anonymous, unexpected, liberating, spontaneous, philanthropic, selfless, project-based rather than an event, playful, engaging, open to interpretation, and process-based. Interestingly, Participant No. 5 also highlighted Papergirl Vancouver’s entrepreneurial spirit, comparing it to a start-up or small business venture:

That’s funny because I don’t view it as radical or political in any way. I view it as more... to me it just seems like such a start-up mentality. It’s very share-aware, sharing with the community, bringing the community together, and bringing artists together, and promoting artists. I just don’t really feel like there is any kind of other motivation behind it.

Papergirl’s entrepreneurial spirit, its self-labeled project status, and its flexible organizational structure, easily compare to the new economy’s ideal worker and the non-hierarchical activist network of the new social movements (see Chapter Three). Papergirl’s organizational structure is minimally hierarchical, flexible, and volunteer-driven. Consequently, the project brings together a disparate group of people of varying political beliefs, who seek to put an end to both their own isolation and that of others. Recall Boltanski & Chiapello’s (2005) strikingly similar description of the organizational structure of the new activist network:

In this network circulate people who are very different in many respects, with divergent opinions in many cases (the ‘patchwork’), but are able to come together and aid one another in actions against exclusion based upon a minimal definition of rights [...] (p. 352)

78 The RCARC Volunteer Program Coordinator oversees Papergirl Vancouver; the program coordinator directs three volunteer Team Leaders; the Team Leaders provide leadership and direction to volunteers within each team (i.e. Social Media Team; Fundraising Team; Public Relations & Event Team; and so on). Despite this structure, independence, autonomy, and leadership are encouraged amongst all volunteers regardless of their position.
Boltanski & Chiapello (2005) also identify a new repertoire of protest and discuss other features of this organizational structure (comparable to that of Papergirl Vancouver): it is adaptable and flexible; multiple projects are pursued; pluralism and heterogeneity is encouraged; and varying degrees of commitment are expected of participants.

4.2.4. Papergirl Vancouver’s (Mis)Identification as Political Art

Most surprising to me (and counter to my initial classification of Papergirl Vancouver; see Chapter Five) was how few of the participants identified Papergirl Vancouver as a political and/or radical endeavour. Unsurprisingly then, few participants saw their own work (i.e. their involvement with Papergirl and/or their artistic practice) as activism or identified as activists. Despite Papergirl's overwhelmingly positive potential to provoke social change as expressed by participants (see Chapter Five), participants were conversely hesitant to associate Papergirl Vancouver with political change. Participants also appeared reluctant to discuss politics with other participants for fear of disrupting the group’s harmony or isolating (or excluding) potential participants. Instead, participants understand Papergirl as community and social art. For example:

**Participant No. 3:** I think it is social – not political. It is coming from people to people and is meant for everyone in the streets.

**Participant No. 13:** It doesn’t feel radical. It feels community. It kind of feels normative. It belongs in my zone. I’m not surprised […]

**Participant No. 7:** It is somewhat radical – it interrupts people’s daily schedules and we talk to random people on the streets – but we don’t call it that. I think it has a different meaning in Vancouver than its political origins in Berlin.

**Participant No. 9:** It can be political but I don’t think this is its purpose or sole purpose. For us it is more about engaging the community and passing on the message that being creative doesn’t have to be scary or intimidating.

79 I explore these contradictions further in Chapter Five.
Participants No. 6 and No. 12 found it difficult to identify Papergirl Vancouver as political: they participated in the overtly political art movements of the 1960s and 1970s and found Papergirl somewhat paled in comparison. Boltanski & Chiapello (2005) similarly discuss the contrast between the 1960s and 1970s and post-1980s. They describe 1968-1978 as a period “marked by a social movement on the offensive, extending significantly beyond the boundaries of the working class; a highly active trade unionism; ubiquitous references to social class […]” (p. 167). Comparatively, 1985-1995 is a period “characterized by a social movement that expresses itself almost exclusively in the form of humanitarian aid; a disoriented trade unionism that has lost any initiative for action; a quasi-obliteration of reference to social class […]” (p. 167).

Unconsciously pointing out criticisms of social practice art (see Chapter Two), Participant No. 4 highlighted Papergirl’s (suggestively intentional) lack of alignment with a specific political ideology:

It is not really political art. Papergirl is a concept without boundaries and for me it is exactly what you make of it or choose to make of it. The terms ‘political’ and ‘radical’ imply that the project can and perhaps even should be instrumentalized towards reaching some ideological goal. And who is to decide which goal that is to be? For me Papergirl can be part of an ideology, but one for each person who comes into contact with this idea ‘Papergirl’. Trying to tie it down to just one goal makes it smaller than it is and in my view kills the spark, which makes it such genius in its simplicity.

It is as if Papergirl Vancouver aligning with a specific political ideology is directly counter to the project’s goals and ethos. Also of note, the actual artwork received by Papergirl is not required to, nor does it commonly have, political content. During my fieldwork, it became increasingly clearer that Papergirl Vancouver is truly focused not on political change, but on building community and fostering meaningful engagement. The effects of these efforts are most strongly seen in the project’s core group of volunteers; remnants can be found between the volunteer cyclists, RCARC’s casual volunteers, and the wider Vancouver community. As well, although Ronniger (Ed., 2009) provides project guidelines, it is clear that Papergirl’s relative open-endedness allows the project to become “less political” depending on its location and its facilitators.

80 I explore this further in Chapter Five.
4.2.5. Papergirl Vancouver as Political Art

There were, however, several participants who described Papergirl Vancouver as political art, but albeit significantly less political than other, more overtly political art they have seen.\textsuperscript{81} Participant No. 10 said Papergirl’s “multiple players” and its uncurated, open exhibition make the project an “inherently political project”. Participant No. 12 identified a need to open up dialogue and critical discussion around Papergirl Vancouver for the project to be considered more political:

Political in what sense? It is not anti-capitalist. But it does touch on the idea of capital and art. It is being politicized but only if you take the time to think about it in those terms.

Notably, Boltanski & Chiapello (2005) discuss a comparable blur between capitalist and non-capitalist projects due to projects’ common use of project management discourse.

But generally, participants viewed Papergirl Vancouver as (relatively subdued) political art because of the project’s ethos of accessibility, inclusivity, “everyone is creative”, etc. and its attempts to challenge conventions:

\textbf{Participant No. 11}: Papergirl is political in the sense of providing those who do not otherwise have a voice, to show their work, to participate in the arts, to provide them with a venue […] Politically Papergirl is a little subversive in that it is being defined by the group itself and is not part of the wider art establishment.

\textbf{Participant No. 12}: Papergirl is a means of bringing new art to the city, instead of circulating and reshowing the same artists and their work.

\textbf{Participant No. 2}: Papergirl is political in the context that it is trying to change the value system. But it is not super radical in terms of its approach – a very inclusive and friendly approach […] Papergirl is not subversive but a nice, soft questioning of what the value of art is. The act is not as political as other political art may be.

\textsuperscript{81} The primary reason being (as expressed by participants) that if Papergirl were to be overtly political it would affect its high levels of participation and community engagement.
Several participants clearly point to the “softness” of Papergirl’s critique (reflecting the silencing of critique in the neoliberal and postfeminist era; see Chapter Two and Three). Participant No. 2 exemplified this point: “Papergirl takes a gentle approach to critique. It does question where the value of something lies, but it tries to do this in a very positive way, without hitting people in the head with it”; this was echoed by Participants No. 1 and No. 10. Similarly, unlike Papergirl Berlin in which the art is thrown (often at people’s heads), Papergirl Vancouver cyclists hop off their bikes and physically hand the artwork to strangers.

Notably, and seemingly unconsciously, Participant No. 10 gave a decidedly feminist perspective of Papergirl Vancouver as political art:

It is political just because everything in life is political. Politics is always involved in art. Anything anybody has done is political whether they understand it or not.\(^{82}\)

Participant No. 10 added that Papergirl is both political and potentially problematic, questioning the supposed inclusivity of the project:

While we say that we are inclusive there is not enough effort made to be truly inclusive. For instance, the open call is still only to a certain segment of the population, and that is political. Only that art is shown and given away, and that is political.

4.2.6. Papergirl Vancouver as Radical Art

More participants did however see Papergirl Vancouver as relatively radical, pointing to the project’s gifting of art, and challenging of art’s commodification and the art market’s elitism. Participant No. 8 said:

In terms of the gifting, our economy is kind of whack and money is a real major concern to most people in Vancouver earning such low wages and high cost of living. When you look at that, the idea of something being given away, it is very unusual and radical.

Participant No. 8 added:

\(^{82}\) Feminist artist and critic Lippard shared a similar perspective: Daily activities are “given political importance because lived experience is the ground from which all politics come” (in Heresies Collective, Inc., 1984, p. 23).
It’s radical because it’s doing a lot of things that aren’t allowed in the art world. People who are professional are afraid it will damage their work and reputation if they show their work in a setting like that or it will take away from their work if they give it away. They’re closing themselves off to another way of using their work to interact with people and getting out to people who might not otherwise have a chance to experience it. That in itself is pretty exciting, to break down some of the boundaries in the art world.

Participants No. 2 and No. 7 made similar statements.

4.2.7. Participants Non-Identification as Activists

Provided this discussion, it is unsurprising that very few of the participants see their involvement in Papergirl Vancouver and/or their artistic practice as activism or identified as activists. Participant No. 3 felt she was “not active enough” to be an activist: “No, not really! I am an artist. Maybe I think and feel like an activist, but I’m not active enough to call myself one”. Reflecting the increasing pedagogical or educational slant of social practice art (tied with creative city discourse), Participant No. 8 stated:

No surprisingly I don’t [identify as an activist]. I perceive myself in the framework of an educator. I don’t think I’m doing anything particularly radical. But I like to share ideas and enthusiasm. I’m not there to blow anyone’s mind like what an activist does.

Finally, Participant No. 2 felt “tied down” by labeling her art as political (similar to the multiple layers of Papergirl Vancouver):

I wouldn’t call my art activist art, but ideas art. It is conceptually driven, not with a specifically political or activist purpose. It has multiple meanings [...] within the pieces themselves I am not necessarily talking about purely activist elements.

Seemingly in accordance with Papergirl’s subdued and gentle approach to critique and social (not political) change, participants had similar perceptions of their own roles as activists. Participant No. 5 stated:

I’m an activist in the sense that I’m trying to get people excited about arts in the community. I definitely feel that’s an activism thing to do.

Participant No. 12 also discussed her educational (not activist) role (seemingly reflecting my earlier discussion of the collapse of art and education):
I work in a preschool [teaching art] and that is my form of activism. My activism is trying to get opportunities for children to make art. I choose to do this with my time. It is about breaking down the wall – everyone can draw. It is about seeing and not about talent. It doesn't look like political work.

Notwithstanding the influence of neoliberal discourse, denying an activist identity is commonly observed in activist art projects. For instance, Thompson (quoted in Schmelzer, 2013) provides a perspective similar to that of Papergirl’s participants:

Activism is often denoted by its directly didactic tendencies, its direct speaking methods. But, at times, I think people are turned off by that. One of the things the arts offer is a non-direct way of talking to you. Things have multiple meanings. There’s space for you, as a listener or participant, to make up your own mind. That’s a kind of freedom the arts offer.

BAVO (a German arts activism collective) discusses how artists try to distance themselves from “real activists” as it distracts from a social practice art project’s assumed goals of inclusivity: “They fault the latter [activists] for a lack of creativity or accuse them of favouring their own political interests or ideological preferences above the interests of the people” (in De Cauter et al., Eds., 2011, p. 290). Participants in Papergirl Vancouver similarly distanced or differentiated themselves from activists.

Lacy (Ed., 1995) argues that the judgement or criteria of a social practice art project’s success hinders the activist element: “ Appropriated, performative, conceptual, transient, and even interactive art are all accepted by art world critics as long as there appears to be no real possibility of social change” (p. 20). Attempts for social or political change are “taken by its detractors as evidence that it is not art” (Lacy, Ed., 1995, p. 21).83 Similarly, several participants interviewed discussed how some Vancouver artists have been reluctant to participate in Papergirl Vancouver, citing the project as “not real art” or being fearful to show their work with “non-artists”. Conversely, Participant No. 8

83 Lacy (Ed., 1995) discusses the unique activist identity of social practice artists: they work “in a manner that resembles political and social activity but is distinguished by its aesthetic sensibility” (p. 19). See Lacy (Ed., 1995) and Cartiere (2010) for further discussion of the social practice artist’s identity. Lacy establishes the “artist model continuum”, including the artist’s intuitive, receptive, experiential, and observational skills and labeling the artist’s role as experiencer, reporter, analyst, and/or activist.
indicated that social practice art was a means to justify her involvement in Papergirl Vancouver: “Sometimes [relational aesthetics or dialogical aesthetics] come into play. That is sort of how I justified my involvement in Papergirl at first. But now I see the project as more complex and look at it from different perspectives”.

The arts programmer who was interviewed offered a similar perspective. A former practicing artist, she now conceives of her role and artistic identity as that of an administrator, facilitator, and collaborator – not an artistic practitioner: “I don't practice as a community arts practitioner, in the sense that I go in and do projects anymore. But I’m always attached to it now, so it is my practice. It is a very creative practice”. Lacy (Ed., 1995) however, argues the role and identity of an artist is expanded (versus discarded) upon their entrance into activist and political art. This results in highly interdisciplinary collaborations.

In contrast, an activist identity is integral to feminist art and is part of the feminist artist's holistic or non-fractured identity. Lacy (in Heresies Collective, Inc., 1984) writes:

The problem with many artists’ conceptions of ‘political art’ is that they feel that somehow they are being called upon to use a different process in making their art, to start with a rational process as opposed to an intuitive process. It seems to me what’s important is to politicize yourself as a person and then learn to integrate those politics into everything you do.

(p. 22-23)

Feminist art critics largely do not view interdisciplinary collaboration as detracting from the realness of an artwork or as separate from the art itself: “Media appearances, classes, exhibitions, discussion groups, public demonstrations, consultations, and writings were all developed as integral to the artwork, not as separate activities” (Lacy, Ed., 1995, p. 40).

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84 Participant No. 8 expanded upon this statement: she explained that she initially used contemporary art theories as a way to explain the project in a “professional way” (particularly to her colleagues and other artists). Identifying Papergirl Vancouver as a relational practice (which the participant did initially) was also a means to define her role in the project.

85 A strong identity is also essential to feminist art’s political and subversive power. For example, Lacy (Ed., 1995) writes: “(Judy) Chicago thought that the suppression of an empowered female identity through popular culture’s misrepresentations could be counteracted by articulate identity constructions in art” (p. 27).
Notably, Second Wave feminist artists adopted a similar universal stance, particularly with respect to oppression (despite their evident alignment with the women’s movement). Lacy (in Heresies, Collective, Inc., 1984) identifies this universalism in her own artistic practice:

It’s not that *anything* I do personally is political, it’s that if I can tap into a deep experience that is common to oppressed people and to *myself* as an oppressed person, then that experience – if it is universal – will be the manifestation of a political experience. (p. 23-24)

Building on this (mis)identification of Papergirl Vancouver as political art and participants non-identification as activists, few participants were involved in other community, participatory, political, and/or socially engaged art. Participants offered various reasons for this lack of involvement including time constraints and a perceived disinterest. Those participants who were involved in similar art practices were drawn to them, not for political or activist reasons, but by the attempts of community-based social practice art to: expand the boundaries and static understandings of art; combine the role of the artist with that of the facilitator; bring people together in art-making; move away from art’s materiality; value and legitimize interaction between/amongst artists and community members; fulfill a craving to connect; foster creativity; and challenge and react against art’s absolute commodification. For example, Participant No. 8 said, highlighting the project’s accessibility (in more ways than one), “Papergirl bridges the gap between more traditional and naïve art practices and something more conceptual”.

I argue that the pervasiveness of neoliberal discourse partly contributes to the lack of identifying Papergirl Vancouver as a political project. Despite (what I deem) Papergirl Vancouver’s apparent political efforts, given the depoliticized climate and capitalism’s appropriation of political aesthetic strategies, participants fail to see Papergirl as political art. I expand upon these themes and question Papergirl’s inherent contradictions in Chapter Five.
4.3. Implications of Postfeminist Discourse: Papergirl Vancouver’s Feminist Denial and Identity Crisis

The implications of postfeminism are largely demonstrated in the feminist denial surrounding Papergirl Vancouver. Postfeminist discourse fuels and perpetuates this denial, leading to an identity “crisis” for Papergirl Vancouver. Though I have situated Papergirl in the feminist art movement and identified its feminist elements (see Chapter One), participants generally did not share my perspective. In my fieldwork, participants did not explicitly recognize Papergirl as a feminist art project, acknowledge Papergirl’s feminist influences, or connect Papergirl to a feminist legacy. Similar to participants’ reluctance to identify Papergirl Vancouver as political art, participants were also hesitant to frame Papergirl in a feminist light, what I have termed the feminist denial surrounding the project. Participants, however, still indirectly address Papergirl’s feminist ethos. For example: they frequently commented on Papergirl as being a mostly female-run organization; several participants see Papergirl as a form of female empowerment (i.e. Participants No. 8 and No. 1); and some participants identify with and were/are attracted to Papergirl’s “strong feminine energy”.

I argue that postfeminist discourse contributes to the perception of Papergirl as female empowering, versus as a feminist or politically minded project. Postfeminist discourse (and most likely a misunderstanding of feminism) was strongly identified in an interview with Participant No. 5 who unprovoked, stated: “feminism is dead”, accounted for, and no longer needed. Participant No. 5 added that there is a “time and place for it” and instead of a feminist approach, “we” should be focusing on marginalized races and other issues (because gender equality has been achieved). Participant No. 9 advocated redirecting the focus from women (insinuating it was no longer required): “I don’t know if Vancouver has that [feminist] agenda. It is more about getting people of all ages, backgrounds, genders, etc. to participate”.

4.3.1. Papergirl Vancouver’s Problematic Name

Contributing to this confusion, it seems Papergirl’s female-powered name is also problematic. The project’s name triggered much discussion amongst participants. Interestingly, when asked about the reception of the project’s name in Berlin, Ronninger
(Ed., 2009) writes: “When talking about Paperboys no one asks whether it is just for boys [...] I am all for balance and hope that equality of gender, rights, education, etc. will be of no matter at some point” (p. 38-39). This point was repeated in Ronniger’s interview:

For me it was an impulse. I didn’t think so much about the title [...] Paperboy is where the name comes from. What do I do so people understand the connection? Later on someone asked [a boy] if boys are allowed to? No girl would ask if they were allowed to be a paperboy too. (Ronniger, personal communication, November 27, 2013)

But she later added, hinting at the (subtle) political element of Papergirl:

Our [German] language is kind of masculine and this is well understood. Maybe the name Papergirl provokes men to start questioning our language. Many women were starting to organize the project and this was kind of funny to see. It was 90% women-powered and I question if it is just because of the name. (Ronniger, personal communication, November 27, 2013)

Comparatively, in Vancouver, Papergirl’s name seems to present greater problems. Participants generally disliked the name: it makes Papergirl exclusively by and for women (detracting from the goals of inclusivity) and it perpetuates the perception of Papergirl as a “cute little art project”.

Pointedly, Participant No. 8 explained a colleague introduced her to Papergirl knowing that the participant wanted to be involved in a feminist art project; the colleague gathered that Papergirl was a feminist art project because of its name. Participant No. 8 now understands the complexity and feminist ethos of Papergirl:

In the end I notice from a professional standpoint in the arts very few women who feel confident in expressing themselves compared to men. Papergirl provides more space for that, women can be affirmed in whatever creative exercise they are doing. My initial understanding of the project was as a feminist project but it has since expanded. But I still like that idea.

Other participants acknowledged women as underrepresented and underpaid in the art world; this led them to question and find issue with the giving away of (free) art by Papergirl. For example, Participant No. 10 said: “because of that there needs to be discussion, resolution or acceptance of the non-financial aspect of it. Women are still
very marginalized from the art world and from making money from it.” Finally, some participants had minimal problems with the name or the group of female-dominated volunteers, believing it adds to the project’s political element. Participant No. 10 stated: “It is just women – no problem – that makes it political, that makes it a force for social change”.

4.4. Papergirl Vancouver’s Complicated Reaction to Neoliberalism and Postfeminism

From these observations, it becomes clear that Papergirl Vancouver is an art project full of productive contradictions: it combines and holds in tension elements from feminist and social practice art; and it simultaneously complies with and challenges absorption by neoliberalism and postfeminism. First, participants perceive Papergirl Vancouver in different ways: political and unpolitical, feminist and not (or post) feminist, accessible and inaccessible, inclusive and exclusive (thus aligning with and denying neoliberal and postfeminist discourse). Second, despite perceiving of Papergirl Vancouver as mostly unpolitical, participants do see the project as a striking social force: it meaningfully engages those involved; it is unlike other community arts projects (participants could not list similar projects); it is highly needed in the arts and wider Vancouver community; and mostly significantly, it is viewed as having the potential to provoke actual social change. These defining elements are what arguably allow Papergirl to avoid complete absorption by neoliberalism and postfeminism, and posit the project as a potential tool for revitalizing political social practice art and reigniting feminist art activism.

4.4.1. Papergirl Vancouver Is Needed

Participants were asked why Papergirl Vancouver is needed in the arts and wider Vancouver community. They listed several recurring reasons (mostly stressing Papergirl’s challenging of conventions) but many of which could also be influenced by neoliberal and creative city discourse. Papergirl provides an alternative to the mainstream:
**Participant No. 3:** Papergirl provides an alternative to the commercialized art world and established art scene.

Papergirl challenges traditional understandings of "real art":

**Participant No. 2:** Papergirl challenges the segregated notion of art [...] that community art projects are not art [...] Papergirl challenges where the value of art lies [...] People may discuss the artwork they received, but they are more likely to discuss the process or experience of the project [...] Just because there is no monetary exchange does not mean there is no value to it.

**Participant No. 9:** Papergirl expands people’s restrictive ideas of what art is and what being creative means. We all have creative impulses.

Papergirl ensures “everyone can be creative”:

**Participant No. 9:** Art should be accessible to everyone.

**Participant No. 1:** Art-making is so important in people’s lives. There is a need for connection and art is a means to connect. It is transformative. It provides opportunity to share our stories and who we are.

And of course, Papergirl builds social inclusion:

**Participant No. 7:** Papergirl builds tradition and community. It helps counter Vancouver’s clique and cool factor.

Ronniger (personal communication, November 27, 2013) witnessed a similar sense of importance of and need for the project in Berlin, driving her to continue the project for five years.

### 4.4.2. Papergirl Vancouver Is Unique

Participants were also asked why Papergirl Vancouver is unique (and supposedly incomparable to other community arts projects in Vancouver). The reasons are similar to those presented above. Participant No. 7 humourously stated: “It is not another hipster art project”. Participants also discussed the project’s openness and altruism:
Participant No. 7: Seniors, youth, professional artists, are all participating and being exhibited in the same space. To me that’s really beautiful and really inspiring.

Participant No. 4: The fact that it's a project based completely on giving! The volunteers giving their time and love to the idea, the artists giving their work to strangers and all of that without any pecuniary goals or data mining or other ulterior motives.

Participant No. 2 accurately stated:

A lot of community projects come out with things that are on the wall or temporary things [...] [Unlike Papergirl] they don’t necessarily all kind of say what is art, who is making art, why can’t you give something away, why does the value of art lie in the fact you pay for it, rather than in art’s idea?

Touching on defining characteristics of social practice art, other participants saw Papergirl’s multi-faceted goals and its many layers; its process-based and open-ended structures; and its meaningful (and actual) engagement of participants, as unique:

Participant No. 3: I don’t know if it is unique. There are many other cool projects. But it does combine many aspects: art market, society, making presents, money, and gender.

Participant No. 5: What I really liked about Papergirl is it’s not just about the exhibition, or the ride out, or giving out art. It’s also about the workshops we do. Like: hey, come on over, have fun with us, do some crafty stuff, learn how to do silk screening, or whatever it is. It is not just about one specific lead up to the one specific day. It’s about all the other community things to get people involved.

Participant No. 8: So many people have different understandings of what it is. I like that. I think it makes people think a little bit more [about] how art functions with community and the public.

Participant No. 2: A lot of times with community art engagement projects someone is hired to produce a project. Sometimes they will have a couple of volunteers [but it is] predominantly artists interacting with people. Whereas this gets kind of filtered and distributed even further [in Papergirl]. For instance, cyclists hardly know anything about the project and they’re essential to the project [...] they have to approach strangers and engage in conversation. They might have a completely different idea of what art is about. All different kinds of stories happen.
4.4.3. Papergirl Vancouver as a Force for Social Change

Participants overwhelmingly viewed Papergirl Vancouver as having the potential to provoke actual social change in the city.\textsuperscript{86} Demonstrating Papergirl’s gentle and subdued approach to critique, participants stated:

**Participant No. 3:** Every little drop or action might bring something to someone and make someone happy. It might make a change, even just in a day or an hour of the person’s life.

**Participant No. 8:** All these little moments are powerful and have the potential to provoke thought, baby steps […] Papergirl could provoke change on a micro-scale, but it is hard to conceive of change on a larger scale.

**Participant No. 7:** Some people suggest giving the art is the actual practice or performance art piece. To me that is social change. We’re talking about how it is a cold city and nobody is talking to each other. And then we go out there.\textsuperscript{87}

In addition, some participants thought Papergirl’s support for young and emerging artists (who are generally lacking support in Vancouver particularly from the City of Vancouver) was important in creating positive social change. Of course, participants mostly credited Papergirl’s community building and engagement efforts as driving the social change the project promises. For example, Participant No. 3 said: “Papergirl creates a sense of community amongst people participating. For people participating they got to know each other and are still connected. For instance, we still meet up at [other] exhibition openings”; Participant No. 6 echoed this. Participant No. 1 said she has already seen the positive impact Papergirl can have in addressing social isolation (this participant witnessed new Vancouver residents attend Papergirl’s workshops and later become more fully involved in the project). I argue this differentiation between social and political change can again be partly attributed to the depoliticized nature of and discounting of

\textsuperscript{86} When participants were asked: “Do you think Papergirl Vancouver has the potential to provoke social change in Metro Vancouver?” specific reference was made to Papergirl’s 2013 Mission Statement.

\textsuperscript{87} Admittedly, Ronniger (Ed., 2009) takes a somewhat more skeptical approach to Papergirl Berlin: “Papergirl is, for God’s sake, not a project that tries to protect mankind from harm, or unstable, asocial behaviour. Papergirl cannot and will not save us from the economic prospects of profit, expressive individualization or other nastiness. I don’t really want to go that deep into it. To break down the written word into a simple formula: providing the means of making people HAPPY, and so far, Papergirl has been an extremely fine thing” (p. 56).
political movements by neoliberalism and postfeminism. I further explore the distinguishing of the social from the political in Chapter Five.

Some participants did, however, suggest several changes must be made to Papergirl Vancouver, should it want to provoke or effect social change. Participants suggested: increased media exposure for Papergirl (emphasizing alternative media support); diversified community participation; questioning the relationship between the arts and social change; thinking realistically on how much social change can be achieved by Papergirl (and the arts) alone; furthering the critical dialogue surrounding Papergirl; continuing conversation between artist and recipient beyond the act of gift-giving; and providing deeper cultural critique of the City of Vancouver’s arts and culture funding (of which Papergirl Vancouver is indirectly a part). Finally, participants were also asked: “What do you think the outcome of the project should be”. In keeping with the project’s letting go and open-ended mentality, participants generally did not see a specific outcome. They did however hope Papergirl: encourages people to make their own art and become more involved in the making process; provokes thought and dialogue; builds community; helps to strengthen ties between artists and the wider community; helps community members learn new skills; and allows participants to develop new friendships.

4.4.4. Papergirl Vancouver’s Simultaneous Alignment with and Reaction against Neoliberal and Postfeminist Discourses

Given these observations, Papergirl thus situates itself in simultaneous alignment with and in reaction against neoliberal and postfeminist discourses. These elements are what arguably cement Papergirl’s unique status, and posit the project as a potential tool for revitalizing apolitical social practice art. By holding these elements in tension Papergirl is also able to avoid complete absorption by neoliberalism and postfeminism, a fear surrounding social practice art.

Kosmala & Ressler (2011) discuss the importance of alternative media in political art today: “In many countries these events, struggles and movements have recognised the centrality of mainstream media in manufacturing and maintaining consent to neoliberal policies and relations of oppression. As such, there has been recognition of the importance of access to alternative communications (including social media networks) and to the existence, evolution and creation of critical/radical media alternatives” (p. 22).
Clearly, neoliberal and postfeminist discourse are in effect in Papergirl Vancouver: its comparison to a small business and entrepreneurial spirit; its self-labeled project status; its non-hierarchical structure; promoting female empowerment; and girl powered. And, although participants describe Papergirl Vancouver as complex or multi-faceted, it does lack critical dialogue, or at best it offers subdued or gentle critique of the art market economy and by extension capitalist relations (Bishop and others argue that more critical dialogue is needed to revitalize political social practice art projects; see Chapter Two). Recall Bishop’s (2012) argument regarding changes of social practice art due to shifts in the economy: the “dominant goal [of projects] seemed to be the production of a dynamic experience for participants, rather than the production of complex artistic forms” (p. 246). Papergirl Vancouver also challenges Bishop’s notions of the “social inclusion agenda”. Bishop (2012) argues: social practice art projects’ social inclusion goals are: “less about repairing the social bond than a mission to enable all members of society [… to] cope with a deregulated, privatized world” (p. 14). 89 And despite adopting the activist network structure, it seemingly uses this to its advantage (particularly given the strong relationships that develop between participants). 90

Papergirl does not adopt the complacent attitude of other social practice art projects (as suggested by Bishop). Papergirl, does, however fail to focus on larger political issues and in exposing underlying institutional structures (i.e. what is causing social isolation). The project and its participants also retreat from tackling controversial political issues preferring to adopt a politically neutral ideology. One participant did suggest that self-censorship is necessary when producing a project (such as Papergirl)

89 Interestingly, Ronniger (Ed., 2009) somewhat acknowledges and condones Papergirl’s absorption by the mainstream: “Of course the papergirl action is exciting because it generates from the street art environment formats, artists and new forms of aesthetic expression that could be absorbed by this operating system in the future” (p. 15). In our interview, Ronniger was well aware of the risk for absorption: “Any kind of subcultural movement is always used at some point […] There is always the risk of appropriation”. But, in perhaps another way of challenging this absorption, Ronniger (Ed., 2009) alludes to a reciprocal absorption, in which Papergirl also borrows from advertising and other mainstream practices.

90 By advantage I mean: the structure of Papergirl does not seem to hinder the project’s success. Participants and particularly volunteers (myself included) seem drawn to and remain involved with the project because of the very autonomy it offers volunteers (giving them the sense they are able to effect change within and through the organization and make a meaningful contribution to the project).
under the name and with the support of the RCARC. Papergirl is also understood by its participants as both unsanctioned and institutionalized or bureaucratic. Referencing the overall institutionalization of public or street art in Vancouver, Participant No. 4 said:

One of the big differences to Germany and in particular Berlin I found to be the total lack of street art. Everything was so clean and off the drawing board, which is fine, but I love street art in that it shows what people living in a city are thinking about and making fun of. Which is why the idea of Aisha Ronninger really appealed to me: bring this bubbling and vibrant creativity into the open and give it a legal vent, without taking away those elements with which a street artist deals: they don't know who's going to see their work, they don't know if it is appreciated or touches a chord, they just have to let it go and have their art be by itself, a gift to whoever has the eyes to see it.

Consequently, several participants saw a need to move Papergirl outside the RCARC, allowing the project to become more autonomous and hold more regular events (perhaps providing opportunity to deepen dialogue). Participant No. 12 warned: “Eventually Papergirl will become too institutionalized, and it won't be as fresh”. Participant No. 1 suggested the institutionalized element of Papergirl and particularly the funding it receives from the City of Vancouver Park Board and RCARC may impact the perception of the project as political art. On a wider scope, Participant No. 12 had strong opinions on municipal and provincial government funding for the arts: “It is challenging to work within these constraints. The government administers it and art becomes institutionalized, contained, and controlled. The creative process is messy and chaotic, but organizations don’t like that”. Participant No. 12, however, continued to say she does not view Papergirl as setting these boundaries and constraints for its participants and artists.

Evidently, the wider context of Papergirl Vancouver must also be discussed. Papergirl Vancouver is a project supported by and associated with the RCARC and is consequently subject to specific parameters. The impact of neoliberal and creative city discourse is apparent, particularly in the City of Vancouver’s *Culture Plan for Vancouver, 2008-2018, Creative City* (2008) and the City’s Cultural Services website (2014). The City of Vancouver’s (2008) culture plan values include: creativity, excellence and international recognition, diversity and cross-cultural support, openness and
experimentation, accessibility and affordability, and collaboration with life and business (p. 8). The use of neoliberal discourse is evident (eerily similar to McRobbie and others’ criticisms of neoliberalism’s exploitative nature; see Chapter Three); for instance, the plan states: “Creativity, innovation and risk-taking are necessary ingredients in fostering cultural expression in Vancouver and an adaptive and resilient workforce and citizenry” (p. 8). It also recognizes the contribution of culture and creativity to economic growth:

> Whether an individual is a practicing artist, an audience member, volunteer for a cultural institution or a worker in the cultural sector, he or she is part of building community and contributing to the economic and social health of the City. (City of Vancouver, 2008, p. 4)

Papergirl evidently contains (and can be subsumed under) many of these values: it is innovative and experimental in its approach to community engagement and the exhibiting and gifting of art; it seeks to inspire creativity and art-making in everyone; it is grounded in accessibility and affordability (by both opening up the call for art to anyone and bringing art to new, public spaces); and it seeks collaboration and sponsorships with local businesses (amongst other similarities).

From my discussion with a City of Vancouver Parks Board arts programmer it is clear that the Culture Plan values and themes guide the Parks Board’s recreation-focused arts programming. For instance, arts programmers seek to: support innovative arts projects and encourage community-focused artists to take risks; provide space for artists and reduce barriers between the artist and community; foster neighbourhood pride and build identity in community-based art; increase the accessibility of and reduce the fear of art; and work with and involve all ages and diversities. A similar support for

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91 These values evidently guide the Culture Plan’s strategic plan themes; these themes include: innovation (support and foster artistic innovation); learning (cultural and inter-cultural learning; use educational institutions to support culture); connecting people, ideas, and communities (create opportunities for collaboration, dialogue, and participation); neighbourhoods (highlight creative, vibrant, and diverse neighbourhoods and build on their unique identities); and culture as a valued and valuable resource.

92 Similarly, arts and artistic are replaced by a new creative discourse; i.e. in this excerpt from the Culture Plan: “The central vision of this ten year Culture Plan is to promote and enhance the culture and creative diversity of the City of Vancouver to the benefit of our citizens, our creative community, and our visitors” (City of Vancouver, 2008, p. 5).
cultural spaces is also found in the City of Vancouver’s (2013) *2014 Capital and Operating Budget* (particularly the role cultural spaces play in enhancing quality of life for residents, attracting tourists, and supporting business).

In addition, Parks Board arts programming is based on the city’s annual theme (i.e. the Year of Reconciliation) and reflects the City of Vancouver’s Greenest City by 2020 movement. The arts programmer interviewed stated: “We are governed as an institution by what the themes of the year are, what the Mayor’s office says”. The arts programmer also unsurprisingly hinted at a sense of censorship in government-funded arts: “We can't do any kind of rallies. Like, ‘we believe in this’ [...] we won't be walking down the street for the 99%. That is a ‘no-no’. That can be considered a challenge.”

Despite this risk of institutionalization and complicated funding, I argue that largely Papergirl successfully challenges neoliberalism and postfeminism’s emphasis on individualization and self-focus. Papergirl Vancouver emphasizes the collective, functions as an apparently collaborative arts project (involving participants on multiple levels), and it discourages self-recognition (particularly that of the artist, by having artists show their work in uncurated exhibitions, and forcing them to let go of their art). Despite being called a project (and offering easy comparison to NGO Art), many participants actually described Papergirl as long-term versus short-term. For example, Participant No. 13 sees Papergirl as “building tradition” in Vancouver (because of its occurrence on an annual basis). Finally, Papergirl strives to react against art’s commodification, through its gifting of art. It potentially subverts the gift economy in turn, by not expecting reciprocity from the art recipient.

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93 Lacy (in Cartiere & Willis, Eds., 2008) emphasizes the importance of long-term engagement in social practice art projects citing four multi-year projects as examples (p. 21).

94 While artwork recipients are encouraged to contact their artist, participants repeatedly state the primary focus of Papergirl Vancouver is letting go; this potentially denies the reciprocity commonly associated with gift giving (see Mauss, 2000).
Chapter 5. Conclusions

This thesis has situated Papergirl Vancouver’s roots in the Second Wave feminist art and social practice art movements. I have argued that feminist art’s contributions to contemporary art have been absorbed into and forgotten by much social practice art. Through my discussion of neoliberalism, postfeminism, and creative city discourse, I have demonstrated that elements of social practice art are compatible with neoliberal discourses of entrepreneurial subjects and creative cities. This has contributed to the depoliticization of much community-based social practice art and a loss of critique in the genre. Using interviews with participants and fieldwork, I have demonstrated the specific implications of neoliberal and postfeminist discourse for Papergirl Vancouver. These primarily include: the (mis)identification of Papergirl Vancouver as political art, participants’ non-identification as activists, and the feminist denial surrounding the project. In Chapter Four, I also explored Papergirl Vancouver’s complicated and contradictory reaction to these implications: its simultaneous reaction against neoliberal and postfeminist discourses and absorption by them. Given these contradictory reactions and the project’s widely acknowledged “uniqueness”, I have situated Papergirl Vancouver as a potential site for implementing practices to reconnect social practice art to its activist roots and reignite feminist art activism.

It is imperative that social practice art’s political and critical functions are revitalized and are able to avoid complete absorption and loss by neoliberalism. My fieldwork has enhanced and enforced my understanding of social practice art’s functions in the community; this includes providing a space to: foster dialogue and encourage participatory democracy; building meaningful relationships between community members; encourage critical perspective and envisage alternative perspectives; challenge the given symbolic order and hegemony; and ultimately contribute to social change (likely at the micro or community level). These increasingly declining functions are threatened by neoliberalism. A specific character of social practice art, is however, needed to embody these functions: social practice art that is agonistic and embraces
dissensus. Agonistic social practice art aims to foment dissensus and make “visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. It is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of existing hegemony” (Mouffe, 2007, p. 4-5). The purpose of this artistic activism, then, becomes a: “counter-hegemonic intervention whose objective is to occupy the public space in order to disrupt the smooth image that corporate capitalism is trying to spread, bringing to the fore its repressive character” (Mouffe, 2007, p. 5). The generative potential of agonistic social practice art and other solutions for revitalizing political social practice art are discussed below.

Drawing from my research of the literature and participant interviews, my final chapter summarizes the challenges social practice art faces today. I will argue for the use of feminist art activism in revitalizing political and critical social practice art and I will discuss other means of revitalizing the genre in a depoliticized neoliberal and postfeminist era. Before I discuss this, I offer some reflections on the research process and participants’ responses.

5.1. Reflections on the Research Process

I became involved with Papergirl Vancouver in a volunteer capacity prior to commencing my research on the project. Unlike some other participants, I was initially drawn to Papergirl Vancouver, not by its “feminine energy” or “girl-powered” name, but by its unusual approach to community-based art. I saw its “giftervention” and explicit challenging of the art market economy and conventions as politically subversive; I was excited by its (now questionable) political origins in Berlin; I was intrigued by the project’s attempts to engage different groups of participants on multiple levels and in varying ways; and I remained involved with the project because of the autonomy, meaningful experience, and value it gave to the core group of volunteers involved (myself included).

When I began my research, while I found it difficult to classify Papergirl Vancouver as purely a dialogical or relational artwork, I immediately conceived of the project as a form of political and radical socially engaged art. In my participant interviews, I was most surprised by participants’ general failure to classify Papergirl
Vancouver as political art (or my apparent misidentification) but their rather contradictory conception of the project as socially engaged art and as a force for social change. (Less surprising, then, was participants’ non-identification as activists and their reluctance to discuss politics.)

Helpful in my confusion was Mouffe’s (2007) distinction of the social from the political; but this also clearly complicates Papergirl participants’ responses. Mouffe (2007) defines the social as: “the realm of sedimented practices […] practices that conceal the originary acts of their contingent political institution and which are taken for granted” (p. 2; emphasis added). The political is defined as: that which “involves the visibility of the acts of social institutions” (p. 2; emphasis added). The social cannot exist without power relations and the political is an expression of a particular structure of power relations. Approaching Papergirl Vancouver in this way, the project is indeed political. For instance, Papergirl makes visible the standards and conventions of the traditional art institution in its attempts to challenge them (i.e. by gifting art and holding an uncurated and non-juried exhibition). It is also possible that attempting to classify Papergirl Vancouver as community/social art, versus political/radical art, reflects the problematic umbrella term of social practice art itself. As discussed earlier, social practice art as a genre is rather overly encompassing, and perhaps confusing to define; in addition, Papergirl Vancouver is comprised of multiple influences, versus the solely political.

I also questioned Papergirl Vancouver as a force for social change, curious as to the location of this change. I was particularly interested by participants’ contradictory responses: Papergirl Vancouver is or can be a force for social change; Papergirl Vancouver is not a political force; and Papergirl Vancouver is unlikely to impact change on a larger, macro level. It seems (social) change is most occurring at the core of the project: between dedicated, long-term volunteers, and committed, returning artists and cyclists. Many of these participants commented on the friendships and connections they

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95 Cartiere & Willis (Eds., 2008) address this problem in a series of essays. They write: “A clear definition [of public art] is elusive because public art is simply difficult to define. Under the vast umbrella of public art one finds permanent works, temporary works, political activism, service art, performance, earthworks, community projects, street furniture, monuments, memorials, and – let us not forget – “plunk” and “plop” art” (p. 9).
have formed between fellow volunteers; none, however, mentioned lasting connections formed between themselves and the (temporary) artwork recipients. Albeit on a potentially smaller scale (than initially conceived), the project’s social impact enforces the need to examine Papergirl Vancouver's political potential. In Section 5.3, I demonstrate that Papergirl Vancouver complies with suggested elements of critical, political social practice art and encourages dissensus or agonism, while still (or despite) building community.

5.2. The State of Social Practice Art Today

In Chapter Two, I discussed several common criticisms of social practice art and the challenges it currently faces. In brief summary, these criticisms include: the need for or use of more critical frameworks by which to evaluate projects; the need to address the types of relations or social bonds produced and strengthened by projects; the need to question the democratic nature, means of engagement and participation, and political efficaciousness of projects; an overall loss of critique and politicization; the cooptation (by capitalism) of art practices and their experimentation and creativity; the projects’ reproduction of the dominant models they attempt to critique; and the ethical or social turn in social practice art.

I was interested to explore these criticisms further in my participant interviews; participants were asked about the state of political social practice art today. Most participants suggested there were some examples of political social practice art; several participants identified a variety of political projects (particularly in Vancouver); and few participants stated there were minimal examples of political social practice art today.96

96 One participant emphasized the abundance of arts programs aimed at empowering residents of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. A second participant stated (referring to the variety of social practice art projects now found): “I think it's all over the map: guerrilla and interventionist projects to global initiatives, teeny tiny or neighbourhood initiatives to large projects”. As discussed in Chapter Four, some participants compared social practice art from the 1990s to art activism in the 1970s. These participants identified a lack of strong political response and political movements to latch onto in today’s context. These participants argued that political art is more likely to be found in Europe and places outside of North America. This evidently points to the need for further research in feminist art contributions to social practice art, outside of North America.
Some participants saw the potential for social practice art to be critical and subversive (albeit in forms different from earlier activist-based practices of the 1970s). Participant No. 12 stated:

There is always art that is disturbing, but it is how these messages can get through that is important. We have to get beyond Banksy, but there will always be those kinds of artists. There is a culture of people who need to get their message out. A lot of artists are capable of subversion. We won’t... you can’t oppress [those] people. There is an inextinguishable energy.

Several participants identified the academic approach and inaccessibility of many community-based social practice art projects today; they were clear to exclude Papergirl Vancouver from this. For example, Participant No. 8 stated:

There are some radical art practices, but they are usually around the marginalization of certain social groups or racial groups or socioeconomic groups. A lot of the time it is also very academic and not reaching most people.

Participant No. 2 identified social practice art projects as largely contained in the gallery or other “acceptable” (i.e. institutionalized) spaces for art:

A lot of my peers are involved in social practice art, but they still base and frame it in the gallery space. It is not really radical because it hinges itself on the gallery, reaffirming it as art. There needs to be more artwork that steps outside of that, but that is really uncomfortable for a lot of people. I guess that is a really good reason to call Papergirl radical.

With the exception of Papergirl (despite concerns of its association with the RCARC; see Chapter Four), Participant No. 2 and several others described much social practice art today as already institutionalized. Participant No. 2 expanded upon this notion of institutionalization:

Yes, I think there still are [examples of radical art practice]. But contemporary art today is really scripted. For example, community-based projects are very similar to how people do public commissions – it is very scripted. If you know how to write, say, fill in the right blanks, explain you’re capturing the right demographics, then you’ll get funding. It is not as radical as it could be if people were doing their own things.
Participant No. 2 identified examples of radical social practice art as lying on the fringe; this includes artists who ignore funding and the associated parameters or requirements of receiving funding.

5.3. The Role of Feminist Art Activism in Revitalizing Social Practice Art

Recognizing social practice art’s historicity, acknowledging social practice art’s forgotten feminist relations, and encouraging elements of feminist art activism in the genre, can arguably make significant contributions to the revitalization of political social practice art such as Papergirl Vancouver. This notion is not necessarily a new one, but has somewhat been ignored. For instance, Lippard (1976) argued (amongst others; see Chapter Two): “Ideally, the women artists’ movement could provide a model for the rest of the world, could indicate ways to move back toward a more basic contact between artists and real life” (p. 143). Through my research, I have identified several ways in which (American) Second Wave feminist art activism strategies can be used in revitalizing social practice art, and preventing its ultimate absorption by neoliberal, postfeminist, and creative city discourses. I have discussed these strategies below; included in my discussion are instances of Papergirl Vancouver implementing these strategies.

First, feminist art’s means of criticism, and its core values, can be used in addressing the types of relations constructed and produced by social practice art (deemed a major area of concern and criticism). Particularly relevant is feminist art’s emphasis on the analysis of socially constructed relationships in and surrounding art, emphasizing the influence of external institutions and forces on art practices. Similarly, I situate Papergirl Vancouver in the wider context (suggesting and identifying institutional influences and implications of neoliberalism and postfeminism). Papergirl Vancouver in turn, reacts to these influences in contradictory ways.

Second, building upon this, feminist art strategies can be used in addressing the largely consensus-based and questionably democratic relations constructed and produced by social practice art (also deemed a major area of concern and criticism).
Many Second Wave feminist artists advocated a sense of empowerment and participation (particularly in community-based works or those involving participants in some way) based on a community of difference and “concrete otherness” versus a community of sameness or consensus (Hicks, 1990). Gablik (in Lacy, Ed., 1995) discusses respect for the Other; she clearly connects care, empathy, and compassion for the Other with a decentralized self, community building, socially engaged art, and other elements characteristic of Second Wave feminist art. Lacy (Ed., 1995) similarly advocates for respect for and accommodation of difference in new genre public art (a “subsector” of social practice art); she writes: “We need to stop denying difference and pretending a woozy universalism that masks and maintains deep social divisions” (p. 118). Rather, difference is productive and contributes to community-based artistic practice (and the larger democratic practice it is clearly tied to):

The big question for public artists and for critics is, how do we develop a public art that acknowledges and supports and enriches these differences while at the same time discovering how these differences contribute to an idea of public life that is, in fact, a kind of common ground? (Phillips in Lacy, Ed., 1995, p. 38)

Papergirl builds a similar community of difference, empowering its volunteers and encouraging autonomy in the group; while perhaps detrimental to a political cause, Papergirl’s volunteers are not apparently tied to specific, shared political beliefs. Papergirl’s exhibition similarly encourages and accommodates difference (i.e. encouraging submissions of all kinds from anyone who wants to participate). Difference is essential to and at the core of the project.

Third, feminist art can be used in addressing the apparent loss of critique in much social practice art; it can serve as a model for valuing and fully integrating critique into the artmaking process. Second Wave feminist artists repeatedly argued for the unification of art and politics and suggested criticism enables a deeper understanding of the relations between art, politics, and society. For example, the feminist Heresies Collective, writes:

97 Gablik (in Lacy, Ed., 1995) writes: “Giving each person a voice is what builds community and makes art socially responsive. Interaction becomes the medium of expression, an empathic way of seeing through another’s eyes” (p. 82).
As women, we are aware that historically the connections between our lives, our arts and our ideas have been suppressed. Once these connections are clarified they can function as a means to dissolve the alienation between artist and audience, and to understand the relationship between art and politics, work and workers. (In Heresies Collective, Inc., 1977, p. 1)

Hammond also writes about the integral roles criticism and awareness of political consciousness play in feminist art:

feminism is the political analysis of the experience of being a woman in patriarchal culture. This analysis becomes a state of mind, a way of being and thinking when it is reflected in one’s life. It can be articulated in art, and the art itself can in turn contribute to the process of analysis and consciousness. If art and life are connected, and if one is a feminist, then one must be a feminist artist – that is, one must make art that reflects a political consciousness of what it means to be a woman in patriarchal culture. (In Heresies Collective, Inc., 1980, p. 45)

Criticism is arguably integrated into the Papergirl “practice” (albeit gentle); for example, its six core themes (see Chapter One) critique and attempt to subvert the conventions and institutions of the traditional art market. Several participants did, however, identify the need to encourage greater critical discussion about the project (see Chapter Four).

Fourth, in contrast to sceptic critiques of social practice art (who may discount community-based art as “not real”), Second Wave feminist artists valued and legitimized the role of community in socially engaged art; and the wider role of community-based art in the political power of the women’s movement. Goldbard & Adams (in Heresies Collective, Inc., 1987) exemplify this:

the women’s movement understood that the cultural dimension of its work was as important as any other: it was necessary to redefine aesthetic standards, to purge language of its sexism, to legitimate the public telling of formerly private stories; and community arts work had a vital part to play in these tastes. (p. 43)

Hammond (in Heresies Collective, Inc., 1980) similarly writes: “An honest criticism would bring art and politics together, helping us to understand their relationship, and furthering their mutual development. We need to develop criteria through a critical practice of our own, to hold each other accountable without censoring our creative imagination. Criticism must be integrated into the artmaking process, and vice versa” (p. 47).
Similarly, community participation and volunteers are essential to Papergirl Vancouver’s existence (let alone its success).

Finally, as highlighted in Chapter Two, feminist art activism of the 1970s and 1980s is notably tied with the larger women’s movement; this arguably strengthened the power and reach of both movements’ political activism. Social practice art critics frequently discuss the need to align social practice art with (a) new political movement(s) to revitalize and re-politicize it. Critics inconsistently mention the feminist art movement as an example, but the new New Left is cited as an example. I discuss this in further detail below. (It is acknowledged that Papergirl “falters” on this strategy; its ties to a political movement, feminist legacy or otherwise, are subdued, hidden, and/or generally not discussed.)

5.4. Other Viable Solutions for Revitalizing Social Practice Art

Feminist art activism strategies can play a significant role in revitalizing political social practice art, but the approach must be interdisciplinary and other solutions are also suggested. Papergirl Vancouver apparently embodies feminist art activism strategies (discussed above); I have also identified Papergirl as a model for implementing these other solutions. Evidently similar to and building upon feminist art activism strategies, these other solutions include: 1) encouraging dissensus (versus consensus), sustaining tension, and respecting (versus assimilating) the Other in community-based social practice art; 2) aligning social practice art with political movement(s); 3) encouraging interdisciplinary artistic practice and collaboration; 4) revitalizing critical thought (in part by resisting institutionalization); and 5) acknowledging and resolving to the neoliberal/postfeminist/creative city context.

Mouffe’s (2007) theory of agonism is especially relevant in the encouragement of dissensus in social practice art (see also Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Mouffe envisions a

99 Bishop’s (2007) theory of relational antagonism (see Chapter Two) applies Mouffe’s theory to artistic practices.
radical, pluralist democracy in which: individual identities benefit from maximum autonomy and are accepted for their own validity; people are divided and ultimate reconciliation is not possible; and conflict is present and necessary for democracy. Democracy is agonistic, versus antagonistic; meaning, political enemies are seen as adversaries, and the Other (or enemy) is respected. Unlike Habermas’s singular public sphere (and Kester’s dialogical aesthetics, which admittedly draws upon Habermas), multiple agonistic public spaces are created. These spaces foster dialogue and allow hegemonic projects to confront one another without requiring (or reaching) societal consensus (Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006; Mouffe 2007). More arguably radical, political, or critical social practice artists and critics envision similar agonistic communities as being created by social practice art. For example, BAVO (in Léger, Ed., 2011) suggest contemporary art’s social relevance is to produce dissensus and break out of the increasingly rampant post-utopian consensus. Referencing participatory art, Goldberg & Reed (2008) state: “That’s what I’m really interested in – this productive mobilization of the conflict of critique as a dynamic creative process”. Extending this notion, Bishop (2012) suggests that consensus is in fact a means of repression (evidently detracting from and counter to social practice’s critical and political potentials). She states:

In insisting upon consensual dialogue, sensitivity to difference risks becoming a new kind of repressive norm – one in which artistic strategies of disruption, intervention or over-identification are immediately ruled out as ‘unethical’ because all forms of authorship are equated with authority and indicted as totalizing. (p. 25)

Second, critics of social practice art repeatedly stress the need to align social practice art with political movement(s) in order for the genre to achieve (or return to) its critical and political potentials. Comparable to the influence of Second Wave feminist art aesthetics on the women’s movement (and the use of aesthetics by activists; see Chapter Two); Léger (Ed., 2011) identifies the following potential in social practice art:

100 Bishop (2012) discusses the historic avant-garde’s constant positioning in relation to existent party politics. Feminism and socialism were similarly tied particularly in the 1970s (albeit a difficult and at times challenging relationship) (see Gouma-Peterson & Matthews, 1987).
Although temporary, protest activity is one of the most democratic forms of collective action that anti-capitalist forces have used to express dissent, and equally, one of the sites where global capital exercises the most direct form of indirect coercive dissimulation. Certainly, artistic experimentation has informed the aesthetics and tactics of social protest movements. (p. 13)

In addition, it is important to note that social practice art cannot achieve social or political change on its own; rather it must align with established political movements. For example, Mouffe (2007) acknowledges critical art's important place in democratic politics, but states it cannot “alone realize the transformations needed for the establishment of a new hegemony” (p. 5). More forcefully, Bishop (2012) argues it is not enough to merely produce activist art; institutional change must be sought (which requires aligning with political movements). Seemingly reacting against the instrumentalization (and legitimization) of art for economic purposes (i.e. in creative city discourse), Bishop (2012) continues: “the task today is to produce a viable international alignment of leftist political movements and a reassertion of art's inventive forms of negation as valuable in their own right” (p. 284).

In her discussion of political alignments, Mouffe (2007) references the building of “chains of equivalence” or collaborative solidarities; these involve the coming together of different political struggles in which each struggle (or movement) is respectful of the other’s differences. It seems artists have already put these political solidarities into practice. For example, Lacy (Ed., 1995) writes: “Throughout the seventies, considerable but often unacknowledged exchange occurred among ethnic, feminist, and Marxist artists” (p. 28). Markedly, Lacy (Ed., 1995) argues these movements were brought together by a centralized art discourse and this discourse became the impetus for the formation of new genre public art. In the current postfeminist and neoliberal context, this type of politics (i.e. radical pluralist democracy, chains of equivalence), is however,

101 Lippard (in Heresies Collective, Inc., 1985) similarly notes: “Artists can’t change the world alone. Neither can anybody else, alone. But art is a powerful and potentially subversive tool of consciousness” (p. 15).
102 Mouffe (2007) further explains this does not produce a single, homogeneous political movement; rather feminist, anti-racist, etc. movements work together against a common adversary and avoid self-neutralization.
actively disarticulated. Consequently, forming such political solidarities can also be essential to the revitalization of Second Wave feminist ideals.$^{103}$

Third, building upon these suggestions and in recognition of social practice art’s interdisciplinarity, scholars suggest interdisciplinary collaborations can help to increase social practice art’s impact and revitalize the genre’s political potential. For instance, Mouffe (2007) argues the field of artistic intervention must be widened to allow artistic practices’ intervention in a multiplicity of social spaces. Given the pervasiveness of neoliberalism in the public and private spheres, this is required “to oppose the program of total social mobilization of capitalism” (Mouffe, 2007, p. 1). Schmelzer (2013) suggests possible alliances between the pro-environment, pro-diversity, and contemporary art movements. Finally, seemingly unafraid to disrupt the boundaries between art, politics, and society (comparable to Second Wave feminist artists), Kosmala & Ressler (2011) also argue for the expansion of art into multiple social spaces:

But I don’t believe that art should limit itself to tasks such as these: making material objects or producing visual material for demonstrations. Artists should get involved in different aspects of organizing and dispersing activism, and, as a long-term goal, somehow aim at overcoming these boundaries between art and activism in practice (p. 22)

These suggestions would evidently require overcoming the reluctance by many social practice artists to identify (or be identified) as activists (i.e. see Chapter Four). This is in apparent contrast to the intertwined identity of artist and activist, characteristic of Second Wave feminist artists.

Fourth, as repeatedly discussed, there is a general loss of critique in contemporary art practices, amongst other disciplines; this is primarily attributed to the appropriation of critique(s) by capitalism. But, critical social practice art is needed to resist this very (increasing) appropriation, bureaucratization, and institutionalization. The impacts of institutionalization on social practice art are widely discussed (particularly with

$^{103}$ For example, McRobbie (2009) argues: “Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau have provided a pathway for re-inventing and developing further left-feminist ideals through their notion of a radical democratic pluralist politics” (p. 48).
respect to its political power). For example, Bengtsen (2013) writes: “something essential may be lost when street art is practically embedded by curators in institutional frameworks” (p. 66). Similarly, Lacy (Ed., 1995) states: “In a public art dialogue focused on the bureaucratic and the structural, the visionary potential of public art, its ability to generate social meaning, is lost” (p. 46). The need to support community-based, grassroots, public art projects – such as Papergirl Vancouver – while maintaining their autonomy, becomes apparent.

Finally, scholars do acknowledge the generative potential of neoliberalism and postfeminism and they allude to adapting or resolving to this political socio-economic climate. Mouffe (2007) argues we must relinquish: “the idea that to be political requires making a total break with the existing state of affairs in order to create something absolutely new” (p. 5). Social practice art can instead be used to help construct new subjectivities or identities. McRobbie (2001, p. 91) also addresses the potential for harnessing the pervasive individualism (attributed to neoliberalism and postfeminism) to give way to “new productive singularities” or “new femininities” in the case of Gill & Scharff (Eds., 2011).

Creative work and artistic practices are identified as the very sites to initiate this harnessing of individualization, revitalization of critique, and construction of new subjectivities. For example, McRobbie (2011) highlights characteristics specific to social practice art that can be used in new, productive ways. She discusses the genre’s collective-based values, suggesting these values can serve as models for alternative labour conditions, and in countering self-employment, project-based work, and worker

104 Conversely, there are possible limits to neoliberal discourse; i.e. the repeated use of “everyone is creative” in creative city rhetoric risks making creativity meaningless. Bishop (2006) points to a similar criticism of social practice artworks in which: “there can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of participatory art, because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond” (p. 3).

105 Budgeon (in Gill & Scharff, Eds., 2011) identifies the generative potential of new femininities and Third Wave spaces to produce new articulations of “feminist femininity”. She argues these spaces must also “provide opportunities to evade the co-optation and commodification of pro-girl discourses” (p. 287). McRobbie (2009) sees similar potential for resistance in these multiple meanings of feminism: “So it is this potential which I argue is the source of anxiety, concern and pre-emptive action, on the part of those bodies and institutions and organisations which do not wish to see established power and gender hierarchies undermined” (p. 2).
exploitation. McRobbie (2011) also identifies the current “re-appropriating” or “taking back” of neoliberalism’s entrepreneurial discourse as productive: “We can see how vocabularies of entrepreneurship came to be flagged up, but somehow often put to different more critical usage. This has permitted at least contestation and critique to flourish, even within the de-politicization effect” (p. 33). Mouffe (2007) suggests comparable possibilities for new strategies of oppositions, particularly in those social relations “that elude the grasp of value, competitive individualism and market exchange” (p. 1). I argue that these characteristics are already present in Papergirl Vancouver from its explicit challenging of the art market economy by gifting art, to its building of meaningful community relationships.

It also seems that this adaptation to the neoliberal, creative city context is already taking place in Vancouver on a municipal level. In my interview with a City of Vancouver arts programmer, the City of Vancouver Park Board’s field houses artist residencies project was cited as one example of adaptation. This citywide project repurposes community centers’ abandoned caretaker suites as affordable studio space for artists. Artists (many of whom are part of collectives) use the space in exchange for 350 hours of community engagement. In our interview, the arts programmer reflected on this adaptation and the constant need to justify governmental arts spending:

If we’re talking about space, Vancouver is a really expensive city to live in. That’s the main reason why we could get the field project approved by senior management. In our cultural plan, the number one item consensually decided upon is workable-liveable space. But they do come attached with a deliverable and that doesn’t always work for people.

Unsurprisingly, this is echoed on the City of Vancouver’s website (2012): “The studio residencies will enhance the Park Board’s arts policy objective of arts in everyday life and contributes to addressing the City cultural plan priority of neighbourhood arts and the objective of supporting more creative spaces for artists”. Reflecting pervasive criticism, it is clear that social practice art projects are often (logistically) forced to work

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106 McRobbie (2011) writes: “I would like to propose a renewal of radical social enterprise and co-oparatives. Such self-organised collectives would also be a way of providing comparable working structures across diverse occupations such as social workers/community workers and artists” (p. 33).
within established objectives; they must, however, find the space for resistance and potential within this (while maintaining financial viability and sustainability). Currently, Papergirl Vancouver seems to work within these parameters, but must encourage and grow its potential as a space for critique and dialogue (also expressed by participants, Chapter Four).

5.5. Concluding Statements and Future Research

In conclusion, while there is criticism of social practice art, there are also examples of practices (including Papergirl Vancouver and other grassroots projects) that appear to be: authentically community-based; providing meaningful participant engagement on multiple levels; valuing its participants and the integral role they play in the project; challenging neoliberal (and related) discourse; and having the potential to function as political forces on a micro level and contribute to larger political change. I have attempted to establish that elements of feminist art activism must continue to be instrumental in producing these alternative critical art practices.

There is need of course, for further research, particularly in the increasing trend toward place-making in social practice art (seen in creative city and creative economy discourse). Place-making is another means of instrumentalizing art, especially used in the process of creating a sense of place for a community. It “can be used by communities to engage residents locally, enhance public space and contribute to healthy sustainable communities” (Toronto Artscape Inc., 2014). Examples of creative place-making include: designating or developing cultural districts as geographic areas for cultural employment, recreation, education, and tourism; building mixed-use developments; artist relocation projects; public art and community arts projects; and other means of cultural planning. Place-making is apparently put into practice by the City of Vancouver’s Cultural Plan (2008) but reframed as city-making: “Cultural awareness and understanding will be the hallmark of city-making in Vancouver; culture will be seen as a critical dimension of development, a benchmark of maturity, sophistication and tolerance” (p. 6).
Comparatively (and perhaps as a sign of resistance), scholars identify the important role place can play in revitalizing political and critical social practice art. Kosmala & Ressler (2011) identify the need to acknowledge a project’s location:

While a specific activity in a liberal democracy might be considered critical, but legal, it might be illegal somewhere else [...] So what appears critical, problematic or illegal really depends a lot on the context of the presentation. Therefore, ideally, critical art develops in a close reference to specific local contexts, art that really challenges the power in place. (p. 24)

As evidenced in the quote above, much like the generative potential of neoliberalism and postfeminism’s individualization, place-making can play a similar role. Feminist art criticism will also remain relevant. For example, Cartiere (2012) has identified the possible use of feminist critique and performativity in critical place-making research (p. 86).

Further work in this area might also consider: the impact of place-making specifically on Papergirl projects worldwide (i.e. how projects situated in specific cities differ from each other); other examples of current social practice art (i.e. in Vancouver, Canada, and throughout the world); other examples of current feminist art (i.e. particularly in non-Western nations); and how Papergirl Vancouver is situated in the discourse surrounding cultural policy, feminism, and labour precarity (i.e. the involvement of women in free cultural labour).

Acknowledging and reconnecting social practice art to its activist and feminist roots will prove essential in attempts to revitalize political social practice art and ensure the continuation of this potentially subversive and critical genre. As Reckitt (Ed., 2001) suggests: “The promise of feminist art is the performative creation of new realities. Successful feminist art beckons us toward possibilities in thought and in practices still to be created, still to be lived” (p. 20).
References


Appendix A.

Research Design & Methodology: Other Critical Perspectives

Fairclough’s (2001; 2013) critical discourse analysis (CDA) and Lazar’s (2007) feminist critical discourse analysis (feminist CDA) are used in my discussion of social practice art and feminist art’s vulnerability to absorption by neoliberalism and postfeminism and the implications this has for Papergirl Vancouver (see Chapter Four). In identifying these implications, CDA and feminist CDA were used in my content analysis of Papergirl Vancouver’s website (Mateus, Ed., 2014); Papergirl Berlin’s project manual (Ronniger, Ed., 2009); and my interview transcriptions (see Chapter Four).  

Fairclough (2001) defines CDA as an:  

*analysis of the dialectical relationships between discourse […] and other elements of social practices. Its particular concern (in my own approach) is with the radical changes that are taking place in contemporary social life, with how discourse figures within processes of change, and with shifts in the relationship between semiosis and other social elements within networks of practices. (p. 1)*

CDA is pertinent in analysis and critique of the new economy. Fairclough (2001) identifies neoliberalism and the new knowledge economy as primarily discourse driven and suggests language plays a more significant role in socio-economic changes than in previous eras.  

Scholars also identify CDA as one means to respond to the hegemonic forces sweeping global culture and suggest linguistic tools can be used to positively shape society and achieve a just social order (Timofeeva, 2008; see Lazar, 2007; Fairclough, 2001; 2013).

Comparatively, Lazar (2007) defines the task of feminist CDA as to expose the “complex workings of power and ideology in discourse in sustaining hierarchically gendered social orders” (p. 141). Comparisons can easily be drawn between feminist CDA’s task, and that of feminist artists, art historians, and/or critics (see Chapter Two). Feminist CDA is also pertinent in the postfeminist context. Lazar (2007) argues: “Gender ideology and power asymmetries in late modern societies also have become increasingly more subtle and, at the same time, as a result of backlash against feminism, have re-emerged with a

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107 While outside the scope of my research, CDA and feminist CDA can be used in analyzing cultural policy documents and the implications these documents can have on contemporary art practices. These documents include: Canada Council for the Arts’ *Public Engagement in the Arts* report (2012) and the City of Vancouver’s *Culture Plan for Vancouver, 2008-2018* (2008), *2014 Capital and Operating Budget* (2013), and *Creating cultural and performance spaces* report (2014). See Fairclough (2013) for a discussion of the contributions CDA can make to critical policy studies.

108 Chiapello & Fairclough (2002) offer relevant discussion on the use of CDA in understanding new management ideology and the new spirit of capitalism discourse. They identify the new spirit of capitalism as one order of discourse and management discourse as one of the main places of inscription of the new spirit (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005).
new blatancy” (Lazar, 2007, p. 141). Feminist CDA can work to expose these “subtle” inequities. Finally, like CDA, and arguably more so, feminist CDA is politically invested and committed to social change. Lazar (2007) explains:

A feminist political critique of gendered social practices and relations is aimed ultimately at effecting social transformation. The social status quo is contested in favour of a feminist humanist vision of a just society, in which gender does not predetermine or mediate our relationships with others, or our sense of who we are or might become (p. 145).

Provided the focus on social change by Papergirl Vancouver and other social practice art projects, feminist CDA analysis is relevant.
Appendix B.

Interview Questions

General Questions

1. Please explain what Papergirl is and how you would describe it.
2. Please describe your involvement with Papergirl Vancouver.
3. Why did you become involved with Papergirl Vancouver?
4. What do you think makes Papergirl Vancouver a unique community arts project?
5. Why do you think Papergirl Vancouver is important or needed?
6. Would you associate Papergirl Vancouver with political art or identify Papergirl Vancouver as a political or radical art project? Why?
7. Are you involved in other community art, participatory art, political art, or socially engaged art projects? Why are you drawn to these types of art practices?
8. Do you think Papergirl Vancouver has the potential to provoke social change in Metro Vancouver?
9. What do you think the outcome of the project should be?
10. Is there anything else you feel we have missed and would like to discuss?
11. Is there anything else about this topic that I should be thinking about or asking about?

Additional Questions Specific to Artists Involved in Papergirl Vancouver

1. Do you also identify as an activist?
2. What challenges do you experience or what barriers do you encounter as an artist involved in social practice art?
3. Does involvement in social practice or community art affect your role or ‘identity’ as an artist? Does it require a new set of skills or place new demands on you?
4. How would you describe the ‘state’ of social practice art today? Do you think there are examples of radical art practice?

Additional Questions Specific to Papergirl Vancouver Founders

1. Why did you start Papergirl Vancouver? How were you first introduced to the project?
2. What challenges have you encountered in bringing the project to Vancouver?
3. What successes have you experienced?
4. What does the ‘future’ hold for Papergirl Vancouver?
Additional Questions Specific to Papergirl Berlin Founder

1. Why did you start Papergirl?
2. Why do you think a project like this is important or needed? In Berlin? In the ‘art world’?
3. How did you establish the 6 core themes of Papergirl (as identified in the Papergirl manual)?
4. Did you intend for it to become a global movement?
5. How closely should the Papergirl manual be followed?
6. How is the project received in Berlin? Can you explain the atmosphere surrounding the exhibition and the ride-out?
7. Why the use of bicycles?
8. What other art movements have influenced Papergirl?
9. Papergirl is about surprising the public with unexpected gifts. Can you explain the notion of the gift behind Papergirl?

Additional Questions Specific to Community Arts Programmer

1. Please explain your role as arts programmer. Can you discuss some of the projects you have programmed recently?
2. Please explain your background. Are you also a practicing artist?
3. What values guide your programming? How do you decide what projects to program? For example: does marginalized groups or gender play a role?
4. What challenges do you experience as an arts programmer? Does being an employee of the City of Vancouver present potential limitations?
5. How do you attempt to engage participants in arts programming?
6. Do you think space is an issue in the Vancouver arts community?
7. The City of Vancouver 2014 budget proposes funding for new public art commissions. Do you think this type of public art is engaging?
### Appendix C.

**Participant Profiles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>Years of Involvement in Papergirl</th>
<th>Outside Career</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Volunteer (photographer, artist interviewer, workshop assistant), contributing artist</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Document control and administration at architecture firm, freelance photographer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Volunteer (workshop facilitator), contributing artist</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Freelance graphic designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Berlin project founder and coordinator</td>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Artist-In-Residence, planning and coordinating workshops</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Art instructor and sessional professor, visual artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Volunteer &amp; Calgary project founder</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Associate gallery director, artist, writer, curator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Contributing artist, volunteer cyclist</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Freelance illustrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Vancouver project founder and coordinator</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Volunteer program coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Volunteer &amp; project manager</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Initiator and former project coordinator, contributing artist</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Volunteer &amp; contributing artist</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Administration, graphic designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Arts programmer</td>
<td>One</td>
<td>Arts programmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Contributing artist</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Visual artist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Contributing artist</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Artist, artist-in-residence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D.

Study Details

Title of Study: Forgotten Relations: Revisiting Papergirl Vancouver’s Feminist and Social Practice Art Roots

Principal Investigator: Danielle Leroux

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Zoë Druick

Secondary Supervisor: Dr. Alison Beale

Department: School of Communication

Background and Study Purpose: Papergirl Vancouver is a community arts project that redefines street and participatory art by combining art, philanthropy, and bicycles. It began in Vancouver in 2011 and takes place on an annual basis. The project is participatory, analogue, non-commercial, and impulsive. It begins with an open call for art; the art is then exhibited in a non-juried and uncurated public exhibition. On the final day of the exhibition, each piece of art is taken down and rolled up. Teams of volunteer cyclists, in the style of American ‘papergirls’, distribute the art to completely unsuspecting strangers on the streets of Vancouver (Ronniger, 2009).

Papergirl Vancouver is part of a larger global arts movement including projects in Mexico, San Francisco, Toronto, and Manchester. Papergirl projects challenge the traditional art market economy by ‘gifting’ art and making art accessible to ‘all’, and aim to effect social change in varying ways (Donahue & Mateus, 2013). While other contemporary art practices may share these efforts (i.e. similar attempts to challenge the market economy and repair the broken social bonds caused by capitalism), Papergirl is unique in its explicit challenging of the art market economy (through a ‘giftervention’), its arguable use of feminist discourse, and its active and meaningful engagement of participants (Bishop, Ed., 2006; Rancière, 2004).

This research project will attempt to situate Papergirl Vancouver in both the social practice art and the feminist art movements. Social practice art emerged in the
1990s. In contrast to earlier political art movements (i.e. the modernist avant-garde), social practice art is defined by open participation and audience involvement, a reaction against commodification and consumerism, and a collaborative partnership between the artist and participant(s). Social practice art projects take place in local settings and are centered on facilitating dialogue between community members, with an underlying goal of catalyzing social change (Bishop, 2006a; Kester, 2004). Critics, however, question the ‘intrinsically democratic’ relations the projects supposedly establish, doubt the projects’ relevance, and accuse projects of being apolitical (Bishop, 2004, 2006; Mouffe, 2008; Thompson et al., 2004).

By comparison, feminist art is characterized by its political activism and ties to the larger women’s liberation movement. The feminist art movement began in the 1960s, a period of great political activism and cultural change. It was determined to transform the art world in which the male ‘creative genius’ dominated, and the wider culture that both suppressed women’s perspectives and discriminated against women (Moravec, 2012; Parker & Pollock, 1987). The artistic contributions of the feminist art movement reflect these apparent political ties, and include: the use of personal experiences (generated by consciousness-raising) in performance art; the blurring of ‘private’ and ‘public’ boundaries in participatory art (integrating the feminist ‘rallying cry’ of the ‘personal is political’); decentering the individual artistic ‘genius’ by elevating the role of collaboration in the art-making process; de/reconstructing race and gender representations; and reacting against dominant (modernist) art conventions and culture (Broude & Garrard, 1994; Reckitt, 2001).

**Research Questions:** Feminist art’s contributions to contemporary art have arguably since been ‘absorbed’ by social practice art. Social practice art literature, however, largely fails to acknowledge this (Broude & Garrard, 1994; Moravec, 2012; Parker & Pollock, 1987; Reckitt, 2001, 2013). My research will aim to begin to close this gap by identifying the contributions of feminist art to social practice art. It will question if, and how, social practice art projects continue the ‘legacy’ of feminist art. It will also discuss the feminist art and social practice art movements as both vulnerable to absorption by neoliberalism and creative city discourse, and the implications this has and/or will have on art practices. Finally, my research will explore the possibility of using feminist art activism strategies to revitalize arguably apolitical social practice art projects.
**Research Procedures:** Papergirl Vancouver will serve as a descriptive case study for this project. The original Papergirl project in Berlin will also be studied to situate Papergirl Vancouver within the wider context of the Papergirl movement. The case study will commence in October 2013 and conclude in April 2014. Qualitative data collection on Papergirl Vancouver will be completed in the form of fieldwork in metro Vancouver. My fieldwork will be imperative to the completion of my research due to the small amount of scholarship available on the subject. Fieldwork will include semi-structured active interviews with Papergirl Vancouver project founders, artists involved in the project, and project volunteers. Additional interviews will be conducted with the original Papergirl project founder via Skype. Participants will be selected using convenience sampling (i.e. based on their availability to speak; part of an active Papergirl project). The estimated number of interviews of 10-12, they will last approximately one hour each and will be audio recorded. All audio recordings will be transcribed and a content analysis will be completed of all transcripts. In-person interviews will take place in a private room at the Roundhouse Community Centre. The information to be collected in the study will *not include* any demographic information or directly identifying information. Interviewees will be kept anonymous throughout the study but may be indirectly referred to as according to their role in Papergirl (i.e. Artist I, Artist II, Volunteer I, Volunteer II, and so on).

To provide further background and context to my research, a literature review and historical trajectory will be completed of social practice art and feminist art. A document and textual analysis will be done of any appropriate publicly available resources for the Papergirl projects.

**Recruitment:** The contact information to be obtained for all Papergirl project founders is publicly available. Project founders will be contacted by telephone and/or email. Participants will be provided with a copy of the Consent Form and will sign the form prior to commencing the interviews. No monetary compensation will be provided to participations. The purposes of the study will be fully disclosed to participants upon recruitment and informed written consent will be obtained from all participants. Participants ages 19 and older are eligible to participate in the study.

**Potential Benefits and Risks:** The participants may or may not benefit from participation in the study. This study aims to suggest means to improve the political
efficaciousness of social practice art projects, which may be of potential benefit to the participants. The study is of minimal risk; there are no foreseeable or known risks to the participants, principal investigator, or research staff.

**Maintenance of Confidentiality:** Electronic files of interview transcripts, field notes, and audio recordings will be password protected on a Canadian-secured server; hard copies of study materials will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Principal Investigator's (secured) home. Participants' confidentiality will be respected; however, confidentiality of participants' identities cannot be guaranteed for interviews or correspondence that take place via Skype, telephone, or email (non-confidential mediums). Information that discloses participants' identity will not be released without their consent unless required by law.

**Access to Data:** The study's investigator, faculty supervisor, and secondary supervisor will have access to the raw data. Audio recordings will be destroyed soon after transcription. Electronic files of interview transcripts, field notes, and hard copies of study materials will be destroyed two years after the study's completion. The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books. The main study findings may also be presented at academic conferences.

**Dissemination of Results:** Research participants will be provided with feedback on the findings and results of the research; feedback will be sent to participants by email.
Appendix E.

Consent Form

**Title of Study:** Forgotten Relations: Revisiting Papergirl Vancouver’s Feminist and Social Practice Art Roots

**STUDY TEAM**

Principal Investigator: Danielle Leroux, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University.

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Zoë Druick, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University.

This research is required for the completion of my Master of Arts in Communication. Information obtained from this study will be part of a thesis (public document). Permission has been obtained from Simon Fraser University to complete this study and this study has been approved by Simon Fraser University’s Research Ethics Board.

**EXTERNAL FUNDING**

The study has received external funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship.

**INVITATION AND STUDY PURPOSE**

You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are a founder and/or member of an active Papergirl project. We want to learn more about how Papergirl Vancouver is part of the social practice art and the feminist art movements. This study will help us learn more about the artistic contributions feminist art has made to social practice art projects such as Papergirl. We are doing this study to question if social practice art projects continue the ‘legacy’ of feminist art. This study will also help us learn more about the possibility of using feminist art activism strategies to improve social practice art projects. We are inviting people like you who have the expertise and experience with participating in a Papergirl project to help us.
VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to participate, you may still choose to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. If you choose to enter the study and then decide to withdraw at a later time, all data collected about you during your enrolment in the study will be destroyed.

STUDY PROCEDURES

If you say ‘Yes’, here is how we will do the study: You will be required to participate in a minimum of one semi-structured interview. We will ask you about your involvement in Papergirl and your experience participating in socially engaged art projects. Interviews will commence in October 2013 and conclude in December 2014. Interviews will be scheduled based on your availability. Interviews will be conducted in person (where possible) or via Skype (online). Interviews will last approximately one hour each. In-person interviews will take place in a private room at the Roundhouse Community Centre. All interviews will be audio recorded (see Confidentiality below). Audio recordings will be destroyed shortly after written transcription. Electronic files of interview transcripts, field notes, and hard copies of study materials will be destroyed two years after the study’s completion.

The information to be collected in the study will not include any demographic information or directly identifying information. Interviewees will be kept anonymous throughout the study but may be indirectly referred to as according to their role in Papergirl (i.e. Artist I, Artist II, Volunteer I, Volunteer II, and so on). Participants ages 19 and older are eligible to participate in the study.

POTENTIAL RISKS OF THE STUDY

There are no foreseeable risks to you in participating in this study. You do not have to answer a question if you do not want to.
POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

There may or may not be direct benefits to you from taking part in this study. This study aims to suggest means to improve socially engaged art practices, which may be of potential benefit to you.

PAYMENT

We will not pay you for the time you take to be in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your confidentiality will be respected; however, confidentiality of participants’ identities cannot be guaranteed for interviews or correspondence that take place via Skype, telephone, or email (non-confidential mediums). Information that discloses your identity will not be released without your consent unless required by law. Electronic files of interview transcripts, field notes, and audio recordings will be password protected on a Canadian-secured server. Hard copies of study materials will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the principal investigator’s (secured) home. There is no known future use of the data beyond the conclusion of the research project.

STUDY RESULTS

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books. The main study findings may also be presented at academic conferences. You will be provided with the results of the study. Please provide your contact information below if you wish to receive the study results.

Name:

Address:

Telephone:

Email:
CONTACT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

Any inquiries concerning the procedures will be answered to ensure that you fully understand them. If you have any questions about the study you can contact Danielle Leroux (see Study Team). If you have any concerns about your rights as a research subject and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact: Dr. Dina Shafey, Associate Director, Office of Research Ethics.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND SIGNATURE PAGE

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records and that you consent to participate in this study.

________________________________________________________________________
Participant Signature                                                    Date (YYYY/MM/DD)

________________________________________________________________________
Printed Name of the Participant signing above
Appendix F.

Photographer Permission Letters

Figure 5.1.  Julie Nicole Photography Permission Letter

April 1st, 2014

Dr. Dina Shafey
Associate Director
Office of Research Ethics
Simon Fraser University

Re: Image Release for “ Forgotten Relations: Revisiting Paper girl Vancouver’s Feminist and Social Practice Art Roots” by Danielle Leroux, Master of Arts Candidate in Communications, Simon Fraser University (application # 2013s0690)

Dear Dr. Shafey,

I hereby grant the right to Danielle Leroux to publish photographs taken by myself at Paper girl Vancouver 2013 events in the above mentioned thesis. The granted permission extends to any future revisions and editions of Ms. Leroux’s thesis, and to the prospective publication of her thesis.

Sincerely,

Julie Larsen (owner of Julie Nicole Photos)
March 27th, 2014

Dr. Dina Shafey  
Associate Director  
Office of Research Ethics  
Simon Fraser University

Re: Image Release for “Forgotten Relations: Revisiting Paper Girl  
Vancouver’s Feminist and Social Practice Art Roots” by Danielle Leroux,  
Master of Arts Candidate in Communications, Simon Fraser University  
(application # 2013s0690)

Dear Dr. Shafey,

I hereby grant the right to Danielle Leroux to publish photographs taken by myself at Paper Girl Vancouver 2013 events in the above mentioned thesis. The granted permission extends to any future revisions and editions of Ms. Leroux’s thesis, and to the prospective publication of her thesis.

Sincerely,

Michele Mateus