GLITCH: AN ARTISTIC INVESTIGATION ABOUT
RELATIONAL AESTHETICS-BASED COLLABORATIVE ARTS
AND ITS SITE-SPECIFICITY

by

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Abstract

This art-based project is composed of several installations that employ inter-media strategies of performance, installation art, participatory art and new media. The research paper and the body of work that was created for this research examines collaborative art that employs Nicolas Bourriaud’s concepts regarding Relational Aesthetics. The research also examines the concept of site-specificity in general. Using a critical perspective rooted in cultural studies the creative work produced uses irony and allegoric humor. Particular attention was given to transnationality factors and Brazilian antecedents.
# Table of Contents

Abstract........................................................................................................................................ ii

Table of Contents...................................................................................................................... iii

List of Figures............................................................................................................................ v

Acknowledgements.................................................................................................................... vii

Dedication................................................................................................................................. ix

1 Chapter: Introduction.............................................................................................................. 1

2 Chapter: Collaborative art .................................................................................................... 5
    2.1 Genealogy and Contextualization.................................................................................. 5
    2.2 Criticism to Relational Aesthetics as a theory............................................................... 12
    2.3 The site-specificity of collaborative art........................................................................ 13
    2.4 Is interventionist collaborative art the "new public art"?............................................... 20
    2.5 Questions and commentaries...................................................................................... 22
    2.6 Relational Aesthetics-based collaborative art and the art system.............................. 29

3 Chapter: Glitch: an artistic investigation about Relational Aesthetics-based collaborative art and its site-specificity ........................................................................................................... 31
    3.1 Human Circus............................................................................................................ 31
        3.1.1 Initial conceptual sketch for Human Circus......................................................... 33
        3.1.2 Human Circus description of possible participatory roles................................... 33
        3.1.3 Photo documentation of Human Circus................................................................. 36
    3.2 A is for Apple Exhibition............................................................................................ 39
        3.2.1 Honey, what is for dinner?.................................................................................... 40
        3.2.2 Monologues of Absurdity................................................................................... 43
        3.2.3 What does the apple mean to you? ...................................................................... 44
        3.2.4 "I can't do it!"....................................................................................................... 46
3.3 Roses for Sale.................................................................48
3.4 Crosswalk.................................................................53

4. Chapter: Photo documentation of the exhibition-thesis...............60

5. Chapter: Conclusion.........................................................64

Endnotes.................................................................67
Works cited..............................................................68
List of Figures

Figure 1  *The Gift* (2004) site-specific installation by the author………………………….3
Figure 2  *The Gift* (2004) community participation .................................................4
Figure 3  Poster by Guerilla Girls (1989) .................................................................9
Figure 4  *Porco Empalhado* (1967) by Nelson Leiner................................................10
Figure 5  *Roof is on Fire* (1994).............................................................................14
Figure 6  *Tilted Arc* (1981) by Richard Serra..........................................................15
Figure 7  *Project for the Don River* (2008) by BGL.............................................17
Figure 8  *Arranque a etiqueta de sua roupa* (2010) by Poro...............................17
Figure 9  PARK(ing) (2007) by Rebar.................................................................18
Figure 10  *Piratão* (ongoing) by Coletivo Filé de Peixe........................................19
Figure 11  *Piratão* (ongoing) by Coletivo Filé de Peixe........................................19
Figure 12  *Piratão* (ongoing) by Coletivo Filé de Peixe........................................20
Figure 13  *Exército de Executivos* (2004) by Esqueleto Coletivo.......................23
Figure 14  *Exército de Executivos* (2004) by Esqueleto Coletivo.......................24
Figure 15  *Saltimbancos* of Teatro de Tábuas initiating an event of *arte sinérgica*…….27
Figure 16  *Saltimbancos* of Teatro de Tábuas initiating an event of *arte sinérgica*…….27
Figure 17  *Human Circus* (2010) sketch by the author..........................................33
Figure 18  *Human Circus* (2010) as a site-specific installation..............................36
Figure 19  *Human Circus* (2010) overview...........................................................37
Figure 20  *Human Circus* (2010) the Ringleader and the TV/media consumer........37
Figure 21  *Human Circus* (2010) performance view.............................................38
Figure 22  *Human Circus* (2010) participatory performance.................................38
Figure 23  *Human Circus* (2010) the Ringleader stripped down of her power........38
Figure 24  *Human Circus* (2010) overview after performance.................................38
Figure 25  Poster-brochure for *A is for Apple* (front) ...........................................39
Figure 26  Poster-brochure for *A is for Apple* (back) ............................................40
Figure 27  3D rendering for *Honey, what is for dinner?*...........................................41
Figure 28  *Honey, what is for dinner?* (2009) overview of the installation.............42
Figure 29  *Honey, what is for dinner?* (2009) detail of the iPod installation..........42
Figure 30  *Monologues of Absurdity (2009)* .................................................................43
Figure 31  *What does the apple mean to you?* ..............................................................44
Figure 32  Apple cards for *What does the apple mean to you?* .....................................45
Figure 33  Responses written for *What does the apple mean to you?* .............................45
Figure 34  *Roses for Sale (2010)* by the author ..............................................................49
Figure 35  Speech bubbles for *Roses for Sale* by the author ...........................................50
Figure 36  *Roses for Sale (2010)* performance by the author .........................................51
Figure 37  *Roses for Sale (2010)* performance and speech bubble .................................52
Figure 38  Initial conceptual sketch for *Crosswalk* by the author ...................................54
Figure 39  Diagram for *Crosswalk* by Solange Farah .....................................................54
Figure 40  Absence of a crosswalk ........................................................................55
Figure 41  Dog and humans crossing ........................................................................55
Figure 42  Poster-invitation for *Crosswalk* .................................................................56
Figure 43  *Crosswalk (2010)* performance by the author ...............................................56
Figure 44  *Crosswalk (2010)* interventionist participatory art ..........................................57
Figure 45  *Crosswalk (2010)* interventionist participatory art (another view) .................57
Figure 46  *Crosswalk* as an interventionist-object (staircase) ........................................57
Figure 47  *Crosswalk* as an interventionist-object ........................................................58
Figure 48  *Crosswalk* as an interventionist-object (doors) ..............................................58
Figure 49  *Crosswalk* as a performance by the author ....................................................59
Figure 50  Photo documentation of the exhibition-thesis with public ...............................60
Figure 51  Photo documentation of the exhibition-thesis ....................................................60
Figure 52  Photo documentation of the exhibition-thesis (detail) .......................................60
Figure 53  Photo documentation of the exhibition-thesis ....................................................60
Figure 54  The *Crosswalk* occupying pivotal corner .....................................................61
Figure 55  The *Crosswalk* occupying pivotal corner (another view) ...............................61
Figure 56  *Human Circus’ objects and video documentation* .........................................62
Figure 57  *Human Circus’ objects* ................................................................................62
Figure 58  *Roses for Sale* as an installation ..................................................................63
Figure 59  *Roses for Sale* as an installation (detail) ........................................................63
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Dedication

To my four parents:

Thomaz (*in memorium*), my biological father, for being a beacon in my life and love.

Maria Celia, the mother whom I adopted, for her spiritual guidance and love.

Anna Maria, my biological mother, for her intellectual accuracy, discipline and love.

John, the father whom I adopted, for his adventurous spirit, environmental stewardship, and love.

And to my children:

Pilar and Lucas, with my love.
1 Chapter: Introduction

This arts-based research will critically examine collaborative-relational art through several visual artworks. Some of these experimental processes are rooted in cultural studies, having as their main framework the influential theory of Relational Aesthetics by Nicolas Bourriaud. In this paper, a special emphasis will be given to collaborative art with interventionist characteristics and to the concept of site-specificity.

These artworks are devices that use several visual strategies to accomplish the intended objectives. They are immersive pieces using new media, video projection, site-specific installation with iPod components, and participatory performance. Moreover, as a Brazilian and an immigrant to Canada, I felt that I could also bring forward a Brazilian perspective to this research in collaborative intervention-based art and further explore the transnationality aspect of relational art.

The following terms define the collaborative nature of this cultural production: participatory, social, collaborative, interventionist-based, dialogical, relational, community-based, littoral, arte sinérgica, KontextKunst. These visual art pieces are often intermedia and immersed in the fabric of everyday life.

My interest in exploring art in this manner arose from my first experience in December 2004, when I was working with public participation in the making of an art object, The Gift (Fig. 1 and 2). This work was a concept of mine with the artistic objective of critically commenting on the socio-political ramifications of destroying the rural way of life, and therefore showing the need to preserve agricultural land in the Okanagan Valley.

This particular piece was a 17-foot high temporary site-specific work composed of 72 apple bins with a large silver bow. This was a community-based project with the participation of city officials, businesses, high school students, a local fruit cooperative and several volunteers who helped to construct the object. While working on The Gift I came to realize that engaged art had a greater potential for social impact. In addition to
the engagement of the local community in the construction and installation of the piece, thousands of people would drive by daily and appreciate the work and its meaning.

Prior to this piece I had worked primarily in the object-based media of prints and paintings. In my view, oils and prints are still important in the contemporary art scene. However, I started to regard my own creations with distrust, believing that they were ordinary objects for consumption. I started to question whether or not they could really have an impact on society in a critical and meaningful manner.

It was also clear to me, from the experience gained with *The Gift*, that I wanted to create pieces that were accessible to people from all walks of life while conveying critical artistic commentaries. The best strategy of doing that was through allegories employing irony and humor. At that time I did not have any theoretical framework or contextual understanding about collaborative art and its variations. I just believed in collaboration as a general concept for engaging people. The notion of having the public at large experiencing the alteration of time and space through participation in the art-making process, was, and still is, very intriguing to me. As a result, I started to create several participatory-experimental projects.

However, most of these pieces are in preliminary stages and still need to be executed or finalized, as funding and support for projects of this nature remains scarce in the Interior of British Columbia. Traditional art venues in the Okanagan Valley are still trying to understand what process-based art truly is. I found myself getting more involved in a personal local crusade to educate and broaden the understanding among our local galleries, yet I was getting very few concrete results from art proposals in the way of funding, legitimization and exhibition opportunities.

In order to learn more about the collaborative art form, I enrolled myself in the Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies MFA Program in Visual Arts at UBC-Okanagan. Through my research, I learned that I was not alone in this quest to work with other people in a collaborative manner. While working on *The Gift* I also began to develop an
interest about the site (as a locale) upon which the art is created. From this first exploration on site-specific art I began to discover that the concept of site, as a locale, didn’t encompass everything about site-specificity. In these past five years, the concept of site-specificity in contemporary practices has become dilated and one that I wanted to explore in this research.

The critical and political commentaries that interest me are based on my own observation of the unbalanced world we all inhabit as social actors. These commentaries include our human disregard for the natural environment, our local agricultural land and heritage, issues of feminism, human dislocation, and general societal alienation regarding these topics. The discipline of cultural studies, with its intrinsically critical perspectives, stimulated my creative process and led to several of these art pieces. It is my intention, through these works, to activate micro-changes that will lead to a more collaborative society.

![Fig. 1 The Gift (2004), a site-specific installation. Credit: Sally Kilburg.](image)
Fig. 2 *The Gift* (2004), a site-specific installation. Credit: Sally Kilburg.
2 Chapter: Collaborative art

2.1 Genealogy and Contextualization

In this last decade, artists increasingly tend to include others, artists or non-artists, in the creation of their projects. By incorporating the public as an artistic element, people become part of the piece through their interaction with components of the art object or processes. Recently, art historians and art critics have produced several interesting texts examining the transnational phenomenon of collaborative art and Relational Aesthetics. Claire Bishop (UK), Nikos Papastergiadis (AUS), Stewart Martin (UK), Nancy Roth (UK), Grant H. Kester (USA), Brígida Campbell, Fernando Cocchiarale, and Henrique Mazetti (BR) are just a few of these authors.

There are a number of terms used to describe the kind of collaborative art that interest me. I have chosen to use the more encompassing term of “collaborative art” to define these projects, but what I want to discuss here is Relational Aesthetics-based collaborative art. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that collaborative art can have distinct characteristics as shown by the different approaches mentioned in my introduction. For example, not all collaborative art projects are interventionist art per se, but often interventionist projects are collaborative.

What most of this recent collaborative art has in common is the theory of Relational Aesthetics by Nicolas Bourriaud, a French art critic and former curator of The Palais de Tokyo. Several artists and curators today view the theory of Relational Aesthetics as the backbone aesthetic theory for these projects of social engagement. The term Relational Aesthetics was coined in 1996 by Nicolas Bourriaud in the catalogue of an exhibition titled Traffic, which was held at the Musee d’Art Contemporain de Bordeaux (CAPC). The artists he showcased at Traffic included Henry Bond, Rikrit Tiravanija, Vanessa Beecroft, Maurizio Cattelan, Dominique Gonzales-Foerster, Liam Gillick, Christine Hil, Carsten Holler, Phillippe Parreno and Jorge Pardo.
Bourriaud published his book titled *Esthétique Relationnelle* in 1998, with an English translation following in 2002. According to Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics operate within the realm of human interaction “mediatised by forms (n. pag.),” a concept fast embraced around the world by experiment-oriented artists. A topic that will be further explored in this paper, is the fact that several art-historians and critics joined in the criticism and the debate regarding this theory.

Collaborative art informed by Relational Aesthetics, can take the form of an event revolving around social interactions based on processes such as games, events, or gatherings. These relational art processes incorporate supporting elements, which can be concrete objects, musical instruments, and movement. Here are some key points of Relational Aesthetics:

- Relational Aesthetics is a theory that is based on inter-human relations.
- Art making using Relational Aesthetics as its framework is interested in introducing spaces or platforms that encourage social engagement and interaction with willing or an unwilling participants.
- In relational art, the physical presence of the participant/viewer on the relational artistic event is necessary to “actualize” the work.
- The artist, in relational art is not after a perfect *form*, but rather he or she is interested in the inter-social experience produced through his or her manipulation of objects, signs, forms and objects.
- The artist who uses Relational Aesthetics as an artistic framework is not interested in assigning meaning to their work. They are more interested in promoting an open-ended process where the value (in economic terms) of the work, is not based on tangible profits, but rather, its value is of a more subjective and non-tangible nature.

The art historian and critic, Grant H. Kester, examined collaborative art, collaborative creativity, and their transnationality in his book *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art*. Kester is focused on collaborative art that engendered
dialogue. Dialogical art as defined by Kester is non-static, where the quality of the interaction between the participants is more interesting than the “physical integrity and formal integrity of a given artifact, or the artist’s experience in producing it” (10). Kester explains that effective dialogical art practices involve “a process of performative interaction” and that the term dialogical art is derived from the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, who argued that the work of art could be viewed as a kind of conversation - “a locus of differing meanings, interpretations, and points of view” (10).

According to Kester, the work done by art collectives such as Ala Plastica in Buenos Aires, Superflex in Denmark, MuF in London, Temporary Services in Chicago, Huit Facettes in Senegal, Ne Pas Plier in Paris, and Ultra Red in Los Angeles, are all examples of dialogical art projects attesting to the transnationality phenomenon of collaborative art.

I would add other projects to this list that exemplify Kester’s dialogical perspective, such as the projects by Rebar in San Francisco and, the works or missions by the interventionist collective Improv Everywhere based in New York (Frozen Grand Central Station, 2007). In Brazil, the ongoing project by Filé de Peixe in Rio de Janeiro, Piratão, Esqueleto Coletivo in Sao Paulo (Exército de Executivos, 2004), (Army of Executives), and Grupo Poro of Belo Horizonte (Arranque a Etiqueta de Sua Roupa, 2009), (Cut the labels off your clothes) and the art collective, Oda Projesi, based in Turkey are also other projects that I would add to this list. Images and descriptions of these works will be in further chapters of this paper.

The art critic and art historian Marjorie Lovejoy (2001), and other art theorists such as Claire Bishop (2004), Holy Crawford (2007) and the Brazilian academic Brigida Campbell (2009) examine the genealogy of collaborative art. These authors agree that making art within the public realm and/or with public direct participation, in a collaborative manner or with a consultative approach, is not a new artistic strategy.

Collaborative art can be traced back to the Dada movement. With its “outings” lead by Andre Breton, people would leave the cabaret and take their follies outside to the streets
of Paris. Several important artists’ collaborations took place at the Villa Air-Bel in the outskirts of Marseille. The Villa Air-Bel was a surrealist rambling 19th century stone house and was considered an artistic haven in the 1940s. This movement extended to the avant-garde expressions of the 1960s and 1970s, with Allan Kaprow’s seminal “happenings” and his performance-based actions in the United States. Projects of this period were focused on public participation, individual public performances and conceptual installations.

What these projects had in common was that the meaning of a certain art piece did not reside only on the autonomous object, but rather in its conceptual and contextual framework. Therefore this expanded the concept and discussion of what art could be from a post-modern viewpoint. It is important to mention, Joseph Beuys’ production as an example of these initial post-modern works, Beuys used collaborative/participatory work with his concept of “Social Sculpture.” In the work he presented at Documenta 5, in 1972, Beuys ran an “office of information” for the Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum. Beuys ran this “office” for 100 consecutive days, discussing with visitors the concept of democracy in his surreal “office” promoting a fictional political referendum.

Claire Bishop (2006) summarizes the artistic experiments of the 60s and 70s as works that were often centered on critique of the work of art itself. Some examples of this are art practices taking place beyond the gallery walls thereby producing artistic juxtapositions with social and political activism.

Several groups of collaborative artists surged in the States during the 70’s and 80’s, with names such as Grand Fury, Group Material, and Guerrilla Girls. Some of these groups challenged the art world’s sacred notions of individual authorship, the cult of the artist as heroes or sublime creatures, and the domain of private expression. Group Material on their website described their activities as an organization of artists “dedicated to the creation, exhibition, and distribution of art that increases social awareness”.

8
In 1988, Group Material created a project called INSERTS, a 12 page newsprint booklet inserted in the Sunday magazine supplement of the New York Times. The insert depicted copies of art created specifically for that project by well-known artists such as Barbara Kruger, Felix Gonzales-Torres, Richard Prince, and Jenny Holzer, among others. The main concept behind this initiative was to get art off the wall and into everyone’s hands. The group strongly questioned what “low” and “high” art could possibly be and created venues for bridging this gap. They also challenged notions of where art should be seen, believing that art should not be just “for the initiated audiences of the gallery and museum” (Lovejoy 1997). Moreover, the Guerilla Girls produced strong feminist artistic comments such as phrases depicting the few opportunities women received in general in the arts. These were printed on large billboards and graphic printed posters (Fig.3) Guerilla Girls were also intrigued by collaborative and anonymous work.

Fig. 3 Poster by Guerrilla Girls (1989). Copyright © by Guerrilla Girls. Courtesy: www.guerrillagirls.com

The trend in collaborative art and/or collaborative creativity is definitely a transnational phenomenon with artists working in artists’ collectives or within the realm of public spaces. In Brazil, for example, my research unveils that in this past decade there was an increase in the number of group of artists such as GIA-Grupo de Interferencia Ambiental, Corpos Informaticos of Bia Medeiros in Brasilia, and Coletivo Entretantos, among others². These groups are spread throughout Brazil according to researchers Henrique
Mazetti (2010) and Fernando Cocchiarale (2010). Each geographical area offers its own particular influence on the work exhibited by these collectives.

The academic researcher and Grupo PORO artist, Brigida Campbell, stated in her essay *Acoes Urbanas: Poesia e Politica no Espaco Publico* (2004) that Brazilian art in the 60’s and 70’s and the concept of Relational Aesthetics by Nicolas Bourriaud are the frameworks within which this generation of Brazilian artists are creating experimental process-based art. In the Brazilian context, according to Campbell, some international references must be cited which confirm the genealogic connections between the interventionist production of today with earlier historical productions such as the Dadaism manifestations, Duchamp’s legacy, Group Fluxus, including the Brazilian approaches, such as the emblematic interventions of Flávio de Carvalho (*Experiências* nº 2, 1931, e nº 3, in São Paulo, 1956), the public participation and life integration in projects by Helio Oiticica (*Parangolés*, in Rio de Janeiro, 1964 -1969) and Lygia Clark (*Cabeça Coletiva*, in Paris, 1975) among others.

Nelson Leiner, the founder of the Brazilian Grupo Rex in the 60s, offered an institutional critique through his work. Leiner submitted a stuffed pig on a crate to the prestigious IV Salão de Arte Moderna de Brasília (Fig. 4), and this work titled *Porco Empalhado* (Stuffed Pig) (1967) was accepted. Leiner then made a direct inquiry to the exhibition’s curators, via an ad published in the newspaper Folha da Tarde asking what were the criteria used by the curators to accept his work.

![Porco Empalhado](image)

**Fig. 4** *Porco Empalhado* (1967) (Stuffed Pig) by Nelson Leiner. Courtesy: Nelson Leiner. Collection: Pinacoteca do Estado.
Today in Brazil, this thread of artistic work involving the public, as actions/ interventions in the public space, differs somewhat from the Brazilian political art created in the 60’s and 70’s. During that time the common denominator inspiring that generation of artists was a reaction to the military dictatorship regime. Today in Brazil, these artistic interventions vary from region to region, and their poetics are also very diverse, ranging from making critical commentaries about local situations to issues of globalization, sustainability, and questions regarding the usage of public or private spaces. Often, these Brazilian interventions are simply ludic interventions such as games or role-playing occurring in public spaces.

Upon examination of the transnational phenomenon of collaborative art, regardless of where it is created, it shares the same intricate and complex root system that began with Duchamp’s ready-made concept, the Dada movement, the late 50s Situationist International with its concepts of dérive and détournement, and the Fluxus movement with its main features: the unity of art and life, chance, playfulness, simplicity and presence in time.

Guy Debord, one of the founders of Situationist International, writes that the dérive sensibility is characterized by "a loose lifestyle and even certain amusements considered dubious... slipping by night into houses undergoing demolition, hitchhiking nonstop and without destination through Paris during a transportation strike in the name of adding to the confusion, wandering in subterranean catacombs forbidden to the public, etc." 3.

Détournement, a term with multiple English translations, includes hijacking one’s concepts, rerouting, misappropriation, distortion, and derailment. Certainly, today’s collaborative art with interventionist/participatory characteristics employ all of these strategies, and are to a degree defined by them.
2.2 Criticism to Relational Aesthetics as a theory

As previously discussed, the translation of Bourriaud’s work into English in 2002 was pivotal to the dissemination of Relational Aesthetics all over the world. Relational Aesthetics itself received heavy critical scrutiny focused on the ethics of its *modus operandi*, its aesthetics and form, and its apparently non-capitalistic views. Such a critique was articulated by Claire Bishop (2004), Hal Foster (2004), Stewart Martin (2007), Granhan Coulter-Smith (2009) and Jacques Rancière (2009), among others.

In a response to a critique written in 2008 by Jacques Ranciere in the book titled *Le Spectateur Emancipé*, Bourriaud defended relational aesthetics by arguing that it was not “just arrangements of art that present themselves as social relations” (2009). Bourriaud affirms that relational projects do have a preoccupation with form itself, in formalist terms, in the disposition of the elements, color, installation aspects, and dimension.

As in Tiravanija’s exhibitions, according to Bourriaud: “…what about the colors, disposition of elements in space, the dialogue with the exhibition space, the formal structure of the installation, the protocol for its use?”. Bourriaud is referring to Rikrit Tiravanija’s work *Untitled (Free)* (1992, which was re-mounted in 2007) when people would eat Thai food prepared by Tiravanija and talk about art or chat in makeshift kitchens, a cornerstone piece that uses Relational Aesthetics as its framework.

Relational Aesthetics has also received serious critical reviews by Stewart Martin in his article *Critique of Relational Aesthetics*. Martin scrutinizes the strengths and limitations of this art theory, arguing in his discussion of Relational Aesthetics that Bourriaud did not pay enough attention to the fact that Relational Aesthetics, while promoting social exchange as its main objective, did not openly acknowledge existing capitalist forces which enable such projects to exist. Martin asks “how relational art produces a social exchange that disengages from capitalist exchange, and how the form of relational art relates or opposes the commodity form or the value form?” (371).
Hal Foster points to another relevant perspective: if Relational Aesthetics is political by its nature, as suggested by Bourriaud, it assumes that this particular kind of work takes place in an inclusive society, as if a “desultory form might evoke a democratic community, or a non-hierarchical installation predict an egalitarian world” (193).

London-based art critic Claire Bishop was one of the first English-speaking critics to raise another relevant question about Relational Aesthetics: “if relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?” (65). Furthermore, in this research paper the novelty of Relational Aesthetic as a theory will be examined in relation to other converging theories of international art aesthetics.

2.3 The site-specificity of collaborative art

Generating art in a collaborative manner can be a way of exploring the concept of site-specificity. Many of these projects have an environmental immersive quality, where the spectator is immersed within the exhibit and therefore becomes a part of it. Thus, the divide between the author/artist and the public diminishes, and may become non-existent. Some of these works present clear interventionist characteristics such as transforming, altering or revealing something of a situation pertinent to a specific time and locale.

Grant H. Kester examines the art exhibited in ArtBarns: Art After Kurt Schwitters, a staged series of collaborative projects in the summer of 1999. This event, involved artists and farmers in the farming community of Bowland, Britain, was organized by artists Ian Hunter and Celia Larner in an attempt to bring city people to the countryside, to give them some awareness of how food is brought to someone’s table, as well as a glimpse into the farmers’ socio-cultural relationships among themselves, their work, and the land itself. Kester explains that Hunter and Larner define their collaborative art as “littoral” art practice. These artists use this term, “littoral” art to define cultural projects that operate at the “interstices of disciplines and institutions ” (167) combining elements of art, activism,
and public policy. According to Kester, littoral art practitioners are artists who work “across and outside the parameters of existing disciplines and professional problem solving” (169). The aforementioned Bowland-based project was particularly interesting to me because of my own work commenting on the need to preserve agricultural land, food networks and the rural way of life. Such topics are explored in my piece *Honey, what is for dinner?*; a work which will be further discussed is this paper.

Art works made in collaboration are often ephemeral pieces where the individual or individuals who conceptualize these works participate alongside the public in action or interventions. These projects often take the form of a public event, which occurs in plazas, on streets, and under or over bridges. These sites, therefore, significantly inform the work itself. Such events may occur on the top of buildings, as in Suzanne Lacy, Chris Johnson and Annice Jacoby’s *Roof is on Fire (1994)*, a performance with 220 teenagers in Oakland, California (Fig. 5). The teenagers talked for hours about their reality as young people of color living in Oakland, listening to music, as teenagers often do, in cars parked at the rooftop of a parking garage.

![Fig. 5 Roof is on Fire (1994) performance organized by Suzanne Lacy, Chris Johnson and Annice Jacoby with 220 teenagers seating and dialoguing on cars on a rooftop, Oakland, California. Courtesy: Suzanne Lacy, Chris Johnson and Annice Jacoby. Photograph: Sosa](image)

It is important, at this point, to differentiate genres of site-specific work. One genre is phenomenological, such as Richard Serra’s sculpture named *Tilted Arc at the Federal Plaza* in New York (Fig. 6), where the site itself dictates the work. This particular work was grounded and stationary, encompassing a large area of the plaza and by its sheer size...
and height it blocked the sights of the Federal Plaza and surrounding areas. The artwork made people walk a great distance alongside the sculpture in order to cross the plaza. This 73 ton Minimalistic and monumental work was conceived by Serra to be placed in this exact locale, the Federal Plaza, as an art piece that could never be removed from its locale. In this case, the site is fixed so this genre of site-specificity is defined by the placement of the object in a particular site (locale). Although I am not going to explore the controversy that this work generated, the work was eventually cut into three parts and removed from its site in March of 1989.

![Tilted Arc](image)


Other genres of site-specificity, are discussed by Miwon Kwon in the article *The Wrong Place*, which advances “an altogether different notion of a site as predominantly an inter-textually coordinated, multiply located, discursive field of operation”(33).

This is clearly the case in the work of Colab, examined by Gillian Whitely in *Locating a Temporary Common Space: Cultural Exchanges in Weedpatch*, an article focused on the Colab collective. CoLab was set up by British artists Heather Connelly, Jo Dacombe, and Jayne Murray with an emphasis on projects that interface with other cultures and places. In Weedpatch, Colab worked as a mediator for a public art project titled *Incubate* (2006). Weedpatch is a Southern California community in which three languages are spoken: Mexico-Spanish, Mixteco and English. Language, according to Whitely, was the site of cultural problems and confrontation, and it was language as a site that generated the
artistic work within and with the community. Keeping this notion in mind, a *site* thus can become the issue or topic itself that one wants to artistically discuss.

Continuing this discussion about site-specificity, contemporary artists carry on creating pieces collaboratively that alter time and space in a site-specific manner.

An example of this is the work by the Québécois collective BGL (Jasmin Bilodeu, Sebastien Giguere and Nicolas Leverdiere) and their *Project for the Don River* (2008) created by N.9 Contemporary Arts and Environment, (Fig. 7) where a cruise ship was painted entirely black and floated on the Don River, a very polluted and disregarded river in Toronto. This work was a critical commentary about the cruise line consumerism system itself and about the bad environmental state of the Don River. The fact that the ship would move around transformed this notion of a site as a fixed locale. Although the object is immersed on the site, it can be moved so site and object are not fixed.

It is important to note that although this site-specific works by BGL do alter time and are produced in a collaborative manner, these projects do not involve the public in a tangible way. The public thus is not interwoven within the piece itself as with collaborative-experimental art. In the case of this BGL work, while the public observes the site-specific work, the viewers do not modify the integrity of the object itself or alter the artists’ original intent. An example of this interwoven aspect occurs with the work titled in Portuguese *Arranque a etiqueta de sua roupa* (2010), *(Cut the labels off your clothes)* by PORO at aO aVESSO, where the public was invited to cut off labels of the garments they were wearing and place these labels in a bowl(Fig. 8). This work also presents *site-specificity*, although in a different way from the BGL work, as the public participated cutting the tags of their clothes in that particular place and time and in the particular way requested by the artists. Thus, the public becomes part of the piece, interwoven or interconnected thereby complementing the original intention of the artists.

The participatory projects by REBAR are another example of this interwoven factor. REBAR is a collective of creators, designers, and activists based in San Francisco. REBAR’s work often uses public regulatory systems as artistic media, particularly as
these systems relate to the organization and use of public urban land. The group is the creator of PARK(ing) in 2007 (Fig.9). This project is a particularly good example of a successful collaborative project having relational art as its framework. The artists artificially created a green area as a base for social interactions while also commenting on the gradual disappearance of green areas in cities. Although they challenge the city public regulatory system, the artists themselves and the public who engage with them did not break the law since they continually fed the park meter.

**Fig. 7** Project for the Don River (2008) by the collective BGL. Courtesy: BGL Photo credit: Catherine Dean.

**Fig. 8** Arranje a etiqueta de sua roupa (2010)(Cut the labels off your clothes) by Poro at aO aVESSO. Florianopolis, Brazil. Courtesy: Grupo Poro at http://redezero.org/
Fig. 9 *PARK(ing)* (2007) by Rebar, in San Francisco, California. Courtesy: Rebar at http://www.rebargroup.org

In Turkey, the Oda Projesi collective, formed by three women artists, Ozge Acikkol, Gune Savas, and Secil Yersel explores site-specificity from a new perspective. The curator Maria Lind (2010) in an essay reviewing Oda Projesi’s work inform us that the artists of Oda Projesi are interested in examining how many different ways a site can be used. The public participated by engendering dialogue through various events: a white paper roll is rolled down from an upstairs flat to the streets and the children start to draw on the paper while inside the flat, a girl dressed in yellow is dancing a solo ballet. Lind writes that Oda Projesi is interested in using art as a means for creating and recreating new relations between people through diverse investigations and shaping of both private and public space. In this case, the site can then have multiple uses.

The debate of what is public and private in regards to a site (as a locale) and also as propriety is a strong conceptual thread in interventionist collaborative projects, such as the ongoing project *Piratão* developed by Filé de Peixe, based in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Fig. 10, 11, and 12). The appropriation of public space and what is previously copyrighted is the inspiration for artists like Alex Topini, Felipe Cataldo, and Fernanda Antoun, members of the Coletivo Filé de Peixe. In their work, the artists copied approximately 400 art videos. These are videos documents of performances, time-based work, urban interventions, temporary installations, and artists’ interviews. The title *Piratão* is the superlative of *pirata* in Portuguese, which means *pirate* in English. This is
certainly a humorous title for a project whose main characteristic is *pirating* work in a clear copyright infringement fashion.

Under the Filé de Peixe “label”, one can find materials by the artists themselves, as well as by internationally known artists such as Nam June Paik, Bill Viola, Yoko Ono and several Brazilian productions by Lygia Pape, Helio Oiticica and others. Filé de Peixe then goes to the streets, offering these videos for sale at a very low price and screening some of these videos on old TV sets where all can see them for free. This urban intervention promotes interchange between Filé de Peixe’ artists and the public, as well with other established artists who are working in different languages art media, and aesthetics. Their ultimate goal is to make art accessible to the general public.

![Image of Filé de Peixe poster](http://coletivoafiledepeixe.com/piratao/)

**Fig. 10** *Piratão* (ongoing) by Coletivo Filé de Peixe. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Courtesy: Filé de Peixe at http://coletivoafiledepeixe.com/piratao/

![Image of Filé de Peixe event](http://coletivoafiledepeixe.com/piratao/)

**Fig. 11** *Piratão* (ongoing) by Coletivo Filé de Peixe. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Courtesy: Filé de Peixe at http://coletivoafiledepeixe.com/piratao/
2.4 Is interventionist collaborative art the “new public art”?

Could collaborative art be the *new public art* with its inherent hybrid characteristics, calling into question perceived ideas of public space, ownership of public space, and its communal value?

This new understanding and conceptual perception of contemporary public art is explained by the art critic and public art theorist Patricia Phillips:

> If not essentially different from other art, public art does suggest its own particular model for thinking about the way all art functions—as a dynamic exchange of invention, production, delivery, reception, and action rather than a stable collection of formal characteristics. In its many manifestations, it questions what occurs—and changes—when people encounter and experience art. In both subtle and radical ways, public art shifts critical analysis to the responses of viewers who shape, modify, perpetuate, and complete (at least provisionally) its meaning. Public art implies and acknowledges the transactions that drive the transformative nature of all art (n. pag.)

I believe that a clear example of this new public art is the interventionist art project *Frozen Grand Central*, which was organized by the collective Improv Everywhere and took place on February 24, 2007 in New York’s Grand Central Station. The founder of this collective, Charles Todd, coordinates Improv Everywhere’s works. These interventions can involve anywhere from five to six hundred people. This collective has created over 70 interventions, which they call *missions*, in New York. The people
involved in these actions, from videographers to the artists and non-artists participants, are called *agents*.

In *Frozen Grand Central Station*, the bustling station is suddenly frozen in time. A man stops to tie his shoes and remains in that position for the next 5 minutes. A businessman walking drops an armload of papers on the floor and tourists stand in a frozen moment looking at their maps. The ordinary “real world” actions that are conducted daily at the station are also modified as a result of the 200 frozen interventionists.

These kinds of collaborative projects are concerned much more with their tactical rather than their aesthetic qualities. The actions employed by the group are examined by the art educator Jack Richardson in his article *Interventionist Art Education*, where he writes:

> Interventionist art practice, understood as a tactical operation, is not simply imposed as an unfamiliar object or action within a familiar environment, rather, it “uses” the systemic operations that are already in place. Social and moral values and codes as well as laws, rules and general public discretion all represent systems that govern social behavior and interaction (22).

These kinds of collaborative art interventions are site-specific in nature, adapting to the characteristics of the site itself, using the available elements around it. *Frozen Grand Central Station*, momentarily, did just that through the tactics the group employed to disrupt time and space. This resulted in a social dialogical and dialectical engagement with the participants of the piece itself and the larger public. The dialogical engagement to which I am referring here is constituted by the spontaneous conversations generate by people’s reactions to this event. As for the dialectical engagement, it manifested itself in some of the documented behaviors and actions by individuals who did not like to have their paths blocked by the stationary objects or participants. After examining the video documentation of the intervention, I found that one of the most interesting aspects was that even after the interventionists resumed their ordinary activities and blended themselves back into the site, the effects of their intervention lingered on, producing most dialogue among and within the broader community at the station. *Frozen Grand Central Station* challenges us to ask philosophical and political questions regarding ideas of community, social interactions, and art in public spaces.
As the art critic, Patricia Phillips wrote in 1995, about public art in general is:

… about the free field—the play-of creative vision. The point is not just to produce another thing for people to step back and admire, but to create an opportunity—a situation—that enables viewers to look back at the world with renewed perspectives and clear angles of vision(n. pag.).

From this viewpoint, collaborative, interventionist or participatory art occurring in public spaces can and should be seen as public art by the art world and funded as such.

2.5 Questions and commentaries

Several questions occurred to me while I was researching collaborative art poetics and praxis, as well as its renewed transnational interest and the ways in which this kind of work is being revisited by a new generation of artists from different cultures and traditions. This research has resulted in more questions than answers.

The art historian, Margot Lovejoy, explains that there has been a repetitive pattern of the 20th Century visual art movements. Abstractionism, Constructivism, Dadaism, and Expressionism have all reemerged as Neo-Dada, Neo-Constructivism and Neo-Expressionism. And the art from the 80s and 90s repeated some art movements from the 50s and 60s as Neo-Minimalist, Neo-Pop, and Neo-Conceptualist. Most importantly, in my view, is the following remark, regarding the historical circularity pattern in the arts:

This has occurred with slight progressions and extensions, but with no real new break in the field of perception or systems of meaning which offers a serious challenge to traditional western notions of representation (374).

Could collaborative art as a medium challenge notions of western representation? It seems to me that collaborative art expands the notion of representation. The concept of representation becomes elastic in this praxis, no longer based on concrete things such as objects with their own physical attributes. Therefore, the concept of representation becomes abstract. For an instance, sharing a moment of joy while participating in an event or process could be considered a representation. The same is true for the subjectivities awakened or presented by the event or process: they could also be considered representations.
Is this renewed interest observed in collaborative and participatory art, which re-emerged with vigor in the 90’s, linked to a new way of thinking about cultural exchange through the advent of digital technology and the diasporas worldwide? Visual culture scholar Nicholas Mirzoeff (2005) comments on the cultural aspect of the diasporas in our contemporary world in contrast to the human migrations of the nineteenth century “where diasporas revealed interconnected nations” (163). According to Mirzoeff, the diasporic moment of our era reveals an “increasingly interdependent planet” where “there isn’t just one viewpoint but multiple viewpoints” (163).

In this context, ideas and viewpoints are carried out by individuals and disseminated by the diverse media rapidly and digitally via the Internet. This strategy is used by many of the younger collaborative interventionist artists. This can be seen in the urban intervention organized by Esqueleto Coletivo, an artists’ collective formed by Rodrigo Barbosa, Mariane Cavalcante, Luciana Costa, David Santos e Eduardo Verderame, for their *Exército de Executivos* (Army of Executives, 2004), which used online social media to quickly mobilize individuals (Fig.13).

The online call asked for people, artists or not, to show up at Praca Almeida Prato, a central downtown square located in front of the Sao Paulo Stock Exchange. This call was distributed by e-mails and published on Esqueleto Coletivo’s website as an online poster with the phrase “Cumpra o seu Dever and Defenda a Sua Nacao” translated here as: “This is your responsibility, defend your nation! It was a derisive critique of global MBAs, with their self-important “attires-uniforms” and accessories (Fig.14).

The interventionists were asked to show up dressed like executives and wear suits and ties, bring cellular phones, laptop computers, papers, briefcases and files to form an army of executives. The satirical aim of the action was to form an army of executives in order to defend the nation. The piece also offers a critical perspective about global capitalist-based systems, which are incapable of really protecting the nations from their general downfall.

Gillian Whitely (Whitely 237) reminds us in his essay Locating a Temporary Common Space: Cultural Exchanges in Weedpatch of a question raised by the postcolonial theorist, Homi Bhabha: is collaborative art exploring the idea of a hybrid “third space” where artists create a new reality within reality? Or is collaborative art or participatory creativity a naive and utopian concept per se? Is it possible to envision participatory art that is hands-on as Patricia Reed proposed (4) while also constituting an effective critical interactive action, that is to say, an intervention, which can include exit, indifference, non-participation and forms of spectatorship?
Is this kind of art a direct but soft confrontation due to its disguised humorous parodies and allegories of the capitalist mode of operation, and of the art system itself, demonstrating that art is an activity open to all independently of their economic status, cultural values or artistic training. Is this 21st century way of art making telling us that the art world is not responsible, capable or entitled to define who is an artist or what can be defined as an art object, but that any ordinary citizens can make those definitions whether they studied art or not?

As a Brazilian, I wonder about the emergence of other concepts similar to Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics in the non-English speaking world, a fact that definitely would raise questions about the novelty of Relational Aesthetics as a theory. My research reveals other sources, generally unknown to non-English speaking critics and theorists, such as the text by the art curator Peter Weibel for his exhibition titled KontextKunst /Context Art (Coulter-Smith 2009, Jaeckel 2009) in 1993 in Graz, Austria, where he challenged artists to create with context in mind. Moreover, Weibel, who coined the term KontestKunst, reminds us that art:

… is no longer purely about critiquing the art system, but about critiquing reality and analyzing and creating social processes. Artists are becoming autonomous agents of social processes, participation of the real. The interaction between artists and social situations between art and non-art contexts has lead to a new art form, where both are folded together: context art. The aim of this social construction of art is to take part in the social construction of reality (Weibel qtd. in Jaeckel n. pag.).

In reading this text by Weibel, there is definitely a conceptual overlapping between relational art and context art. We are talking about the same art form and basic concepts with a different nomenclature.

In this following situation, the lack of notice was likely due to the fact that these are yet unpublished art manuscripts and written in Portuguese. However, these materials were informally disseminated in Brazil through lectures, correspondence between artists and art critics, and also through some of the art experiments proposed in the manifesto.
That is the case of *arte sinérgica* (synergic art), a concept and an art manifesto created in 1993 by the Brazilian psychologist, writer and artist, José Ernesto Bologna. This unpublished text was written three years before Bourriaud published his now famous catalogue for the exhibition *Traffic* in 1996. Bologna’s art manifesto, titled in Portuguese, *A Estética da Sinergia : um manifesto de arte contemporânea para a cultura brasileira* (translated here as *The Aesthetics of Synergy: a manifesto of contemporary art for the culture of Brazil*) has one of its main premise based in collaborative art made within the public realm. In this text, Bologna expresses his concept for a new kind of art making in Brazil, an art based in *sinergia*. Here are some of its key points:

- Art should be socially engaged and happen within the public realm: streets, plazas, parks and avenues through site-specific events.
- The participants in the art piece or art event should participate aurally to give depth to the projects.
- Art should promote cooperation with easily understandable critical objectives without devaluing the aesthetic aspects of the event, processes or objects.
- This new art would not present the individualistic nationalist spirit of the Romantic Era, the virtuosity of the Baroque Era, or the alienating and frivolous aspects of some of the contemporary avant-garde.
- The concept of “belo” (beautiful) in *arte sinérgica* is inherent and intrinsically connected with “*esforço cooperativo entre as pessoas*” (n.pag.), (translated here as a cooperative effort between individuals).
- *Arte sinérgica* presents elements of surprise, a ludic and blurred separation between spectators/participants/artists through inter media projects.

Reading about the Brazil-based *arte sinérgica*, I observed that this theory presents several convergent points with Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics. Both theories are primarily concerned with building an artistic platform where social relationships can occur during an event or process. In *arte sinérgica*, an object could be created as a result of the social interactions. However, the object itself is not the main intent, but rather, in *arte sinérgica*, it is the “cooperative effort between individuals” that is the main objective. *Arte sinérgica*
and relational art are both interested in social interactions as in the aforementioned work *Untitled (Free)* (1992) by Rikrit Tiravanija where dialogues and social interactions occurred in a makeshift kitchen.

Several events based in *arte sinérgica* happened in the mid 90s in Brazil. In one called *Arco-Iris* (Rainbow), people were gathered in a city park by the interventionists. Bologna called the interventionists in synergetic art *saltimbancos*. The participants were given several hoses assembled with nozzles to create mist and rainbows, depending on the angle of the sun. It seems that, according to Bologna, not everyone saw the rainbow and no object of art *per se* was made; but because all the participants knew of the intent in trying to produce an artificial rainbow, they all enjoyed the group’s effort and the beauty of the rainbow. Through this particular event, the public was able to discuss the “beauty of the common effort” mediated by the interventionists.

These following images show the *saltimbancos* starting an event in the street by playing and singing, inviting the public to participate in its actions (Fig.15 and 16).

![Fig. 15 and 16 Saltimbancos of Teatro de Tábuas initiating an event of *arte sinérgica*](http://www.teatrodetabuas.com.br)

*Arte sinérgica* was also used in the 90s as a pedagogical methodology in workshops for training students as well as professional art educators. Today, *arte sinérgica* is often used as a creative methodology used in theatre training to blur the roles between the author’s text, the director and the actors. *Arte sinérgica*, according to Bologna, is often used by the
Brazilian troupe Teatro de Tábuas, which is a mobile theater company that performs all over Brazil.

In another recent and unpublished essay about art collectives and collaborative art, Bologna examines some of the socio-psychological feelings that are experienced by the people who participate in these processes, pointing out how the strong individualistic spirit of the art created in the modernist era is challenged by today’s recent experimental process-based art. According to Bologna, the current role of the arts and culture in general, is to “balance this exhaustive individualism, so pervasive, to our contemporary world with a healing aesthetic where the collective is supported and based in individualities and not a collective supported and based in individualism (n.pag.)”.

I wonder if this insight proposed by Bologna, although a relevant point, fully explains the recent reemergence of collaborative art with Relational Aesthetics characteristics. I remain hopeful that this current and strong aesthetics tendency is a genuine attempt to reach out to other fellow human beings in an effort to collaboratively produce new meanings and representations. Perhaps, this manner of doing art is a response to our contemporary crises which are exemplified by broken social bonds, and perhaps this kind of art can possibly change prevailing paradigms: man is not the center of the universe; unbridled capitalism is not the solution; and nobody owns culture.
2.6 Relational Aesthetics-based collaborative art and the art system

It is a fact that artists working in the various collaborative processes discussed in this paper or in more traditional media such as painting, drawing, sculpture, printmaking or photography, need the financial support and means of legitimization offered by private, state and/or corporate institutions in order to continue to survive and produce culture. Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt explores this point in her text *The Culture of Capital*, where she analyses the risks and challenges faced today by critically minded artists:

… artists are increasingly obliged to play by the rules and a self-policing consensus has formed around the art world, much like that which dominates the mainstream media. In this world of scant funding, troublemakers need not apply and, if work by radical artists happens to find its way into outlets for official culture, it risks being neutralised and decontextualised. These are the challenges faced by radical artists at a time when their critical voice has never been more vital (564).

For most artists the point of entry into the art system is the art schools. It is relevant to discuss polemic and heavily scrutinized art theories, such as Relational Aesthetics, to entice the schools to not simply produce “art professionals”, avoiding, perhaps, the common trap art students face, often resulting in compromising of their own creativity in order to survive. Certainly, one can see pedagogical value in collaborative art praxis and process to engender social, cultural and political critique, learning and researching in a collaborative manner. Perhaps this manner of making art could assist mainstream public education at all levels, from elementary school to university level, in helping students to learn what experimental process-based art is. As Richardson wrote, “learning is something that takes place, it does not just occur in a pre-determined environment, but rather unfolds as an event” (31). Introducing this kind of art practice shifts the focus from art as object to art as a process, an open-ended concept in which knowledge is gained from creating these experiences. The knowledge could surface from informal discussion of these artistic processes ranging from topics such as ethics, cultural values, and debates on what constitutes private or public spaces.
Although there is an increased number of exhibitions around the globe dedicated to collaborative experimental art— for example Madrid Abierto in Spain, MIP (Manifestacao Internacional de Performance) in Belo Horizonte and EIA (Experiencia Imersiva Ambiental) in Sao Paulo, LIVE- International Performance Biennale in Vancouver, 4 Culture Site Specific? in the Washington state, and the famous Burning Man in the Nevada desert — there still persists an aura of disbelief, indifference or disregard on the part of the art system towards viewing this cultural production as art. Perhaps, the reason why this happens can be explained by examining the nature of the art itself, since it is not a product-based art but an art that is mainly process-based.

Art evolution and transformation, in my view, occurs through several parallel and complementary paths; one path should not displace another. Collaborative art with interventionist characteristics should be embraced by the art system just as the more conventional or technique-based art is. I can understand that this inclusion involves a considerable risk from the artists, who may fear that their art could be threatened by the possible restrictions of the institutionalization processes and the art system fear for their investments if it invests in a not yet clear and defined art.
3 Chapter: Glitch: an artistic investigation about Relational Aesthetics-based collaborative art and its site-specificity

I created several inter-media pieces or visual pieces in an attempt to investigate the notions of relational art, exploring some of the theoretical discourses outlined above in this paper. I also wanted to challenge formalist notions of form, content and context, and address questions related to site-specificity.

After careful consideration, I decided to focus my thesis-exhibition on one main piece, Crosswalk. This work best represents the main topics of this research paper that includes Relational Aesthetics-based collaborative art and issues related to site-specificity. Crosswalk is comprised of a canvas facsimile of a real crosswalk, related video and photographic documentation. Four other support pieces, Human Circus, I can’t do it!, Roses for Sale and Honey, what is for dinner?, were also exhibited exploring the topic of site-specificity and art made in collaboration. However, I am also discussing in this paper works from a previous exhibition, A is for Apple, and some of its installations because this was also a body of work developed as part of my graduate research. Although I did not use all the pieces from A is for Apple in my thesis-exhibition, I did include Honey, what is for dinner? and I can’t do it! . In the following sections I describe and critically examine each one of these pieces.

3.1 Human Circus

This public participatory experimental performance is an ironic allegory commenting on the invisible forces managing what French philosopher Jacques Rancière calls “the distribution of the sensible” (12). In his book, titled Politics of Aesthetics, Rancière questions the neo-imperialism manner of how cultural values and everything that one senses is distributed according to capitalistic interest.
Rancière’s notion can be better understood through the interpretative words of the Vancouver-based artist, Eli Bornowsky:

The *distribution of the sensible*, according to Rancière, is a distribution system (“laws”) which condition what is possible to see and hear, to say and think, to do and make … what is possible to apprehend by the senses. The sensible is partitioned into various regimes and therefore delimits forms of inclusion and exclusion in a community (n. pag.).

In other words, the piece deals with the concept of power and cultural consumption along with other contemporary juxtaposed themes such as the concern for nature, anti-anthropocentric views, and social alienation.

The concept of power and its effects are connected with capitalism. But power encompasses much more, as the co-curator of the 2005 Torino Triennial, Carolyn Christov-Bakargie, reminds us when explaining the title of that exhibition, *The Pantagruel Syndrome* 3. It goes “beyond just economics and into psychoanalysis” (3) Christov-Bakargiev explains. Power’s main fuel is subjugation, for example: husbands beating wives, human power over another human through intimidation and violence, or human power over animals. *Human Circus* was a playful investigation of this theme of power and its effects.

The following questions served as a starting point for the creation of *The Human Circus*:

- Who/What are these possible invincible forces?
- Who/What is in real possession of power?
- Who/What can transform society for better or for worse?
- Who/What can liberate individuals from this vicious circle?
- Who/What cause this circle/circus to move fast or slow?
- Who/What can tell if this circus is a balanced system?

The chosen site for this work was the atrium of the Fine Arts Building that houses the UBC-O FINA Art Gallery. This site was appropriate in how the visual elements of the piece would be installed. It conveys a roundness that I wanted to explore in the creation of a makeshift circus, and this particular area of the building has a staircase where the public could have an overview of the performance as one would in a real circus.
Thereby, *Human Circus* was a site-specific participatory collaborative performance. The collaborative nature of the work will be better explained in the next sections. I also wanted to create an event, or a support platform for social interactions based in Relational Aesthetics where people could interact, and I could observe if this theory could be applied in an event with more defined theatrical characteristics.

### 3.1.1 Initial Conceptual Sketch for Human Circus

![Initial Conceptual Sketch for Human Circus](image)

*Fig. 17 Human Circus (2010) initial conceptual sketch by the author.*

### 3.1.2 Human Circus description of possible participatory roles

Although some of these roles were envisioned for this participatory exercise, it had plenty of room for improvisation as no rehearsal took place prior to the first and second performance. The fundamental concept for the piece was to experiment in a spontaneous lab atmosphere where the audience could take an active part in what was happening in the experimental performance, blurring the lines between performers and audience. With
Human Circus exit, engagement or indifference were somewhat expected actions by both participants and audience.

Some of the props and elements were in a green case or close to the steel rims at the circumference of the ring. The performers waited for the ringleader to give the commands or prompts to start their improvisation.

1- **The TV Watcher**: You must first plug the TV into its outlet at your wheel rim on the circumference of the ring, sit at your spot and watch the show, while eating junk food and drinking beer or Coca-Cola.

2- **The Protester**: Read aloud the text about anti-anthropocentrism. Protest with spirit, make protest signs, show a frenetic/passionate attitude, try to engage the audience, make new signs, all the while paying attention to the ringleader.

3- **The Sports person**: Get sports gear from the trunk (swimming goggles, tennis racket, golf club, golf ball, golf green, rope, weights, scale), trying to engage the audience. All the time paying attention to the ringleader.

4- **The Sage**: Meditate, observe, remain still, peacefully hold the walking stick and play the wooden rain instrument.

5- **The Birdwatcher/Environmentalist**: Get the bag with binoculars, bird guide, and pencil. Performing bird watching activity, engaging the audience in this activity, talking about the ecology and the need to preserve Nature. All the time paying attention to the ringleader.

6- **The Weather Freak**: Read and cut columns about the weather from the newspaper, try to convince people that it will be raining or snowing, to dress for cold or heat. Check the thermometer, call friends on the cell phone and talk about the weather. All the time pay attention to the ringleader.
7- **The Dancer**: Dance, silently at first, then according to the iPod music.

8- **The Singer**: Sing alone at first, then more loudly to the iPod music or any other music of your liking. Try to engage the audience in singing together.

9- **The Sound Rim** (plug the system first): Pay attention to when to put the speakers on when the trainer gives the cue. This role is of a DJ or talking radio host. Talk about music, criticize lyrics and about MTV videos.

10- **The Painter**: Get material from the green bin. First paint the picture, then attach it to its frame and go auction it to the audience, use art critic vocabulary.

11- **The Shopping Queen**: Get the cosmetics bag and perform grooming activities, sometimes stopping to text, or talking on the cell phone with speakerphone on about her or his beauty purchases or beauty treatments.

12- **The Season Queen**: Get your elements from the green case, perform rituals of wrapping presents, place the wreath on an imaginary door (you can ask someone on the audience to be your “door”), place the Seasons star at your “door” then plug in the star (on the base of your rim).

13- **The Oppressed**: Someone who is inside the cage, performing sewing garments, piling them up, first performing the sewing activity quietly. Accept the bananas and MacDonald’s hamburgers from the ringleader and, later on engage with the Protester and start to revolt and engage the audience.

**First Act**: All perform first individually and then for the climax all perform together in a spirit of happy chaos, as a circus going mad, building up tension.
**Second Act:** Wait for the cue and the musician to play circus music. All other sounds should stop at this point. The “ringleader” will release The Oppressed/Other from the cage.

**Final Act:** The “ringleader” will be displaced from her position as the “authority” and be put in the cage under protest and insults from her human-beasts.

**NOTE:** The performance doesn’t need to have all of the wheel rims on the circumference of the ring full to happen, it can happen with just a few of these. And other roles or scripts as can be improvised created on the spot. The finale can be changed as well.

3.1.3 Photo documentation of *Human Circus*

![Human Circus](image)

**Fig. 18** *Human Circus* (2010) as site-specific installation at UBC-O FINA Art Gallery. Credit: the author
Fig. 19 Overview of Human Circus (2010) participatory performance with The Protester with signs, singer, The Sage, The Birdwatcher/Naturalist and The Ringleader. Credit: Amber Choo.

Fig. 20 The Ringleader and TV/media consumer at Human Circus. Credit: Amber Choo.
Fig. 21 While The DJ/Music consumer and The Ringleader danced holding their bananas, music and bread as in the Roman’s time of *panem et circenses* is tossed for the audience while The Sage looks on without interfering. Credit: Amber Choo.

Fig. 22 and 23 Other images of *Human Circus* participatory performance culminating with The Ringleader being literally and figuratively stripped down of her power. Credits: Amber Choo.

Fig. 24 *Human Circus* overview after performance within the gallery space at 2011 MFA Open House exhibition. Credit: Renay Egami.
3.2 A is for Apple Exhibition

This exhibition was comprised of several media-based installations having the apple as its main inspiring object to trigger subjectivities about nature, agricultural and rural way of living. The body of work that was produced for this exhibition was originally to be used on a later project called BioZest, which was dropped from this current research for practical reasons, such as the time and financial constraints required to develop such an ambitious project. However, I decided to include *Honey, what is for dinner?* and *I can’t do it* that were parts of *A is for Apple* in my exhibition-thesis.

![Poster-brochure for A is for Apple exhibition](image)

**Fig. 25** Poster-brochure for *A is for Apple* exhibition(front). Credit: Isa Creations.
This exhibition is a result of a participation and collaboration of many individuals to whom I feel very grateful:

Faculty of Creative and Critical Studies at UBCO-
Assistant Professor Aleksandra Dulic
Adjunct Professor Kenneth Newby
Michael Berger
Maureen Lisle
Aleks Lingnau
Don Lyons
Dennis Evans
Linda Falkingham
The Brazilian Community in the Okanagan
Jair Dias dos Santos
Janice Marques
Luís Felipe Marques Dias
Vera Romano
Marisa Dalgleish
Fred Mandl
Valencia Young
Cida Tennert
David Garrett
Pilar Dirickson Garrett
Lucas Dirickson Garrett
John Crofts
Neil Crofts and Shannon Walker
Zoe Jacoe
Patricia Jacoe
Solange Farah
Sue George
Brigite at Wild Horse Mountain Ranch B & B
Blossoms Fruit Stand, Summerland, BC
Flavia and Craig Lindsey and
Victoria Wan, for her focus and dedication to this project.

I dedicate this exhibition to the Polesello family of Summerland, BC owners of Blossom Fruit Stand and Farm for their generational commitment to farming.

Fig. 26 Poster-brochure for A is for Apple exhibition (back).

3.2.1 Honey, what is for dinner?

In this ironic and cautionary piece I wanted to explore the topic of food production, from the fields to the table, and its socio-cultural aspects including ethnic recipe exchanges and holiday celebrations through a video-collage. This video-collage was presented through iPods inserted into dining plates. The public was welcome to sit at the table and “eat” their visual food. With this piece I attempted to make the table and its objects engender not a passive relationship with the public-viewer, but to engage the public in a reflective and critical manner. The table became what David Goldenberg (4) called a “thought object”, meaning that the artwork functions as a tool to assist critical thinking.
The video-collage prepared for this piece, although an important element, should not be viewed as a technically elaborate video. One of my intentions was to explore the possibilities of working with iPods inserted into an art form, in this case, the ceramic plates. I was also interested in talking with the people who sat at the table, and gathered their thoughts in regards to the piece. Some appreciated the irony of “eating digital food” and having fun acting out the actions of eating with the table’s cutlery and glasses, while real food was digitally shown. Some said that they take for granted the fact that today food is so abundant and that the piece made them reflect that perhaps, in a near future, food will not be as easily available and that we may resort to such fictional scenario. The site-specificity of this piece is of two genres. The first one is related to the cognitive interaction between the public and the table which is similar to the aforementioned work, *Arranque a etiqueta de sua roupa* (Cut the labels out of your clothes) by Grupo Poro where the public, through their interactions with the work, complements my original intention and thereby became part of the work. The second one is related to another genre of site-specificity where a *site* can become the issue or topic itself that one wants to artistically discuss. In this particular case is the topic of food production, from the fields to the table, and its socio-cultural aspects.

![Fig. 27 3D Rendering based on initial sketch by the author. Courtesy: Mark Julien at Viseira Design.](image)
Fig. 28 Honey, what is for dinner? (2009), installation and “I can’t do it” as video projection. Credit: the author.

Fig. 29 Honey, what is for dinner? (2009), installation with iPods Ceramic plates: Dennis Evans. Credit: the author.
3.2.2 Monologues of Absurdity

This new media work involved the projection of multiple video footages onto apples, creating an ambiguous visual juxtaposing. I was interested in creating a cacophony of the combined individual “voices” or heteroglossia; some expressing concerns about the environment, some laughing uncontrollably, some with critical alerts saying “nature would be gone and then we will be gone as well”. The public was quite interested in this work and they tried to understand what these sentences could mean. However, I am not sure if the public grasped the main message, or if a connection was made with regard to these statements, or if they understood that the apples signified nature in this piece. The piece offered some technical challenges in regards to the proper use of digital media applications for the positioning of the projections on the apples. In retrospect, I believe the piece would benefit if the timing between the projected footage were better spaced, thereby allowing for the juxtaposing of voices and offering more distinctive and clear utterances. This piece could be more visually appealing if the group of apples were suspended in the center of the gallery, rather than in the corner of the space. Although this piece was not part of my exhibition-thesis, I decided to keep the description of this particular work here because it was an interesting result of a collaborative effort between artists and non-artists. The site-specificity of this piece is of the same kind of the aforementioned Colab’s work in Weedpatch, where site is what one wants to artistically comment on which in this case is nature and its preservation.

![Monologues of Absurdity](image)

**Fig. 30** *Monologues of Absurdity* (2009). Installation with video projection (still).
3.2.3 What does the apple mean to you?

This piece was a simple parody of trade shows where people express their opinions about certain products, or vote on little papers and place them in a box. In this case, I asked the following question: “What does the apple mean to you?” which was printed on cards depicting the most common apple varieties of the Okanagan Valley (Fig. 31, 32 and 33). The viewers responded on the back of these cards and placed them into a Plexiglass box. The idea was to engage the public to reflect literally and abstractly about the apple. The site-specificity in this piece has to do with critical thinking about the apple, which is once again similar to the Colab’s work in Weedpatch where site is defined by an issue to be discussed. The responses were mostly short and varied, from philosophical remarks to comments on the quality of the fruit. Some wrote about the smell of warm apple pie and the feelings this evoked, recalling Grandma’s kitchen, or memories of visiting apple orchards. The site-specificity in this piece is also related to how the public became part of the piece by their participation, thereby complementing my intention for this piece.

Fig. 31 What does the apple mean to you? (2009). Credit: the author.
Fig. 32 Apple cards for *What does the apple mean to you?* Graphic design by Victoria Wan.

Fig. 33 Responses written by the public on the back of the apple cards for *What does the apple mean to you?*
3.2.4 “I can’t do it!”

“I can’t do it!” was an allegoric postmodern work that reinterpreted the childhood tale of The Little Red Riding Hood. In this piece I wanted to explore the genre of site-specificity where site is what I artistically want to comment on in relation to topics of feminism and nature. This piece was to be projected in a loop mode. The video imagery is of the character Little Red Riding Hood on her journey through the forest carrying a Plexiglass box with an apple in it instead of the expected basket of goodies as in the original tale. My interest in this piece was to explore this character under a new lens, from a feminist perspective to an environmental one, where the red apple signifies Nature and how difficult the human task is both to preserve it and take from it. What we remember most about Little Red Riding Hood is her naiveté and trusting personality, but here I was more interested in her courage and her inner conflicts while she goes on her journey as a young female.

In Cry for Myth, Rollo May (44) explains that Freudian scholarship has analyzed fairy tales and described them as myths functioning as the escape valves of humans’ innermost or repressed feelings. Fairy tales bring these feelings to the surface as longings, fears, fantasies, and social constructs of false and true notions of heroism, and of good and evil. The conscious and unconscious content of the tales emerges from a universal need for people to deal with their concrete and abstract problems, hence the creation of archetypal narratives. Classical fairy tales as a literary genre offers an unlimited source of material for artists to tap into and reinterpret and manipulate its original version through diverse interdisciplinary approaches. Classical fairy tales are narratives that “belong” to all of us and often artists feel compelled to invent new characters or partially change the original narrative, or even insert autobiographical material. Also, contemporary perspectives, in an instance, based in cultural studies, can present critical and relevant material for these reinterpretations.
The heroine in my work presented several human characteristics such as vulnerability and uncertainty of her own path and mission, perhaps reflecting on our own characteristics as an audience facing the reality of the world around us. The strategy of looping the story depicting just one interval of the original narrative was a conceptual decision, making this version of the well-known fairy tale without a beginning, middle, or end. The final performative utterance of “I can’t do it!” by the main character produces hopefully, what the language philosopher, J.L. Austin, describes as an illocutionary force where the character evokes upon her audience other feelings and thoughts. The phrase, “I can’t do it!” is used as a strong and definitive final utterance, capable of generating multiple meanings, reflecting perhaps the perception of recognizing one’s own limitations and frailties or a sense of inadequacy to carry one’s own mission and destiny to the end.

In this work, I wanted to explore one genre of site-specificity as previously mentioned, but also simply to explore collaborative artistic work under my leadership where I retained almost total control of the final outcome of the work. This work is an example of collaborative artistic work not based on Relational Aesthetics. I decided to incorporate this work at the thesis-exhibition to demonstrate and differentiate that not all collaborative art is based on Relational Aesthetics.
3.3 Roses for Sale

This work was exhibited originally as a live performance with public interaction and considered diverse concepts regarding feminism, consumerism, multicultural identity, geographic displacement and linguistic barriers. The work had the performer juxtaposed with three cartoon bubbles mounted on the wall to articulate the relationship between the benign and symbolic object; the red rose and the interactions of the seller, who embodied the “other” and has her own thoughts, subjectivities and realities.

Do “buyers” sympathize with her plea as a displaced individual? Are “buyers” critical of her “unvoiced” thoughts printed on the bubbles? Do the attitudes expressed in the bubbles reflect an informed emotional-critical intelligence that contrasts with the working activity of selling roses in a sexualized manner?

In contemporary globalized societies, women, who are often valued only for their physical attributes, may not be able to find better work opportunities due to a lack of education or linguistic displacement, or due to subjective factors such as a lack of resilience, adaptive skills or family support. Such women find mechanisms of survival that range from selling their own bodies to low-skill jobs that may not reflect their abilities or intelligence. These women often cannot break free from oppressive circumstances to gain agency and articulate their own destinies. The site-specificity of this work is similar to the Colab work in Weedpatch, the site-specificity here has to do with the topics that I wanted to comment on, such as as issues of human dislocation, language barriers and other feminist issues.
Fig. 34 *Roses for Sale* (2010), performance at FINA Art Gallery at UBC-O. Credit: Amber Choo.
Eu não falo seu idioma, mas, não pense que sou muda.

Kindly translated: I do not speak your language but do not think I am mute.

Para você, eu sou só carne ou um número, se vendo ou compre viro gente, só por um instante.

Kindly translated: To you I am just flesh or a number, but if I sell or buy, I am a person, for an instant.

Eu venho de outro lugar, é verdade, entretanto, eu também tenho minha própria (hi)(e) stória.

Kindly translated: I do come from another place. It is true, however, I do have my own (hi) story.

Fig. 35 Speech bubbles for Roses for Sale.
Fig. 36 *Roses for Sale* (2010), performance at FINA Art Gallery at UBC-O. Credit: Amber Choo.
Fig. 37 *Roses for Sale* (2010), performance with public interaction. Credit: Amber Choo.

Lu venho de outro lugar, é verdade, entretanto, eu também tenho minha própria história.

Kindly translated: I do come from another place, it is true, however, I do have my own (hi)story.
3.4 Crosswalk

The absence of a real crosswalk where there should be one was the inspiration for the piece. It also presented a critical commentary of how millions of dollars can be spent to build an institution, such as The University of British Columbia-Okanagan, while a simple thing such as a crosswalk for student and faculty safety was completely overlooked. I envisioned from the start that the piece should engage students and the public at large as participants, as an intervention that could include exit, indifference, non-participation and forms of spectatorship. Some of the questions that I wanted to explore in Crosswalk are: Would the fun and militant aspect of the piece guarantee engagement of more participants? How can one create art that follows the main premise of Relational Aesthetics, while still addressing some of the relevant points raised by the criticisms the theory received? I wanted to create a visual relational art platform, by making a facsimile of a crosswalk in fabric. I also wanted to explore visual alternatives and site-specificities of the Crosswalk as using the fabric as an object intervening with architectural elements at the campus, as well as using it for a solo performance. Keeping in mind the criticism that relational art received in regards to formalist notions of form, I decided to use black, white and red as the chosen colors for the piece in an attempt to give it a visual cohesiveness. The outfit I wore as a performer, the black and white of the fabric and the balloons reflect this palette. It was important to me, perhaps as a personal remnant of my Brazilian roots, that the interventionist action should have an appearance of a spontaneous street spectacle with music, singing, noisemakers and movement. Although some initial instructions were given to the participants, it was clear to me that I should allow the experiment to evolve organically in its alteration of time and space. Crosswalk did engage a few students along the way but not in a considerable number. People seemed to receive the work well laughing and applauding when their picnic tables were temporarily covered. The fabric crosswalk used for the Crosswalk offered me opportunities to explore interventionist site-specificity, such as when the fabric was jammed between passages and doors, working as an interventional object. I also examined the form as an art installation when draping it over the stair rails, making usage of the architectural structure of the building. The main point of the piece was to explore
the aforementioned key points of the theory of Relational Aesthetics with Bourriaud’s phrase in mind “…to take up a position within an arrangement, giving it life, complementing the work, and taking part in the formulation of its meaning”(59). Crosswalk worked as an assemblage where social context and human interaction was “mediated by forms”. In this work, these forms were the facsimile crosswalk, the balloons, the movement of the fabric, participants, noisemakers, and my performance.

Fig. 38 Initial conceptual sketch for Crosswalk by the author.

Fig. 39 Diagram of measurements for Crosswalk. Diagram: Solange Farah.
**Fig. 40** Photo documenting the absence of a crosswalk at the entrance of the UNC building at UBC-O in earlier September 2010. Credit: Victoria Wan.

**Fig. 41** Dog and humans crossing without a crosswalk at the entrance of the UNC building at UBC-O in earlier September 2010. Credit: the author
Fig. 42 Poster-invitation for *Crosswalk* (2010) graphic design by IsaCreation. The poster is based in an initial sketch by the author in a clear reference to the I Ching’s first hexagram (unity).

Fig. 43 *Crosswalk* (2010) interventionist participatory art. Credit: Kevin Jesuino.
**Fig. 44** *Crosswalk* (2010) interventionist participatory art. Credit: Kevin Jesuino.

**Fig. 45** *Crosswalk* (2010) interventionist participatory art. Credit: Kevin Jesuino.

**Fig. 46** *Crosswalk* as an interventionist-object at the UBC-O Fipke building. Credit: Fred Maia.
Fig. 47 Crosswalk as an interventionist-object at the UBC-O Fipke building. Credit: Fred Maia.

Fig. 48 Crosswalk as an interventionist-object. Credit: Fred Maia.
Fig. 49 *Crosswalk* at Fipke Building at UBC-O. Credit: Fred Maia.
4 Chapter: Photo documentation of the exhibition-thesis

The exhibition was installed at the UBC-O FINA Art Gallery for a week from March 28th to April 1st 2011 with an opening event Tuesday, March 29th. The exhibition was documented through video and photography.

Fig. 50 and 51 Views of thesis-exhibition with Honey, what is for dinner? placed at the atrium of the UBC-O FINA Art Gallery and view of the photo documentation of Crosswalk on the background. Credit: the author.

Fig. 52 and 53 Views of thesis-exhibition with Honey, what is for dinner? placed at the atrium of the UBC-O FINA Art Gallery and view of the photo documentation of Crosswalk on the background. Credit: the author.
Fig. 54 The *Crosswalk* occupied pivotal corner at the exhibition and *Human Circus’* objects and its respective video-documentation and photo-documentation. Credit: Maureen Lisle.

Fig. 55 The *Crosswalk* occupied pivotal corner at the exhibition space with its respective video-documentation screened on the plasma TV at the left of the suspended object. The invitation poster of the participatory intervention was at the right of the object. Credit: Maureen Lisle.
Fig. 56 *Human Circus*’ objects and its respective video and photo documentation with projection view of *I can’t do it* (right). Credit: the author.

Fig. 57 *Human Circus*’ objects. Credit: the author.
Fig. 58 *Roses for Sale* as an installation with a sound track by Maggie Shirley. Credit: the author.

Fig. 59 *Roses for Sale* as an installation with a sound track by Maggie Shirley. Credit: the author.
5 Chapter: Conclusion

Since an artistic research is based on the fact that art constantly evolves and transforms in its processes and explorations, this research may never be conclusive. Therefore, what I can offer is a reflection about the whole process and additional commentaries about my own pieces, besides what was already exposed about these pieces in previous sections of this paper.

I understand the creative possibilities that new media offers, but I am aware of my own limitations regarding this art form and how steep my learning curve was to deliver the *A is for Apple* exhibition on time. Furthermore, it was very interesting and insightful to share the process with a collaborator who is more comfortable with digital technology. Through this collaborative interaction, I was able to overcome my initial resistance to digital technology. Project and time management were crucial skills to complete all the installations in a short period of time for that exhibition. I was also thankful that I had prior work experience in gallery preparation from the time that I had owned an art gallery once in Carmel, California, in event planning, as well as project management in trade shows. This confirmed, once more, that one brings to the craft of making art all the tools and experiences that life has given.

From *Human Circus*, I recognized that one must listen to the audience in order to perform, as a non-trained performer I had some challenges. *Human Circus* also taught me that it is okay to take risks and that the possible errors regarding the piece’s execution occur in a spirit of learning and exploration. *Human Circus* had two performances during the MFA’s Open House Exhibition. The first performance, on the opening night, was a bit more turbulent. The creation of a chaotic environment was a conceptual element for this piece. The site of the atrium with its particular site-specific qualities as *a locale*, informed the placement of the piece and a performance that had a rounded center. The basic elements, as the steel rims, were distributed equally around the center. *Human Circus* was presented with interventionist approach in order to surprise, challenge, and provoke the audience. After talking about the piece with several people
post-performance, some enjoyed the aspect of chaos presented, which gave these individuals some critical insight about their own consumptive behavior since the piece allowed them to reflect on these “invisible” forces that dictate social actions and behaviors. With this first performance, I created an atmosphere of uneasiness felt by some of the participants and audience, but it was never my intent to cause harm or belittle anyone involved in the process. The aspect of chaos, as mentioned, was to some extent a purposeful conceptual aspect of a “human circus going mad” and building up tension. The second performance was a fun exercise. Although we had few spectators, we all were more prepared for what to expect from the experiment, although in my opinion, the second exercise missed the chaotic conceptual element.

*Crosswalk*, was a much more benign piece compared to *Human Circus*. For both of these pieces I was the main orchestrator of the event, a trickster, perhaps. However, in *Crosswalk* I did not have an instrument or tool of authority, such as the whip that I had in *Human Circus*. Additionally, the fact that I did not have a whip modified the balance of the social relations between the participants and myself. Although, I did carry a whistle in my hand, it was perceived more as a playful tool to assist the parade’s organization than a symbol of authority. *Crosswalk* offered me the opportunity to effectively explore concepts such as form, content, and context with the interventionist event itself and to study Relational Aesthetics key points.

The concept that an artwork can be fluid and relational by contributing to a pedagogical perspective was quite interesting to me. Firstly, it intervened in our academic setting, and secondly the people participating were undergraduate students currently taking formalist based courses that focused on paintings, sculpture and drawings, thereby enabling them to reflect upon interventions in public space, questions of artists’ authorship, and the ethics of this kind of art. While *Crosswalk* was an effective piece of participatory art with interventionist characteristics, it did not engender any real change in the situation regarding the absence of a real crosswalk, which perhaps, never was the primary objective of this piece.
I am well aware of the risks of creating relational art pieces using Relational Aesthetics as a framework, a risk even more augmented because I often employ humor in my creations, which can be interpreted as frivolous and not considered reflective or critical enough. *Crosswalk* was to be viewed as a political commentary but not as a political protest, although it was a politically engaging piece.

*Roses for Sale* was first executed as a performance, but I believe it could also be presented as an installation or a photo-performance, which is how I exhibited it at my final exhibition adding a soundtrack element. Perhaps if *Roses for Sale* was performed under different site-specific parameters, such as on a busy city intersection or perhaps even inside a bus, it would be more effective in expanding the concept of site-specificity testing the limits of the concept and of the art piece itself.

Relational Aesthetics-based collaborative art exists in parallel to the more established art traditions. The acceptance or legitimization of this kind of collaborative art and of Relational Aesthetics as an art theory will depend on several factors. Firstly, it is important for the prevalent art system to continue to embrace this kind of collaborative art. Secondly, Relational Aesthetics-based collaborative art that presents a critique of our contemporary and social reality has a higher chance of contributing to the field of art knowledge as a lasting cultural artifact. Finally, Relational Aesthetics based-collaborative art will continue to depend on theory and arts-based research, such as my own, in order to assert its place as a more accepted art form.
An article by Nicolas Bourriaud was published in 2009 and it was titled *Precarious Constructions. Answer to Jacques Ranciere on Art and Politics*. In this text Bourriaud claims that contemporary thinkers never completely understood his theory. That in his book, *Relational Aesthetics*, he wanted to introduce the notion of “an emergence of a new state of form or new ‘formations’” so he was baffled by the debates around ethics, politics and of esthetics resulting from his theory. In this article the author introduces us to a new theme, *Precarious art*, which is related to relational aesthetics, for artistic practices and for art in general. *Precarious art*, in his understanding, reflects the world we live in: a world where “endurance, whether it concerns objects or relations, has become a rare thing”. (n. pag.).

According to Bourriaud, the world and the political programme of contemporary art occupies a *precaria* state: “ it has no definitive status and an uncertain future or final destiny: it is held in abeyance, waiting, surrounded by irresolution. It occupies a transitory territory (n. pag.)”. He elaborates further about precarious art in his new book, *The Radicant*, where he states that the aesthetic challenge of contemporary art resides in artists remounting the reality in temporary, fragile tableaux with materials from everyday life.

See for more information about Brazilian collaborative experimental art:

http://poro-redezero.org
http://giabaia.blogspot.com
http://intervencaouurbana.com.br
A Brazilian magazine titled *Tatui* is a good resource with informed contextualized criticism about the independent art market, experimental art and new curatorial approaches in Brazil. *Tatui* is the “voice” of the new generation of artists and curators in Brazil. Go to: http://revistatatui.com/secao/revista-online/


The *Pantagruel Syndrome* was the title of the 2005 Torino Triennial Exhibition that was based in a literary figure by the French Renaissance author, Francis Rabelais. Pantagruel was a character of voracious appetite and incredible power, an appropriate allegory of our global consumerist reality. More about this Triennial in *On Curating: Interviews with Ten International Curators* by Carolee Thea. New York, NY: D.A.P/Distributed Art Publishers (2009): 73.
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