

**Occupy Plop Art
Public Sculpture as Site of Antagonism**

BY

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THESIS

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Dedicated in memory of Eliza Dangler.

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SUMMARY

In large cities today, prominent buildings are almost expected to have a sculpture in the middle of the plaza in front of them. While public sculpture has noble, community-oriented goals – to bring art to a wider audience, without an admission cost of a museum – criticism of the modernist sculpture in a plaza shows the heated nature of such works in urban centers. The term *plop art*, coined by artist/architect James Wines and used by many, including art historian Miwon Kwon, suggests that these modernist, abstract sculptures are important because as an example of what *not* to create for a public space. Most people, be they academics, critics, curators, politicians, etc, seem to agree that these sculptures primarily provide no engagement with the public that they are meant to serve.

While plop art has been mostly understood to be an eyesore, this project looks at instances in which plop art has been used by citizens for effective ends, in artistic and political ways. Here I aim to articulate how the sculpture can become a symbol for an entity with which citizens want to converse. These conversations with and within sculptures offer an alternative view of plop, as it shows examples of how the “unengaging” sculptures *have* engaged. By examining these instances, I suggest that we can redefine plop art in terms of the types of engagements that it creates. This can provide a different scale of how to measure the success or failure of plop: the sculpture that engages is fundamentally more successful than sculptures that fail to engage their publics.

Occupy Plop Art: Public Sculpture as Site of Antagonism

I. “Plop” as a Pejorative

At noon on August 16, 1967, Chicago welcomed its newest resident: possibly a woman, possibly an animal, and for some citizens possibly a worldwide embarrassment. In an article for the *New York Times*, reporter, art critic, and art historian John Canaday detailed the celebrations for a nameless sculpture in a famous Chicago plaza, describing nearly two hours of “music-making, flag-raising, anthem-singing... speech-making, poetry-reciting, and telegram-reading.”¹ A priest, a rabbi, and a Protestant minister prayed. Finally, 12,000 square feet of blue percale fell from 60 feet and 163 tons of steel, unveiling what would come to be known as the *Chicago Picasso* (figure 1.1).

The *Chicago Picasso* serves as an example of the challenges behind public art and its reception, illuminating an antagonism in criticism. Looking at criticism from 1967 reveals these layers of tension. Tension between the reporter and the art critic; tension between the politician and the citizen; tension between the sculpture and the architecture. In Canaday’s review, one of the first written after the sculpture’s ceremony, the critic praises the *Picasso* for its balance of firmness and airiness—connecting it to the spirit of the city’s bridges—as well as for its harmony with the Civic Center building behind it (later named the Daley Center). The article in the *New York Times* expresses the strong objections from Chicago citizens, writing that signs protesting the sculpture read “Colossal Boo Boo,” “Give It Back,” and “Monster.”² *Time Magazine* asked if it was “a bird, a woman, an Afghan hound, a Barbary ape, a cruel hoax, a Communist plot, or

¹ John Canaday, “Chicago Unveils its 163-Ton Sculpture by Picasso,” Special to *the New York Times*, Aug 16 1967.

² Ibid.

Superman?" A science fiction writer proposed replacing it with a giant pickle, calling his plan the Picklecasso.³

While Alderman John J. Hoellen believed that "the statue represents the power of city hall, stark, ugly, overpowering, frightening,"⁴ the *Chicago Tribune* tried more closely to gauge the array of public opinions, noting a plurality of views. An article before the sculpture's dedication cites Bud Holland, a gallery owner, who stated that while he had never seen the new sculpture, he would praise it simply on the basis of it being a work by the famed Pablo Picasso. Holland said: "...even if I hate it, I'm going to love it."⁵ The New York art critic and Chicago gallery dealer praise the sculpture's aesthetics-- urging the public to be grateful for the gift, while local citizens, politicians, and media protest. This variety of reactions is not uncommon when it comes to public sculpture, especially that installed in the middle of the twentieth century.

In the late 1960s, architect and professor James Wines coined two terms to talk about new public sculpture such as the *Chicago Picasso*: "plop art" and "turd in the plaza."⁶ These terms refer obviously to fecal material, the former a play on the term "Pop Art." This language suggests that art has been thoughtlessly, carelessly dropped into the public space without attention or any kind of holistic permission. Wines, a Professor of Architecture at Penn State University, has a collection of public sculpture photographs that he calls a "checklist of boring clichés." He elaborates, "Works of art should be seen as the environment, not objects in the

³ "Sculpture: An Old Maestro's Magic," *TIME Magazine*, Aug 25 1967.

⁴ David Canfield, "Civic Plaza's Picasso Statue—Monument or Monstrosity? Chicagoans Have Many Diverse Views," *Chicago Tribune*, July 30 1967.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ James Wines, *Site: Identity in Crisis* (Victoria, Australia: Images Publishing Group, 2005). Originally published in *Art in America*.

environment. They should never be able to be removed and put in a museum.”⁷ Since Wines invented these terms, they have been adopted into the vernacular of art criticism to refer to specific sculpture seen as uninviting, given to an unenthused public.

In the criticism of plop, it is perceived as an aggressive type of sculpture, standing apart from its vicinity and not encouraging active engagement. Plop sculpture does not attempt to assimilate with its surroundings, it does not provide a function, and it does not make room for other agendas. Plop sculpture, like the *Chicago Picasso*, is unapologetic in its presence. It is placed at the center of a constructed space (frequently a park or a "frontyard" plaza of a building), and the space becomes part of *the sculpture's* breathing room. An image from the Picasso's unveiling shows its prominence in the plaza (figure 1.2). The sculpture seems to reach the third story of the Civic Center behind it. It rests upon a Cor-Ten steel base of its own, as well as an additional concrete base to heighten it further, creating a sort of exaggerated ground/pedestal for it.

In this thesis I examine the evolution of plop sculpture, which has historically been criticized as an imposition onto a city. Countless other sculptures could serve as fruitful examples, though I focus on the *Chicago Picasso* in the beginning of this project in order to articulate a history of public sculpture criticism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The *Chicago Picasso* was a protested sculpture before its installation, and it has been used as a protest meeting spot ever since its installation. In this discussion, I begin with an analysis of the term “plop”, challenging its status as only a pejorative. An examination of the term's roots progresses to a discussion of how the term has been adopted to both critique and champion public art projects. Rather than accept the term's conflicting definitions, I plan to problematize

⁷ Patricia Lowry, “Places: Lessons on putting the public in public art,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 25, 2007

these views in order to find specific characteristics of what makes a sculpture “plop” and how these features can actually encourage creative engagement and political organizing. By becoming a part of a cityscape, these sculptures become home to both organized and unorganized activity--the sculpture a medium in which the powerless can be seen and heard by their opposition.

These relationships between sculpture, citizen, and space will be framed in this project around the idea of occupation. Just as the Occupy Wall Street movement decided in 2011 to station itself day after day in Zuccotti Park, plop sculptures have been occupying plazas and citizens have been occupying sculptures. It is in these occupations that material and critical concerns around sculpture can manifest. These interactions beg questions asking what public sculpture can be and what it can encourage. I argue that while plop sculpture is named as such for not engaging *with* its environment in its conception, once installed it can provide an environment *for* engaging. In other words, plop sculpture can become a multifaceted, theatrical site in itself: a symbolic extension of an authority and a stage for antagonism.

I am interested in “antagonism” as Claire Bishop articulates it in her *October* essay, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.” Here, Bishop believes that antagonism’s role in a democratic society aims to challenge a particular authoritarian control. She writes:

...a fully functioning democratic society is not one in which all antagonisms have disappeared, but one in which new political frontiers are constantly being drawn and brought into debate—in other words, a democratic society is one in which relations of conflict are *sustained*, not erased. Without antagonism there is only the imposed consensus of authoritarian order—a total suppression of debate and discussion, which is inimical to democracy.⁸

Bishop further explains that antagonism serves to create an “other” outside of a totalitarian

⁸ Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* vol. 110 (Autumn 2004): 65-66. Bishop offers an interpretation through Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985), 125.

control, in order to challenge a “full totality” of society.

By highlighting instances in which plop creates sites of antagonism, the question that I aim to answer with this project is: instead of defining plop art as such for its lack of engagement, can we redefine it in terms of the types of engagement that it creates? Through a discussion of creative engagement with plop sculpture this project examines ephemeral actions with the sculptures. These acts are guerrilla in nature, most often anonymous and/or collaborative, documented and then archived in various ways (including articles, blogs, various social media). These engagements include performances, protests, knit-bombing, exhibitions, magnetic artworks, et cetera--using the “plop” piece as a site for expression.

The aesthetic, materialized form of these projects separates them from acts of vandalism. By creative engagement, I do not mean using sculpture as a backdrop for tagging, throwing paint on the surface, or physically destroying it or altering it. While the political act of destroying a sculpture would provide an interesting and complex discussion of the relations between "the public" and its sculpture, this topic moves outside the scope of this project. The engagements with plop that I plan to focus on have been temporary—documented in media and attaching themselves to the work’s history after the act, creating a public that is momentarily visible on the surface of the sculpture.

By saying that a sculpture has been plopped in a plaza, a critic ultimately argues that the sculpture has no public purpose or relevance. As a pejorative, the term leaves no room for admiration. Mike Royko, Chicago newspaper columnist for the *Chicago Daily News*, *Chicago Sun-Times* and *Chicago Tribune*, criticized the *Chicago Picasso* almost as much as he criticized the man for whom Daley Plaza is named. In his article after the sculpture’s unveiling Royko wrote,

It has a long stupid face and looks like some giant insect that is about to eat a smaller, weaker insect. It has eyes that are pitiless, cold, mean.... Everybody said it had the spirit of Chicago. And from thousands of miles away, accidentally or on purpose, Picasso captured it. Up there in that ugly face is the spirit of Al Capone, the Summerdale scandal cops, the settlers who took the Indians but good....Any bigtime real estate operator will be able to look into the face of the Picasso and see the spirit that makes the city's rebuilding possible and profitable. It has the look of the big corporate executive who comes face to face with the reality of how much water pollution his company is responsible for--and then thinks of the profit and loss of his salary. It is all there in that Picasso thing--the I Will spirit. The I will get you before you will get me spirit. Picasso has never been here, they say. You'd think he's been riding the L all his life.⁹

Of course, not many other than Royko would see these particular anecdotes specifically present in the composition of the cubist steel sculpture. However his critique does get to the heart of the criticism. He links the sculpture not to a general populace or the experiences of most workers but rather to a spirit of control, power, and violence. The installation for public sculpture is not a democratic process that involves the entire city's population voting upon whether or not the sculpture will become a permanent feature of the cityscape. The sculpture is seen as something handed to them from an authority whether they like it or not. The criticism highlights the fact that the public has no say in the matter, which leads to offensive critiques of the finished, installed products.

Historically, public sculpture has had a tense relationship with American urban centers, well before the *Picasso* entered Daley Plaza. In a similar tone to Wines' and Royko's, a *New York Times* article from 1894 entitled "Weeding Out Bad Sculpture" states that "Sculpture is...that art which has committed most crimes against the taste and, indeed, the common sense of mankind, warping the aesthetic instincts of babes unborn and perverting the ideas of infants."¹⁰ These

⁹ Mike Royko, "Picasso and the Cultural Rebirth of Chicago," *Chicago Daily News*, August 16, 1967. Reprinted in *One More Time: The Best of Mike Royko*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999)

¹⁰ "Weeding Out Bad Sculpture," *New York Times*, March 13, 1894.

criticisms have been taken seriously, leading to discussions about whether or not a public can "deaccession" sculpture just as a museum deaccessions art objects.¹¹ Due to time and money invested into the projects even before installation, coupled with the sheer size of the finished projects, these deaccessioning discussions usually only continue so far, though works have been deaccessioned from public spaces. Understanding this issue explains what is at stake in defining some public sculpture as "useless" or "irrelevant" -- the possibility of it being removed from its space and physically disconnected from its history within a city.

Due to urban beautification programs in the 1960s and 1970s, artists were invited to exhibit their sculptures within cities. Committees commissioned artists who had already proven successful in museums and galleries, leading to projects for public art that could be enjoyed without an entrance fee. Written at the request of Mayor Richard J. Daley, Gwendolyn Brooks presented a poem at the unveiling of the *Chicago Picasso*, asking for citizens' compliance with its newest sculpture, reciting: "Does man love Art? Man visits Art, but squirms/Art hurts. Art urges voyages---/and it is easier to stay at home/ But we must cook ourselves and style ourselves for Art."¹²

In an interview about her participation in the ceremony, Brooks stated that she did not know much about art herself, discussing her insecurity about joining the conversation. Concerning the sculpture she said, "it's not a thing you easily and chummily throw your arms around, that it's not a huggable thing" -- hence her statement that it hurts, implying her own

¹¹ See Derek Fincham "Deaccession of Art From the Public Trust," *Journal of Art, Antiquity & Law*, vol 16. issue 2 (2011)

¹² Gwendolyn Brooks, "The Chicago Picasso," *CUNY Composers*. ed. Corbett Treece. 1967
Web.cunycomposers.wetpaint.com

personal, physical reaction to the Picasso.¹³ The sculpture, in its presentation to the city of Chicago, was framed as a gift from Picasso to the citizens-- a gift that the majority would have liked to return should they have been asked.

Recently, there has been effort to reclaim the term “plop” as favorable. The Public Art Fund (PAF) published a book entitled *Plop*, which highlights projects that received funding through the organization. Susan K. Freedman, president of the Public Art Fund, states in the book’s foreword that the goal of PAF’s text is centered on “coopting a derogatory term for public art...”¹⁴ This effort to salvage the term is extreme, putting disparate projects by artists such as Kiki Smith, Vanessa Beecroft, Martin Creed, Barbara Kruger, Rachel Whiteread, Jenny Holzer, Richard Long, Louise Bourgeois, Jeff Koons, the Guerrilla Girls, Vito Acconci, and Vik Muniz under the same umbrella. Despite the work being figurative or abstract, performance-based or image-based, text on a billboard or a series of sculptures in a park, this book argues that any project that received funding can be considered "plop" so long as it is "publicly accessible" (without defining what "publicly accessible" means). PAF's text mashes together modernist public sculpture, site-specific works, and “community-responsive” projects as though they are part of a gallery exhibition, as though these works have and achieve the same goals. Perhaps PAF believes that people still associate public art projects with “plop” and therefore put forth this effort to redefine the term by essentially changing the meaning of it, so that projects PAF funds can be viewed as better investments.

However, PAF's effort to redefine the term to include all public art projects essentially aims to remove any definition and distinction that has been fostered by scholars and critics. In

¹³ George Stavros, “An Interview with Gwendolyn Brooks,” *Contemporary Literature* 11, no. 1 (winter 1970): 1-20.

¹⁴ Susan K Freedman, *Plop: Recent Projects of the Public Art Fund*, (Merrell: London, New York, 2004)

One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity, art historian Miwon Kwon chooses to use the definition of “plop” as originally articulated by Wines. Categories laid out by Kwon help further define what plop sculpture is by focusing on how it separates itself from other genres of public art. Kwon teases out three distinct sub-sections of public art that have been installed since the 1960s: art in public spaces, art as public spaces, and art in public interest (or “New Genre” public art). The first category, art in public space, is what she sees as plop art. Kwon elaborates that “plop” can describe museum art objects brought into public space without further contextualization. The “public” becomes an extension of the museum in the sense that the sculpture is for a specific art audience-- mostly critics and academics. Kwon emphasizes that this plop sculpture does not have a foundational engagement with its site. It has no site-specificity. On this “plop” category, she elaborates:

These art works were usually signature pieces from internationally established male artists (favored artists who received the most prominent commissions during this period include Isamu Noguchi, Henry Moore, and Alexander Calder). In and of themselves, they had no distinctive qualities to render them “public” except perhaps their size and scale. What legitimated them as “public” art was quite simply their siting outdoors or in locations deemed to be public primarily because of their “openness” and unrestricted physical access--parks, university campuses, civic centers, entrance areas to federal buildings, plazas off city streets, parking lots, airports.¹⁵

The second and third categories illuminated by Kwon serve as progressive counters to plop. Whereas plop is said to not engage with its site, the second category becomes more intertwined with its site. “Art as public space” measures the success of public art in terms of its function, which merges art and design-- this is the category Wines positioned himself in as a practicing

¹⁵ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (MIT Press, 2004): 60.

artist.¹⁶ Kwon's third category of New Genre public art aims to make the relations between the community and the work essential to the project's goals. The artist becomes an "active social force" and Kwon elaborates that at its best, New Genre public art "shifts the focus from artist to audience, from object to process, from production to reception, and emphasizes the importance of a direct, apparently unmediated engagement with particular audience groups."¹⁷

When Wines coined the term "plop art", he had just founded SITE, or "Sculpture In The Environment," immediately distinguishing itself from sculpture that does not adapt to its surroundings. Wines' career has focused on green design and integration of art into its landscape. The final project might be a park in which to eat lunch, creating a space to relax, with focus on the function of the project. The "audience" might be more accurately seen as "user," led through a winding path, or seated on a carefully curated bench. These types of functional "art as public space" projects were the response generated as a result of a tall, steel, cubist Picasso that did not offer an explicit function. "Art as public space" aims to assimilate.

For example, one of SITE's projects is the Shake Shack, a burger restaurant in New York's Madison Square Park (figure 1.3). SITE's website describes the project, its conception, and its goals. The Shake Shack design serves as one example of SITE's projects that construct themselves as the opposite of plop, learning from plop sculpture's failure to be relevant:

The [Shake Shack] concept responds to several important features of the surrounding community - the triangular shape of Daniel Burnham's Flatiron Building, the plan of the historic park, the profusion of vegetation, and the festive atmosphere that prevails during all seasons. The kiosk is designed to serve typical American hot dogs, hamburgers, milk shakes and other simple lunch items. A large shade trellis, overgrown with English ivy, covers an inclined roof and the entire back wall of the five hundred sq. ft. building. The general intention of the design is to provide a food

¹⁶ Ibid, 69.

¹⁷ Ibid, 100-106.

kiosk for Madison Square Park that becomes a miniature garden in itself¹⁸

At Shake Shack, the aluminum of the tables and chairs match the food kiosk. While the material contrasts with the trees, the curvilinear form of the kiosk's roof and the pathway leading up to it connects the natural features of the park into the constructed space. Though a commendable and enjoyable corner of New York City, frequented equally by Shake Shack's patrons and pigeons, the Shack's sharp distinction to the *Chicago Picasso* make it difficult to imagine them as though they are two sides of the same Public Art coin. Ultimately, plop sculpture acquired its name and its criticism for not trying to be more like a park.

Playing with these categories that Kwon introduces, if plop is “art in public space,” then this means that it is also not “art as public space” or “art in public interest”-- an idea that this project challenges. In Kwon's effort to tease out distinctions, plop suffers a sad end: not engaging with site or audience, left cold with no friends in urban centers. However, on this note, it is possible to find and examine intersecting ideas laid out by Kwon, as they do not always occur as distinctive. For example, what happens when category number two meets category number one-- can we reconsider the relationship between plop sculpture and its surroundings to consider both the harmonies and antagonisms between art and site? As well, what does it look like when category three meets category number one-- when New Genre projects engage with the plop sculpture? This latter question is particularly relevant to the projects discussed in this paper. Kwon's categories serve as a foundation for a discussion of integration. In the next two sections of this paper, I will consider this question more closely: how do groups of people organize themselves around plop? How do they occupy it, and does this occupation create a kind of re-imagined relevance, so as to argue against the possibility of deaccessioning these works

¹⁸ SITE. “Shake Shack” www.siteenviroidesign.com/proj.shake.shack.php

from the public?

Plop, according to Kwon, has defining features: first- it is siteless (in contrast to site-specific), and second- it is a distraction that lacks a function. In *One Site After Another* these identifiers ultimately lead to a sculpture that fails to engage. In a footnote for her chapter, “Sittings of Public Art: Integration versus Intervention,” she specifically lists the Picasso as one example of plop among many different sculptures. She writes that “Some prominent cases [of plop] include Pablo Picasso’s sculpture at the Chicago Civic Center (1965), Alexander Calder’s *La Grande Vitesse* in Grand Rapids, Michigan (1967), George Sugarman’s *Baltimore Federal* (1975-1977) and Maya Lin’s *Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial* in Washington, D.C. (1982).”¹⁹ Kwon emphasizes that the goal of plop sculpture might be “fantasies of public spaces as a unified totality without conflicts or difference.” She concludes that this goal has been a disappointment: public plop sculpture has not created unification; it stands indifferent to all those who access the space.²⁰

In other words, to Kwon, Picasso, Calder, Sugarman, and Lin, as different as their work may be in their particular contexts, all fail as public sculpture because they do not create “unified spaces” and “unified communities.” Kwon does not elaborate on these projects individually and why she considers them plop (as many have argued that Lin’s memorial in particular has broken out of a “plop” category as it engages the viewer to physically interact with it instead of remaining a passive viewer). She does not define what a “unified community” might look like or if any plop sculpture could encourage it.

The following two sections of this paper illuminate instances in which communities *have*

¹⁹ Kwon, 185-186, footnote 49 of “Sittings of Public Art: Integration versus Intervention” in *One Site After Another*

²⁰ Ibid, 80.

organized themselves around plop sculpture, arguing that these works have in fact played a role in unification for particular causes. The sculptures might not unite every person in the city at one point in time, but is that possible through any object or created space in an urban center? Is that the goal of public sculpture? The sculptures discussed here each have histories particular to their cities and have been part of public celebrations, protests, and gatherings, the sculpture both aesthetically and politically intertwined with its constituency.

On the issue of “sitelessness,” Sarah Gaventa (an advisor to London’s government on architecture and urban design) states, “I hate it when you can tell where the art ends and the building begins.”²¹ This lack-of-assimilation on behalf of the sculpture is one of the hallmarks of plop art. Kwon elaborates on sitelessness:

Whether they were voluptuous abstractions of the human body in bronze or marble, colorful agglomerations of biomorphic shapes in steel, or fanciful places on geometric forms in concrete, modernist public sculptures were conceived as autonomous works of art whose relationship to the site was at best incidental.... the conditions of the site were considered irrelevant in the conception and production of a sculpture.²²

This dismissal of site on behalf of the artist is a frequent criticism of plop, yet rarely is it so clear-cut, as often the city commissions the artist to create the work for a specific site. Therefore, how does one measure the consideration of site in the final project?

It is worth considering the *Chicago Picasso* in conversation with these ideas about site-specificity and the lack of site-specificity in plop art. While Picasso had never visited Chicago or the United States, Michael Hartmann (architect of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill who first initiated communication with Picasso for the sculpture) provided the artist with a scale model of the plaza and buildings surrounding it. The material of the final sculpture is the same Cor-Ten

²¹ Saba Salman, “Future of cities: When does public art become 'plop' art?” *The Guardian*. October 1 2008.

²² Kwon, 63.

steel as the Civic Center behind it-- Picasso used this material knowing that it would weather in a few years to the same equal shade as the building.²³

However, while Picasso did consider the site in the conception of the sculpture, the final product is by no means married to its location. The sculpture could achieve similar effects in different urban plazas: aggressively taking its space on a pedestal at the center, so that all activity happens in its shadow. An artist's acknowledgment of the site does not make a sculpture "site-specific," but the term "siteless" should also be used with caution, as it alone does not determine a sculpture "plop." Overall, plop can be considered such for this fluctuating relationship with its site, this unresolved tension in which the location is not overwhelmingly present in the finished product, but it is not entirely absent, either.

Rather than simply using relationship-to-site as an identifier, plop can also be considered as a departure from a city's infrastructure. Plop sculpture has an "otherness" quality. It is not a building, it is not street furniture like a bench or a lamp post, it is not a park, it is not a fountain or an entrance to anything. It is this otherness that has been criticized as irrelevance. However, it is this lack of function that makes plop adaptable. Its autonomy-- its otherness in the city-- allows it to be a mascot, *and* a refrigerator door for magnets, *and* a symbol of a trusted or distrusted authority, all possibilities that will be elaborated on within this text. The sculpture's lack of defining purpose allows groups to find purpose in it.

Despite its status as plop, it would be an ill-fitting critique to call Chicagoans disinterested in the *Picasso* sculpture, even if the sculpture might be disinterested in its public. The *Picasso* has continued to play an active role in its cityscape, embraced by Chicago. The sculpture has been adorned with regalia of every Chicago sports team (figure 1.4). The sculpture

²³ Canaday, *NYT*

has been described as having “jungle gym” characteristics-- children run up its base, only to gleefully slide back down, over and over (figure 1.5). Groups use it as a meeting or training location. Every year, the city hosts a “performance at the Picasso.” When the sculpture turned 20, the Mayor’s office gave it a six-foot medal for “heroic deeds,” which is an award reserved for an “outstanding person who deserves recognition.” Its twentieth birthday party included a birthday cake and ice cream.²⁴

Since its installation, the sculpture has been involved in an unspoken “tug-of-war” as this symbol for celebration as well as a symbol for rebellion. Just as the sculpture was protested in its infancy, it has continued to play a role in Chicago protest history. Different groups continue to utilize the sculpture and the space for their own ends, giving the agendaless Picasso particular agendas. For one of the sculpture’s first political engagements, the Yippies (Youth International Party), guided by Abbie Hoffman, met at the Civic Center before the Democratic National Convention in 1968. The pranksters nominated Pigasus for President, marching through the nearby streets in business suits, taking turns protecting and carrying the candidate, demanding that the pig be given secret service protection. At the nomination ceremony, police arrested Pigasus and activists while the crowd cheered “pork power.”²⁵ Their location of choice for this historically tense and humorous moment: the *Picasso*, carefully chosen to antagonize Mayor Daley.

In her article “Baboons, Pet Rocks, and Bomb Threats: Public Art and Public Perception”, art historian Harriet F. Senie calls the *Chicago Picasso* and its history of confrontation “the

²⁴ “Long the Butt of Jokes, a Picasso Wins Respect,” *New York Times*, Aug 15, 1987

²⁵ See “7 Yippies Arrested With Pig ‘Candidate’ At Chicago Center,” *New York Times*, Aug 24 1968 and “Yippies Present a Pig As Presidential Choice,” *New York Times*, Sept 29, 1968.

sculpture that signaled the revival of public art.”²⁶ Channeling the sentiments of those who protested the sculpture’s installation from its conception, Senie states, “You (the powers that be) have put this strange object in my space (without asking me, the powerless individual). How does it relate to my known world, me, my life?”²⁷ Senie argues that these types of reactions to and around public sculpture distinguish its importance in an urban landscape, because as she clarifies, it brings a discussion of art to a discussion of power.

Since the Yippies, the *Chicago Picasso* has cemented its identity as a protest meeting point, and as a result, Chicago police officers often barricade this public sculpture from public access (see figure 1.6). (The barricading of public art will be a topic to return to later in this project—this very bold and confusing notion of making public sculpture inaccessible to the public.) Since the Yippies, the use of the *Picasso* has continued, becoming a site for more acts of conflict than this paper allows. In 2012 alone these rallies and protests ranged from NATO to the Chicago Teacher’s Union, to smaller rallies. When police surround the *Picasso* at Daley Plaza, it articulates a sense of danger. Senie writes that “seeing art as dangerous is an acknowledgment of its power.... Even public art without specific political connotations may fall prey to the political agendas of different administrations and the political climate of the time.”²⁸ When it is behind bars, has the *Chicago Picasso* been imprisoned for participating in the protest? Or is the public being punished as authorities take away the sculpture for a moment, the "gift to the city," like a parent taking away a toy from his or her child?

It is important to distinguish the difference between activity occurring at the *Picasso* and

²⁶ Harriet F. Senie, “Baboons, Pet Rocks, and Bomb Threats: Public Art and Public Perception.” *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy*, ed. Harriett F. Senie and Sally Webster, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992)

²⁷ Senie, 243.

²⁸ Senie, 243.

activity occurring at the Daley Plaza. After all, how much of this would have taken place simply because the plaza is the Civic Center, where this activity normally occurs in urban centers? Would the plaza, with or without the sculpture, attract the same public? Daley Plaza is not a Free Speech Zone, requiring registration and advance notice to use, yet it attracts people to use the space and the sculpture as though it were available for their concerns. Ultimately, the archive helps to articulate the critical role of the sculpture. In 1961, David Boorstin coined the term “pseudo-event” to describe a spectacle produced especially for reproduction in media, with the success of the event measured by how widely the act is reported—an idea that I wish to keep in mind for this thesis and one that I will return to later, as I believe the use of plop sculpture encourages a media response, a fact that activists understand and utilize to their benefit.²⁹ When the media reports on the rallies and events at Daley Plaza, sources describe the events and confrontation as occurring at the *Picasso*, around the *Picasso*, under the *Picasso*, where the *Picasso* -- not the plaza -- becomes the site of activity. The *Picasso* becomes confidant for confrontation: involved and historicized, with consequences for its participation.

While Kwon’s critique focuses specifically on abstract works, a discussion of sculpture-as-plop can be expanded to include more than these modernist sculptures. For this reason, in the following sections of this project I also consider figurative statues-- perhaps more often referred to as “monuments”-- as “plop” because of their associations with a definition of plop, specifically the “otherness” quality and refusal to aesthetically blend into its surroundings. While monuments have a direct historical reference, often the reference does not translate to its site, or its relationship to site might be contested. Due to such similarly heated arguments involving monuments and their problematic relationships to cityscapes, I also bring them into the

²⁹ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961): 11.

discussion, as citizens have responded to both modernist, abstract works and historical monuments in similar ways.

On the flexibility of “plop”, it is worth considering performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s 2011 project, “A Proposal for ‘The Worst Public Artwork Contest.’” In his project, “worst” refers to that sculpture which does not engage its public. This proposal also opens up the boundaries of “plop” while still maintaining some defining characteristics (in contrast to the PAF book). Gómez-Peña lists some of the most common types as: historical monuments; heroic monuments; nude Greek gods and goddesses; “humongous” geometrical or abstract shapes; animals cast in bronze; animals in pop colors; dancing, seated, praying, flying or hugging humanoids; children sitting, playing, jumping, climbing; fat forms, human or animal-like; oversized everyday objects; allegorical figures; and “murals, lots of murals, specific murals.”³⁰ Essentially, this is public art that remains consciously distinctive from Wines’ aesthetics. In his project proposal, Gómez-Peña asks the readers of *Performance Research* to find the worst public sculpture in their hometown. For the first prize winner of the contest, Gómez-Peña suggests “a golden pickaxe to ‘symbolically’ destroy the artwork.”³¹

In the next section of this paper, I expand on the idea that plop art, in its refusal to engage with its site, can create a site of its own, based on a material engagement. Specifically, I discuss plop sculpture as a kind of “talking sculpture,” where citizens use the plop piece as a puppet for their agendas, in order to remain anonymous. Here, the role of anonymity that the sculpture offers allows citizens to be able to push agendas that they may not be able to push otherwise. The “occupation” in this section focuses less on a physical, bodily occupation, and more on a

³⁰ Guillermo Gómez-Peña, “A proposal for ‘the worst public artwork’ contest” *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*. vol 16, issue 2, (May 2011)

³¹ Ibid.

material occupation—responding to the sculpture with tangible art projects.

In the third section of this paper, I look more closely at the context of protests utilizing plop sculpture, in which the occupation of plop art is physical, a space for public gathering. Specifically, Occupy is the occupation. In this section I will focus on how Occupy Wall Street used sculptures around New York City as calls for action and stages to advertise activism. Here I will elaborate on interventions with plop sculpture as media projects. While sculpture in the second section is a puppet for a cause, the sculpture in this third section stands as a symbol for an authority-- a space for dissenters to converse with this authority in visible ways.

While in this project I use Kwon's categories (art-in-public-space, art-as-public-space, and New Genre public art) as a starting point, I also utilize these categories in order to challenge their isolation from one another. Rather than accept her categories as distinctive, I aim to show a complexity of plop—that it can defy its singular category through interventions. This project looks at redefining plop, obscuring this established pejorative to create a multifaceted meaning of what plop art has been and can continue to be in an urban landscape. Rather than simply define plop sculpture as an autonomous object that lacks engagement (which has been the extreme of this critique historically), the autonomy of plop can create a space of otherness, inviting specific types of material, critical interaction. Whether the sculpture be abstract or figurative, whether the engagement involve a group of artists responding to an art world or a group responding to what they see as a crisis of political economy, the plopped sculpture can stand for an authority that the voice of a people seemingly cannot reach, and interaction with the sculpture becomes an effective way in which to amplify a voice.

Figure 1.1 Picasso, unveiled
(screen-cap from Tom Palazzolo's *Bride Stripped Bare* video, 1967).



Figure 1.2 Unveiling Ceremony, Chicago, 1967. (photograph from blog.chicagodetours.com)



Figure 1.3 James Wines, Shake Shack, Madison Square Park, New York (2004).
Photograph via *Time Out New York*



Figure 1.4. The Picasso as Mascot. Flickr user heather-c.



Figure 1.5 Children at the Picasso. Flickr user DocLine.



Figure 1.6 Police barricade the Picasso for NATO. May 18, 2012. Photograph by David Royko.



II. Plop Sculpture as Puppet: Ephemeral Graffiti for Talking Objects

In the introduction to their book *Articulate Objects: Voice, Sculpture and Performance*, Aura Satz and Jon Wood describe art works that “speak” by describing the object in terms of puppets and marionettes. They emphasize that just as an outside, external voice is necessary to animate and enliven a puppet, objects also can be occupied, given a voice with which to speak about contemporary issues. Satz and Wood write:

When we talk about ‘articulate’ objects we endow a curious, at times uncategorisable collection of things with the capacity for voice, speech or expression. By “articulate” we also indicate the jointed segmentation of the body: the body built in parts in order for it to be moved and animated. These two aspects, the one, ventriloquially performative, the other, sculpturally performative, are perfectly combined in the figure of the puppet or marionette... The puppet is implicitly ventriloquial, it speaks by being spoken through, it is a mouthpiece of sorts through which another voice can reverberate. The puppet moves by being moved through, as the gestures of the puppeteer trickle down and expand through its articulated body.³²

By using the idea of sculpture-as-puppet, I highlight interventions that have employed the sculpture as a kind of mouthpiece. The sculpture then can become a site for responding to locally relevant events while also responding to itself and its role in the city. The sculpture, through its engagement with the material imposed onto it, becomes a puppet and challenges the criticism of it being irrelevant in a space. Rather, it becomes a space, and is given an important function as spokesperson (a spokessculpture).

Projects I will explore that have artistically responded to plop sculpture include (1) a Richard Serra sculpture located on a South Bronx industrial lot which attracted local artists to curate a guerrilla exhibition inside of it, and (2) supporters of the punk band Pussy Riot, who used sculpture to advocate for the imprisoned members of the band. In the first case, artists

³² Aura Satz and Jon Wood, *Articulate Objects: Voice, Sculpture and Performance*, (Bern, Switzerland: International Academic Publishers, 2009)

“found” a work plopped in their neighborhood, and they chose to respond to this sculpture by creating what they called “invisible graffiti,” attaching magnets to the steel plates of Serra's work. In the second case, I elaborate on the phenomenon of yarn-bombing, and how monumental sculptures throughout Europe were involved in a plea to drop the charges against Pussy Riot band members. In this section I elaborate on how these types of engagements with sculpture fundamentally challenge plop criticism by making the "useless" plop a space for exhibition, assigning the futile object a utility through this analogy of puppetry, which relies on its participants' anonymity.

One primary issue that I engage with in this section: when an artist/activist engages vis-a-vis material with a public sculpture, does he or she use the sculpture as a tabula rasa, erasing its history, using it as a blank slate for his or her own cause? Or do the artists/activists choose the sculptures for particular reasons, believing that if the sculpture had a voice, it would also advocate for this cause? In each case discussed in this section, the sculpture's history becomes the foundation for a new artistic creation. Rather than being a completely blank slate, the sculpture carries its history forward in the contemporary interventions. The sculpture and alterations made to it serve to create an ongoing visual dialogue and debate. Like the *Chicago Picasso*, the sculpture is a site, a place, and specifically in these cases, an artistic and curatorial project, a puppet for the sculpture's continued life and relevance in the public sphere.

Historically, this non-destructive, creative and political use of sculpture can be seen as comparable to the “talking sculptures” of Rome. In the fifteenth century, Pope Urban VIII Maffeo Barberini decided that bronze tiles would be taken from the Pantheon to create an altar canopy in St. Peter's Basilica. Il Pasquino, a marble Classical sculpture located in a square behind the Piazza Navona, decided to comment on the relocation of these tiles. Through text

pasted on his base, Il Pasquino voiced a concern of the public: quod non fecerunt barbari, fecerunt Barberini, or, "What hadn't been done by the barbarians, the Barberini are doing instead." ³³

The torqued sculptural bust of Il Pasquino stands outside of what used to be a tailor shop called Pasquino. While there has not been much written on the early history of the sculpture, in 1833 H. Nachot wrote, "According to some it was an Alexander, and according to others a Hercules, but the people cut the matter short by calling it Pasquino, the honour and ever-lasting remembrance of the poor tailor."³⁴ The sculpture is one of five "talking sculptures" in Rome—the other five scattered throughout the city include Marforio on Capitoline Hill, the Facchino fountain, Madama Lucrezia, Babuino, and Abate Luigi.

Citizens used these five sculptures as mouthpieces, pasting anti-authority poems in Latin or Roman, critiquing the papal state and excessive spending of authorities. In the seventeenth century the talking sculptures of Rome seemed to "speak" to one another. Il Pasquino began to communicate with Marforio (a river-god) about Pope Clement XI's zeal for a "rival settlement of Urbino." Marforio asked Il Pasquino: "What are you doing Pasquino?" and Il Pasquino responded, "Well, I'm keeping an eye on Rome, to make sure it doesn't head off to Urbino." It has been noted that in his list of grievances, Il Pasquino included new sculpture in the city, with a particular disdain for Bernini and the wealth and fame given to him.³⁵ Just as authorities were threatened by public engagement with the *Chicago Picasso*, papal authority intervened in the

³³ Dorothea Jaffe, "Scritti Politti: The history of anonymous protest in Rome," *Frieze*, Issue 78, (October 2003).

³⁴ H. Nachot, "Pasquino and Marforio." *The Border Magazine*, vol.2. ed John Rennison, (November 1831—December 1832).

³⁵ Genevieve Warwick, "Making Statues Speak: Bernini and Pasquino," *Articulate Objects: Voice, Sculpture and Performance*, editors Aura Satz and Jon Wood, (Bern, Switzerland: International Academic Publishers, 2009): 37.

civic lives of the talking sculptures of Rome. Pope Sixtus offered 2000 pistoles as a reward for the “guilty person” pasting such messages on Il Pasquino’s base. Adrianus VI went as far as to put Il Pasquino under nightly surveillance. Others proposed that the sculpture be thrown in the Tiber.³⁶

Though the other "talking sculptures" of Rome have fallen quiet, Il Pasquino still speaks today. Poems appear alongside annotated newspaper cuttings and hand-drawn cartoons. As Dorteia Jaffe wrote in her description of Il Pasquino’s continued conversations throughout the centuries: "The enemy may have changed his vestal robes for the bling-bling attire of a media mogul, but the issues (high taxes, corruption, nepotism, conflicting interests) remain the same. This is the Eternal City after all."³⁷

As a result of this civic interaction with public sculpture, Jaffe points out that the word *pasquinata* has been adopted after Il Pasquino to describe "short satire exhibited in a public place." This section focuses on artistic interventions with sculptures in the same vein as *pasquinata*, with emphasis on the fact that this satire is made for exhibition and how added material or alteration has engaged with urban sculpture for a politicized, aestheticized shift in the sculpture’s intended agenda.

Magnetic Graffiti Exhibitions: Serra in the South Bronx

On a sparsely populated industrial area located south of the Major Deegan Expressway in Bronx, New York, artists working in a loft saw a Cor-Ten steel sculpture assumed to be a work

³⁶ Nachot.

³⁷ Jaffe.

by Richard Serra (figure 2.1), identified by its unmistakable undulating steel "walls."³⁸ The fact that the sculpture was located in a space free of traditional art institution rules and regulations encouraged Port Morris's residents to physically respond to the sculpture, the space it created, and its author, using Serra's steel sculpture as walls for a temporal gallery.

While a bus line runs nearby, Curtis Eisert's lot on Locust Avenue would not be a location that many would stumble upon without knowing of the artwork that it held.³⁹ Those who live in Port Morris primarily live in poverty, although there has been gentrification in the recent decade-- hundreds of artists, photographers and journalists have moved into the area's nineteenth century row houses, fondly calling their new South Bronx home "SoBro".⁴⁰ In the early 2000s, environmental and community activists tried to reclaim space along the river in order to bring waterfront access to the South Bronx for the benefit of the area's newest residents. While planning a Greenway to connect various Bronx parks via a bike path from Yankee Stadium to the East River, activists noticed a Cor-Ten steel sculpture on an industrial lot. At approximately the same time, the group of artists working nearby learned of the work.

As a result of the Serra sculpture (located in the South Bronx circa 2001-2011), Eisert's lot became a pilgrimage site, requiring its visitors to ignore the "No Trespassing" signs and dodge security cameras before crawling under a chain-link fence and climbing over piles of garbage to experience the sculpture (figures 2.2 and 2.3). A black cat was one of the few known security guards, meandering in and out of the steel plates or rolling on the paved ground. Once

³⁸ Involved in this project was Harry Bubbins of Friends of Brook Park, as well as Dart Westphal from Mosholu Preservation Corporation in conjunction with a group of Art History students from Fordham University, including myself, in the Spring of 2009. One of Bubbins long-term goals has been to create a sculpture garden in the Bronx: the Serra sculpture became part of his goal. Also see, Jeremy Smerd, "Finding a Way Past 'Garbagia' and the Bruckner to the Water," *New York Sun*, June 30, 2005.

³⁹ As of 2013, the sculpture does not appear to be still located on Eisert's lot.

⁴⁰ Joseph Berger, "Goodbye South Bronx Blight, Hello SoBro," *New York Times*, June 24, 2005.

one entered the thirteen-foot-high sculpture, light and sound changed completely. While Port Morris is a relatively quiet neighborhood, silence permeated the space with the aid of steel plates that are two inches thick. Light filtered in through the top, creating shadows off the plates, forming both light and dark areas within the work. Trash accumulated within the sculpture, either blown in by the wind or left behind by previous visitors: newspapers dating from 2006, cigarette butts, old Coke bottles, and faded receipts. The sculpture was propped on rotting wood and reinforced by steel beams with the word “Bellamy” written on them, prompting many to read the beams as a name-tag, associating the Bronx sculpture with one exhibited at the Gagosian Gallery in 2001 for a show called “Torqued Spirals, Toruses and Spheres.”⁴¹

While Kwon does not consider Serra to be an artist particularly engaged with the “plop” genre, she does note that Serra’s work has been associated with and understood by some as plop art, as a result of the *Tilted Arc* case. The notorious 1980s saga of *Tilted Arc* begins with the Art-in-Architecture program of the General Services Administration commissioning Serra to create a steel sculpture for New York’s One Federal Plaza in the Financial District and ends with the sculpture’s conceptual death. Figure 2.4 shows how Serra’s Cor-Ten 120 feet long steel sculpture blocked what people argued was the most direct route into the building. In 1981, art critic Grace Glueck of the *New York Times* called *Tilted Arc* “an awkward bullying piece that may conceivably be the ugliest outdoor work of art in the city.”⁴² Ultimately, officials removed the work and did not relocate it to a new space: Serra stated famously that officials destroyed *Tilted Arc* by disassembling it for storage in 1989. Government officials stored it on an outdoor parking

⁴¹ Serra created the particular Gagosian Bellamy sculpture in memory of art dealer Richard Bellamy, one of the first dealers who had exhibited Serra’s work, who died in 1998.

⁴² Grace Glueck, “An Outdoor-Sculpture Safari in the City,” *New York Times*, August 7, 1981.

lot in Brooklyn before moving it by flatbed truck to Middle River, Maryland, where the three five-ton sections were stacked by a forklift.⁴³

Serra did not create *Tilted Arc* during the height of the plop art phenomenon in the 1960s - but his work did become a critical proponent of the debate between "art-in-public-space" and "art-as-public-space." As a result of the 1960s plop explosion and the subsequent disdain that people had for it, the NEA stipulated in 1974 a new focus on art-as-public-space, so that citizens would no longer have to suffer through more modernist abstract sculptures.⁴⁴ In 1980, with *Tilted Arc* Serra visually responded to this NEA implementation, because the sculptor had no desire in integrating his sculpture with the surrounding environment. Specifically, throughout his career, Serra has championed keeping art and architecture as distinctive categories. Kwon calls *Tilted Arc* Serra's "counter-definition" to "integrationist projects," as the artist refused to "accommodate architectural design."⁴⁵

After the removal of *Tilted Arc*, One Federal Plaza became the site for landscape artist Martha Schwartz's project, which turned the plaza into a space for which Wines would advocate. Kwon calls the space a "playful and decorative mix of street furniture and natural materials, a clever reworking of traditional design elements of urban parks. Seen from above, the plaza is an abstract composition in green, with yards of seating rippling through the space like highly contrived ribbons."⁴⁶ Essentially, Schwartz's project is the response to Serra's response: highlighting this back and forth between art-in-public-space and art-as-public-space. Relating this issue to Kwon's chapter title, "Sittings of Public Art: Integration vs. Intervention" -- Schwartz

⁴³ Harriet F. Senie, *Tilted Arc Controversy: Dangerous Precedent?* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002): 26.

⁴⁴ Kwon, 80.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 82-83.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 57.

and her "art-as-public-space" project become the "integration" and Serra's "art-in-public space" becomes the "intervention," these two different approaches wrestling through the public arena.

Kwon defines Serra's complicated relationship to "plop" criticism, not labeling him a plop artist but rather teasing out a wavering relationship to the category. She states that, importantly, viewers believed that the sculpture was plop, that *Tilted Arc* was seen as "an arrogant and highly inappropriate assertion of a private self on public grounds. The sculpture was viewed, in other words, as another kind of plop art.... a symbol of the overbearing imposition of the federal government (the sponsor of the sculpture) in the lives of 'ordinary' citizens and 'their' spaces."⁴⁷ Serra's relationship to plop is important in discussing the reaction to the sculpture on the Bronx industrial lot, as the people who engaged with the Bronx's Serra did approach it as a piece of plop art, evident in their guerrilla exhibition.

Although it is not likely that anyone would carelessly "abandon" the several-million dollar sculpture by an internationally renowned artist, it feels like Serra dropped the sculpture there thoughtlessly, allowing vastly different groups of people to re-define the work and the space that it creates. While there is more physical labor involved in visiting Serra's Bronx sculpture compared to his sculptures in public plazas and parks, many have put in the effort to experience the work, documenting the journeys with stories and photographs then published on various websites. As a result of this digital presence of the Bronx's Serra, the sculpture became publicly accessible, as people could discern its location for their own pilgrimage.

Numerous assumptions about the Bronx sculpture exist as a result of blog posts and sparse official statements, leading some to wonder whether it is *Bellamy*, as the beams suggest, or even a verified Serra sculpture. Internet attention prompted a media response to the work on

⁴⁷ Ibid, 79.

Eisert's lot-- an article in the *New York Times* from September 2010 declares that Serra's associates do not believe that the sculpture should be considered a work by Richard Serra. Reporter Sam Dolnick quotes the official response from Serra's studio: "...a Serra is not a Serra until Mr. Serra says it is; this, they say, is a big hunk of metal behind a chain-link fence." ⁴⁸ The *New York Times* article continues, "Mr. Serra's studio declined to comment on whether the Bronx work was the *Bellamy* sculpture." While in the Gagosian Gallery the sculpture was undeniably *Bellamy*, complete with a catalogue and wall panel to attest to its title, no such name-tag exists in the Bronx besides the beams. This, according to Serra's associates, is not enough to brand it as a Serra.

Yet, in a personal telephone interview less than two months after the article was published, Serra's assistant Trina McKeever frankly confirmed to me that the steel plates were moved in 2001 directly from the Gagosian Gallery to Port Morris: the sculpture was, at one time, *Bellamy*.⁴⁹ Eisert's lot was meant to serve as an interim location before moving onto its buyer. Due to undisclosed issues, the sculpture has remained on the lot longer than originally intended. It had been nearly a decade before it was relocated. This, McKeever believes, is all that there is to the story, but the sculpture has continued to function as a publicly accessible work of art without the studio's control. In the Bronx, the steel that identifies Serra's sculptures became an unrecorded torqued spiral, site-specific to the Port Morris crane yard.

McKeever would disagree with this notion. She says, "It's all so ridiculous.... Its just storage. It's like puzzle pieces in a box."⁵⁰ It is true that it does not have every authorial intention for display in mind, but this does not shed it of its author entirely. The "puzzle pieces"

⁴⁸ Sam Dolnick, "Richard Serra Sculpture Rusts in Bronx Yard," *New York Times*, September 24, 2010.

⁴⁹ Trina McKeever, Telephone Interview, November 2010.

⁵⁰ McKeever, Interview.

McKeever refers to are the five steel plates that define any torqued spiral by Serra, and even uninstalled can allow viewers to respond to it as they might respond to a properly installed work. McKeever reiterated that the company responsible for moving Serra's sculptures, Budco Enterprises, did not install the work properly, as there was no need for them to do so in what they believed would be private storage. The only concern in installing the pieces was exposing each of the five plates to the air, so that the plates would oxidize equally.⁵¹

This question—is it or is it not a Serra?—is critical to the sculpture's history in the Bronx. It is denied “official” status in this interim location, yet New York-based artists saw the sculpture and responded to it critically, as a plop sculpture in their space. Their view of it as “official” in a way makes it “official” as they post pictures and articles announcing that there is an accessible work by Richard Serra in the Bronx, encouraging others to use the space as they see fit.

On Sunday, August 27, 2006, a group of 17 artists held an exhibition within the sculpture called “Invisible Graffiti: Magnet Show” (figure 2.5). They wished to author the sculptural space as their own for an exhibition, challenging issues of ownership in a work taken out of its traditional context. All works of art in the show were ephemeral, holding to the surface as “graffiti” for the length of the show and no longer. Photographs from the event have been preserved in a Flickr photo stream under the name “Richardlovesmagnets ”and show the exhibition as a medium for both responding to and critiquing Serra's statements on his own work.

The show's artworks were made specifically for the Serra: artist Virginia Poundstone used LED lights, scattered over the surface of a plate, using the steel as a sort of dark sky for these lights to shine against (figure 2.6). Artist Anna Tshouhlarakis used what appears to be gold

⁵¹ Ibid.

toy soldiers in a curved formation, using the amber steel as a grounding (figure 2.7). Artist Michael Smith chose to apply a round magnet to the surface that declares: “I never liked the *Tilted Arc*,” using the sculpture like a refrigerator door (figure 2.8).

Figure 2.9 shows the bright yellow exhibition flyer for the “Invisible Graffiti” guerrilla exhibition. In bright pink, names of the artists who contributed magnetic work for the steel plates are listed, with the curator’s names on the bottom of the flyer in teal. The top right corner shows a photograph of *Bellamy* behind the chain-link fence with a crane in the background. The photograph has a white border as though it were a Polaroid, a casual representation of the sculpture-turned-exhibition space. Kitschy images of fruit are incorporated in the design of this bright and colorful flyer, instilling the document with an air of playfulness. It is like a low budget advertisement for some tropical vacation, promising fun and promoting tourism for this gritty industrial corner, unknown to most people, including those who live in the Bronx.

The flyer circulated online in 2006, at least a few days before the three hour exhibition. Text accompanied the online circulation, warning “If questioned, maintain that you do not know who is in charge. Criminals are people who get caught,” suggesting that it is not a crime unless noticed. This text also provided a map and details on how to access the space: “When you get to the fence at the end of 134th you will see the sculpture to your left just past a low fence. Use the wood block, climb over the fence, and walk inside the Torqued Ellipse.... Please be careful and keep a low profile walking to the site.”⁵² The flyer states the time of the exhibition: 7am to 11am on a Sunday, a strategy in itself for the industrial area, as not many people would be working in there on a Sunday morning. However, a blog post by curator Lan Tuazon recounting the experience indicates that the artists were not the only ones on the lot that morning. She writes,

⁵² Ibid.

“The show opened at 7am and closed four hours later when once again Marie and I found ourselves in front of a guard, this time with very little to say. ‘I hope you’re okay in the head,’ he said and declined our offer of breakfast.”⁵³

The fact that the artists created vastly different displays for the exhibit emphasizes the notion that they are using the steel plates for one general, collective use: walls for their gallery, despite the fact that these were not Serra’s intentions for the work. The artworks converse with him almost entirely. The show’s curators, Lan Tuazon and Marie Lorenz, both artists who received MFA degrees from Serra’s alma matter, Yale University, in 2002, describe the show as “a secretive act in a public space... an act of resistance against the architecture of behavioral and spatial control [whose] possibility rests on mimicry and invisibility, copying both the style and strategy of its adversary.”⁵⁴ Lorenz had initially spotted the Serra sculpture from the East River while working on her project, *Tide and Current Taxi*. It is evident that the artists in this show find Serra’s work and his statements about his work as domineering and wished to respond in a way that challenged his control over this work. The show was ephemeral, lasting only for a few hours, the magnetic artwork leaving no trace of its existence after the artists left the lot. Their aim was not to leave a physical mark on the sculpture, but nevertheless, their recorded act becomes part of the distinctive story of this fenced-in work.

In a quote by Senie introduced in the previous section, she states “You (the powers that be) have put this strange object in my space (without asking me, the powerless individual). How

⁵³ Lan Tuazon, “Invisible Graffiti Magnet Show,” Artist Website, n.d.

⁵⁴ As noted in the following source, participants included Ethan Ayer, Scott Marvel Cassidy, Grayson Cox, Dearraindrop, Jena Kim, Jose Krapp, Matt Lorenz, Virginia Poundstone, Birgit Rathsmann, Damon Rich, Marco Roso, Miljohn Ruperto, Jee Young Sim, Scheate Blingelhoff, Mike Smith, Anna Tsouhlarakis and Suzanne Wright: “ArtNet News,” *Art Net*, August 29, 2006.

does it relate to my known world, me, my life?”⁵⁵ These artists lived and worked in Port Morris, and suddenly they found this sculpture in their environment. They took it upon themselves to respond to it, treating the Serra as though it were symbolic of their problems with the New York art world. The “Invisible Graffiti” show exhibits these magnets on the sculpture just as Roman citizens used the base of Il Pasquino to express certain desires through humor, allowing the sculpture to engage in ideas.

As a whole, the exhibition gave Serra's "useless" sculpture a use, it makes the futile useful-- as a space for antagonism. These artists are generationally different from Serra and the art world that he represents-- perhaps they are the "Invisible" part of the show's title as recent MFA students moving to an area that does not have a highly sought-after art scene. The “Invisible Graffiti” show seems as though it is less about the individual works, with primary attention on the fact that the artists are occupying a sculpture in a way that is not invited or encouraged by galleries, museums, or Serra's studio. They are occupying a sculpture, vis-a-vis material, in order to explore their ideas about what public sculpture can be-- a space for a creative community to claim and use how they want to. The sculpture, nor the guerrilla exhibition, engages with the diversity of the South Bronx's residents, but it is symbolic of the gentrified community finding a way to express their work in their new locale. While this act did not extend in any way to the community-at-large in Port Morris, it did associate the new residents with their neighborhood on a digital level, as they shared their exhibition on artist-frequented websites such as Art Net.

Serra has emphasized that viewers should experience his sculptures without any preconceived notions about architecture, landscape or any possible relationship that does not

⁵⁵ Senie, 243.

relate to the physicality of the work itself-- a tall task, indeed. He wants his sculptures to be experienced as autonomous works of art. Perhaps it is this very autonomy-- this definite, confident lack of referent in the sculpture itself-- that seemingly invited the guerrilla activity at the site. The walls of the sculpture physically block the viewer from being able to see any site other than the sculpture itself. While Serra does not associate himself with architecture, the sculpture becomes architecture-like, a site of otherness for further expression.

Challenging the public status of the steel plates, Tuazon elaborates on her blog that she and Lorenz “dreamed of ways of stealing the massive steel work and decided that moving it even ten feet would be enough to claim it as our own.”⁵⁶ Obviously they could not physically move steel plates, so they put their signature on it through the creation of an exhibition that responds to Serra’s published statements on the reception of his sculptural work. Through this exhibition, the exhibiting artists visually debate with Serra on topics concerning his works: the first concerns his sculptures as analogous to architecture, and the second issue concerns graffiti as the ultimate danger to his works.

As indicated from his many statements on architecture’s functional purposes, Serra does not consider his sculptures as architecture or even "architecture-like", as they do not have an architectural function. In his chapter on Serra in *Lives of the Artists*, Calvin Tomkins describes an unpleasant moment in one of Serra’s previous interviews, in which Charlie Rose tried to show flexibility of identities, discussing Serra's work as architectural and architect Frank Gehry's work as sculptural. In conversation with Tomkins on the issue, Serra disagrees with making terms flexible:

....art is purposely useless, [its] significations are symbolic, internal, poetic--a host of other things--whereas architects have to answer to the

⁵⁶ Tuazon.

program, the client, and everything that goes along with the utility function of the building. Lets not confuse the two things.... Sure there are comparable overlaps in the language between sculpture and architecture, between painting and architecture. There are overlaps between all kinds of human activities. But there are also differences that have gone on for centuries.⁵⁷

Serra does not believe artists should be described as architects, or that architects should be described as artists. Regardless of whether or not his sculptures induce architectural-like experiences within the viewer, Serra sees the two professions as distinctive and identifies himself as an artist and not an architect.

As stated earlier-- Serra has no interest in blending his art into its surroundings. Kwon elaborates on this in her chapter, stating that Serra does not envision a "smooth continuity between the art work and its site but an antagonistic one in which the art work performs a proactive interrogation."⁵⁸ Aware of its own antagonism, the "Invisible Graffiti" show transformed the Serra sculpture into an exhibition space, attempting to declare an architectural function for the sculpture to display the site-specific artworks. Curator Tuazon writes on her blog, "We took our chance encounter with the Torqued Ellipse as an opportunity to respond to Serra and his concepts about the object, specifically his idea that any use of art is a misuse, and that sculpture is not architecture."⁵⁹

Other than specific artworks serving as direct dialogue with Serra over his own statements about what his sculptures can and cannot be, the entire premise of the show serves as a commentary on what Serra and his associates see as his sculptures' worst enemy. By titling the show "Invisible Graffiti," the artists reference the fact that while a Cor-Ten steel sculpture can

⁵⁷ Calvin Tomkins, "Man of Steel," *New Yorker*. August 5, 2002.

⁵⁸ Kwon, 74.

⁵⁹ Tuazon.

weigh upwards of 50 tons and can withstand all temperatures without any unwelcome change, it is not entirely safe from all possible harm. There is one very present danger to a Serra sculpture: graffiti (fig 2.10 shows a vandalized sculpture from Germany).

When discussing the Bronx sculpture, McKeever stated that the most recent *New York Times* article highlighting the storage space created a security concern for vandalism.⁶⁰ She described to me the extensive process of what would have to happen should any of the plates be damaged: the plates would have to be sandblasted to remove layers of steel and damaged areas to achieve an equal color, a tedious and expensive project.⁶¹ Of course, invisible or magnetic graffiti poses no permanent harm, but McKeever says that the “Invisible Graffiti” show is not welcome any more than visible graffiti because of the potential for danger to the steel. The magnetic exhibition taunts this possibility, toying with the studio's headache as the theme of their show.

In addition to the antagonism displayed in the exhibition focusing on graffiti and its status as Serra-or-not-Serra, the show dealt with another theme: Serra's relationship to the Bronx. As rare as it may seem to find a Serra in Port Morris, it is actually not the first time the artist has worked in the northernmost borough of New York City. Early in his career, a colleague told Serra: “Manhattan is out, try the Bronx,” so he placed one of his first outdoor urban sculptures on 183rd Street and Webster Avenue called *To Encircle Base Plate Hexagram Right Angles Inverted* (1970). The sculpture did not stay in the borough for long. Serra removed it with distaste, describing the location as “sinister, used by the local criminals to torch the cars they'd stolen. There was no audience for the sculpture in the Bronx, and it was my misconception that

⁶⁰ McKeever, Interview.

⁶¹ Ibid.

the so-called art audience would seek the work out.”⁶² Forty years later, the area of the Bronx that the pseudo-*Bellamy* occupied is possibly no less sinister, but Serra's name has become more well-known and his audience more willing to be mobile for him. He now has both a Bronx audience and an audience that will seek out even a “non-branded” sculpture. Out of its context, it adopts a new context, allowing its adventurous audience to not only participate but also to co-author the stored sculpture. Essentially, any visitor can leave his or her mark, and so long as the blogosphere operates, this “invisible graffiti” cannot be sandblasted away.

Sculptures Supporting Pussy Riot

While magnetic “graffiti” on a Richard Serra sculpture might not be an act that happens with great frequency, there have been other ephemeral forms of graffiti that engage with sculpture on a more common, everyday basis. Specifically, guerrilla knitting, “yarn-storming” or “yarn-bombing” has attached itself-- literally and figuratively-- to objects in public spaces. News articles written about the phenomena do not seem to date earlier than the 2000s, emphasizing the newness of this art form.⁶³ Yarn-bombing artists do not discriminate between street furniture and public art, affixing panels of colorful yarn to trees, street signs, benches, and any object available to them, including bicycles left unattended, and art objects in the public realm. The graffiti knitter's goal, according to an article in *The Guardian* by Maddy Costa, is “hellbent on liberating us from the forces of drabness.”⁶⁴ When attached to sculptures of bronze or steel, it suddenly turns an object seen as cold and detached into a stuffed animal or toy, wrapped in colorful

⁶² Douglas Crimp, “Richard Serra’s Urban Sculpture,” *Richard Serra: Writings, Interviews*, 125-128. Originally published in *Arts Magazine*, November 1980.

⁶³ Julie Mollins cites Leanne Prain of Vancouver for coining the term “Yarn-bomb” in her 2009 book. See Julie Mollins. “Graffiti knitters to hit streets on Yarnbombing Day.” *Reuters*. June 10, 2011

⁶⁴ Maddy Costa, “The Graffiti Knitting Epidemic,” *The Guardian*, October 10 2010.

patterns of wool. The term “yarn-bombing” itself can be read as an oxymoron: yarn is not violent; it does not cause permanent harm. Yet in its recent adaptation as a tool to advocate for free expression, yarn-bombing can become seen as a threat to public order.

The art-performance music group Pussy Riot formed in September 2011, after Vladimir Putin announced that he was running for president of Russia, again. The ten performers in the group hold shows in Moscow’s public spaces, dressed in balaclavas-- knitted ski masks that cover the entire face with holes for eyes and mouth.⁶⁵ On February 21, 2012, the group performed what they called a “punk prayer” at the altar of Christ the Savior Cathedral, singing “Virgin Mary, Drive Putin away!” On March 3, Pussy Riot released a video of the punk prayer, which quickly caught international media attention (see figure 2.11). The video shows the members of the band wearing colorful outfits, with balaclavas over their faces in order to remain anonymous. They stand at the altar with microphones in front of them. The video alternates between moments of the band members kicking, punching, and jumping, with moments of the band members on their knees, crossing themselves and bowing. While crossing themselves, Cathedral security attempts to pull the members forcefully to their feet, trying to drag them away, off the altar-turned-stage and outside of the cathedral.⁶⁶

The video led to arrest of three members: Maria Alyokhina, Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, and Yekaterina Samustsevich. Prosecutors argued that the actions of Pussy Riot “had insulted all of Russian Orthodoxy and if not jailed would pose a continuing danger to society....the women’s performance was an act of opposition against Putin and that the prosecution was politically

⁶⁵ Sydney Brownstone, “Pussy Riot Sentenced to 2 Years in Prison,” *Mother Jones*, July 31, 2012.

⁶⁶ Pussy Riot Punk Prayer, You Tube, accessed January 6, 2013.

motivated.”⁶⁷ The performance led to arrests, charges of hooliganism motivated by religious hatred, and two-year prison sentences.

While often yarn-bombing has joyfully “attacked” an array of public furniture and art, it rarely has been as angry and overtly political than in its adaptation by Pussy Riot advocates in the summer of 2012. On the day of the verdict, plop sculptures throughout Europe were used as mouthpieces in support for the group and for free speech. Supporters, often dressed in balaclavas themselves in order to conceal their identities, climbed the pedestals of public monumental statues of historic leaders and thinkers, placing balaclavas over the sculpture's heads. Reports of balaclava-covered sculptures arose in Russia, Serbia, France, Ireland, and England, though it may have occurred in even more cities. Participants and bystanders all circulated images of the balaclava-covered sculptures on social media websites such as Twitter and Instagram, causing more people worldwide to repeat the same yarn-bomb, even leading to cases of police intervention between the sculpture and the public. Whereas Pussy Riot band members and guerrilla knitters wore the balaclavas in order to stay anonymous--the sculptures wear the balaclavas in order to speak about the cause. The sculptures become the voice that had been silenced by authority.

Whereas so far in this project I have spoken about plop sculpture as modernist abstract works, here I wish to consider monuments. While Kwon, in her analysis of public sculpture, does not discuss monuments, I believe that the critique she offers for modernist abstract sculpture can also be applied to monuments in cities. It is worth considering the monument in a discussion of the three categories that Kwon uses to refer to public sculpture: art in public space, art as public space, and art in public interest. The monumental sculpture is neither art as public space,

⁶⁷ Shiv Malik, “Pussy Riot jailed for two years,” *The Guardian*, August 17, 2011.

assimilating into its surroundings, nor is it the latter, community-oriented art in public interest. Rather, if we use Kwon's categories of public art, the monumental sculpture would fit only into her first category, the category of plop sculpture, art in public space. It is art that could just as well be in a museum or gallery, but is moved into an outdoor arena.

Monumental sculptures are often in a specific site for a historic referent-- but as discussed earlier, this geographic importance alone does not make the sculpture site-specific. Namely, monuments have the same fluctuating relationship to site that plop sculpture has. Many artists of plop sculptures considered the sculpture's location on some level in the conception, but the sculpture does not become permanently linked or dependent on its site in the same way that one of Wines' parks would. The monument of a historic figure offers this same wavering connection to its site as a plop sculpture. Often, the monument is placed in a specific location because the figure has a historic connection to said site-- however this geographic connection remains the only link. Often the monument, in bronze or marble, does not aesthetically link itself to its site. The work would not be destroyed if it were moved, as Serra argued in the destruction of the *Tilted Arc*. The defining characteristics of it being a monument to honor X would still apply if the sculpture were relocated; its public would still be able to discern this should it be relocated.

On Arbat Street in Moscow stands a sculpture of Russian poet and writer Alexander Pushkin and his wife, avant-garde artist and writer Natalia Goncharova-Pushkina, outside of the Pushkin house. The bronze sculpture, completed by Alexander Nicolaevich Bourganov in 2005, shows the couple formally dressed, Natalia wearing a long, flowing skirt. Her hand rests on top of his, as they both stare out across the land that they owned. They stand on not one, but two pedestals, and their names are inscribed on the lower pedestal-- one image shows someone leaving flowers on the base, as though it were the couples' grave site (figure 2.12). The Pushkin

sculpture does not provide any function, does not offer explicit community-building in its existence. Sculptor Bourganov's website describes his work as "decoration of our capital" and "symbols of Moscow"-- emphasizing the decorative, non-utilitarian function of the work that he creates.⁶⁸ As Kwon stated in "Sittings of Public Art," this kind of ornamentation has been one of the most criticized aspects of plop art. She points out that, "At worst, [plop art] was an empty trophy commemorating the powers and riches of the dominant class--a corporate bauble or architecture jewelry."⁶⁹

In August 2012, supporters of Pussy Riot became knit-bombers, climbing the sculpture's base to put yellow balaclavas on both Alexander and Natalia Pushkin's heads, making them supporters of the band and of freedom of expression. In a 1999 Russian poll, citizens were asked which Russian they thought made the most important contributions in world history. Alexander Pushkin came in second place, between Peter the Great and Lenin. An article about "Pushkin fever" by Robert Parsons places the poll's data in conversation with Russian economic and political history. Parsons elaborates on the public respect (and perhaps at times infatuation) of Pushkin, using his image to advertise an array of items, from women's underwear to chocolates, cigarettes, cough medicine, and vodka. Politically, the spirit of Pushkin covered a similar fluctuation of identity. Parsons elaborates that one could present Pushkin as

...the people's poet who fought the tyranny of tsarism; Pushkin the Supporter of Autocracy or Pushkin the Dissident. No wonder that Russia's contemporary rulers - still struggling to find a new state ideology - are so keen to hijack him as one of their own.... Pushkin, renowned for his sense of humour, would have enjoyed the spectacle.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ "Bourganov's House," The Moscow State Museum, Burganov.ru. accessed January 2013.

⁶⁹ Kwon, 65.

⁷⁰ Robert Parsons, "Pushkin Fever Sweeps Russia," *BBC News*, June 5, 1999.

Just as Pushkin might have been “hijacked” to push a state ideology, Pussy Riot supporters also hijacked his identity, to advocate for the jailed members.

It was the day of the sentencing of Pussy Riot that supporters for the punk band claimed the Pushkin sculpture, as well as other sculptures throughout Europe, as a space for advocacy--through interaction it became a site for civic engagement and argumentation. Using a revered Russian figure as a puppet, the balaclavas became a political statement, allowing the sculpture to speak on behalf of Pussy Riot. In his post on *Visual News*, Benjamin Starr listed the Pushkin monument as one of many sculptures involved in this advocacy for Pussy Riot, describing the sculptures as active participants. He poignantly states: “It was as if these free thinkers had joined the protest themselves.”⁷¹ Joining the protest means, in this case, becoming anonymous, concealing the face, to symbolically become part of Pussy Riot.

The role of anonymity in the Pussy Riot knit-bombing examples is crucial. The band members, the knit-bombers, and the sculptures being knit-bombed all engage in hidden identities. Similarly, while the artists using the Serra sculpture revealed themselves through the photographs after the exhibition—before the exhibition, they knew the importance of keeping their plans quiet in order for them to succeed. James C. Scott, Professor of Political Science at Yale, has referred to these anonymous, collective actions in his book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. In this text, he discerns between “public transcripts” and “hidden transcripts.” The former is a term to describe public interactions between subordinates and those who hold power. The latter term describes activities that happen “offstage,” when the subordinates expresses his or her displeasure of the power relations, anonymously, individuals hiding identities within collectives. Scott elaborates:

⁷¹ Benjamin Starr, “Russian Statues Protest for Pussy Riot,” *Visual News*, August 28, 2012.

By definition, the hidden transcript represents discourse--gesture, speech, practices--that is ordinarily excluded from the public transcript of subordinates by the exercise of power. The practice of domination, then, *creates* the hidden transcript. If the domination is particularly severe, it is likely to produce a hidden transcript of corresponding richness. The hidden transcript of subordinate groups, in turn, reacts back on the public transcript by engendering a subculture and by opposing its own variant form of social domination against that of the dominant elite. Both are realms of power and interests.⁷²

The collective identity of the subordinates also serves as the audience for this kind of activity, which Scott notes can manifest itself in an array of folk culture: rumor, gossip, folktales, jokes, songs, rituals, codes and euphemisms.⁷³

Yarn-bombing might also be understood as fitting into this same folk culture, to speak to an audience who also agrees with the agenda put forward. Yarn-bombing has rarely been discussed as an explicit political form, although it has always been about a struggle over what can and should be in “public” space. The first journalistic reports of yarn-bombing emphasize a focus on aesthetic reclamation of public space. Essentially it started as a reaction against objects that have the same problems that critics find in plop art (though expanding this critique to anything in the public space, rather than sculpture alone): both functional and non-functional objects that are disparate from their surroundings, without an attempt to assimilate.

Madga Sayed has been credited with starting the movement, outside of her Texas store in 2005, as a reaction to her steel-and-concrete surroundings. She stated that she was overwhelmed with “a selfish desire to add color to my world.” Sayed pre-knit panels (large or small, depending on the object being “bombed”) and brings these panels to an object where she then attaches the panels together, fully wrapping the object. She continued yarn-bombing outside of her town,

⁷² James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990): 27.

⁷³ Ibid, 14.

attacking parking meters in Brooklyn, a bus in Mexico, and a statue of a soldier in Bali. The statue she attacked carried a gun, and she decided to wrap the gun in yarn, stating that she aimed to “neuter its violence.” This case highlights the guerrilla art form’s trajectory, from being a light-hearted example of intervention to a discussion of expression and of violence: it has historically responded to violence in a public space with the very non-violent act of knitting.⁷⁴

Yarn-bombing has not been an act which prompts attention from authority. Mark Thomas from *The Guardian* spent an evening with guerrilla knitters to learn more about the action. His language on yarn-bombing waivers back and forth, just like the word itself. He associates “yarn” with grandmothers and living room couches, and “bombing” with blatant attempts to reclaim public space. As one knit-bomber declared: “You can’t go throwing the word bombing around.”⁷⁵ Thomas calls it “the fluffiest example” of intervening, while still being an example of a “nefarious act of mischief.” Thomas elaborates: “it lacks the wanton damaging of property that you get with plastering ‘Troops Out’ on doorways or tagging on a wall, so the consequences of capture are less severe. After all, what police officer would want to spend time and paperwork prosecuting a knitter?”⁷⁶ Another knit-bomber agrees, that the association of the guerrilla projects with the “craft” category allows for its success. Knit bombers do not have to sneak around in masks at night (though some do, for larger, more public and politically antagonistic projects). One knit bomber states: “you’d have to be the most bored police officer to want to arrest me.”⁷⁷

Yet, this yarn-bombing in support of Pussy Riot was read as an actual attack, determined as worthy of punishment. It is unclear in articles whether or not the punishment is for climbing

⁷⁴ Costa.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Mark Thomas, “Mark Thomas joins the Guerrilla Knitters,” *The Guardian*, October 31 2009.

⁷⁷ Costa.

on sculptures or for supporting Pussy Riot-- perhaps it is safe to assume that the threat resides in a combination of the two.

Pussy Riot supporters climbed a sculptural group located in the passage between Moscow's Belorusskaya and Belorusskaya-Radialnaya metro stations. Located in a tunnel between the two stations, it is likely that commuters pass by it in a rush each day -- making it a highly visible artwork in Moscow. The sculpture, *Belarusian Partisans*, was created by S.M. Orlov, S.M. Rabinovich, and I.A. Slonim (date unknown). The title of the sculptural group refers to fighters in irregular military groups that participated in the Belarusian resistance during World War II, against Nazi Germany.⁷⁸ The sculpture in Moscow treats these fighters as respected and revered, three larger than life bronze figures on a pedestal. Each of the three figures holds a weapon. The middle, seated, rests with the gun across his lap. The other two figures stand on the left and right sides: the figure on the left holds his gun in his hand while the figure on the right has the gun flanked across his chest.

Besides these formal details, not much else is known about the sculpture, with very little information written on the topic (perhaps another hallmark of "plop" is how infrequently these sculptures are studied, as most have very little written about them). Interestingly, searching for information on this sculpture, most sources only mention that it was involved in the Pussy Riot movement. Just as Serra in the Bronx becomes about the magnetic graffiti exhibition inside of it, the history of the *Belarusian Partisans* sculpture becomes attached to the guerrilla action that used the sculpture as a site for political engagement.

Understanding the definition of "partisan" -- an irregular military force opposing control of an area ruled by foreign power -- speaks to what Pussy Riot supporters were trying to

⁷⁸ For more information on this type of organizing, see Israel Gutman, *Resistance. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1998.): 104-105.

accomplish by using the *Belarusian Partisans* sculpture in the metro station. They saw these nameless figures in the sculpture as friends to the cause, the guerrilla action of putting the balaclavas on the sculpture's faces an act related to the history of the figures depicted.

Figure 2.14 shows two men on top of the sculpture, as they quickly put the balaclavas on the sculpture, a red balaclava for the figure on the left and a blue balaclava for the figure in the center. Once masked, they become Pussy Riot members-- momentarily activated sculptures for political purposes. Another image shows both men being held on the ground by a security guard. This yarn-bombing in support of Pussy Riot, perhaps the most widespread guerrilla knitting act to date, led to headlines such as Benjamin Starrs' "Russian Statues Protest for Pussy Riot", *MSN's* "Even statues in Europe look like they're standing up for Pussy Riot," and Amnesty International's "Statues of Belfast say 'Free Pussy Riot.'" Similar to Starr's comment about these sculptures becoming free-thinkers who are joining the protest, Amnesty International's language suggests that the sculptures have willingly joined the conversation concerning Pussy Riot. Amnesty International's article states that they have "recruited some of Belfast's best-known statues to stage a virtual demonstration in solidarity with jailed punk group Pussy Riot. Statues and sculptures around the city staged the demonstration." ⁷⁹

In the *Articulate Objects* text quoted at the beginning of this section, Satz and Wood ask that we "listen to" sculpture as much as we "look" at it. ⁸⁰ In the controversial context of Pussy Riot, the sculptures seem to be saying what some citizens want to but cannot say, in fear of being reprimanded. While some knit-bombing has been about the nature of the craft, it is the element of reclaiming public space that carries forward in the Pussy Riot knit-bombs. The sculptures are used as voices, and their power visually (and perhaps audibly) extends the message of support.

⁷⁹ "Statues of Belfast say 'Free Pussy Riot'" *Amnesty International* (UK site), August 22, 2012.

⁸⁰ Satz and Wood, *Articulate Objects*. Np.

In his article in *The Guardian*, Thomas wrote in support of the yarn graffiti: “it defies the corporate and government vision of our cities...with an air of intense joy.”⁸¹ While the cause for the yarn-bombing of European sculptures in late 2012 had a serious and potentially dangerous agenda, there was still an undertone of joy in the actions: the brightly colored balaclavas vividly contrasting the material of the sculpture. One can imagine groups of Pussy Riot supporters taking pictures with the balaclava-covered sculptures, as it becomes an act not only concerning support of Pussy Riot, but also about building communities of common interest.

In an article written after the sentencing of Alyokhina, Tolokonnikova, and Samustesevich, Miriam Elder of *The Guardian* wrote,

The case against Pussy Riot has ruptured any pretense of decorum in the growing split between those who align themselves with Putin’s government and those who oppose it.... What began as a radical fringe movement has brought tens of thousands of people on to the streets to protest against what they saw as the death knell of Russia’s brief experiment with democracy. The government’s response to them has pushed them back into the mainstream.⁸²

In other words, the government's action against Pussy Riot directly led to strengthening what they represented, to bring others on their side, against Putin's authority. This “growing split” that Elder references is echoed in the acts that use the sculpture as a puppet for the cause. These statues’ balaclavas bring this split into the public sphere, making it visible. The Pussy Riot supporters aim to bring the sculpture-- and the public space-- into their fight, and on their side. The fact that these images are then circulated vis-a-vis social media (an issue that will be elaborated at length in the last section of this project) shows that this act is meant to be a conscious strengthening of the cause, outside of Russia, and also meant to strengthen dissenters and make their voices heard loudly and more clearly.

⁸¹ Thomas.

⁸² Miriam Elder, “Pussy Riot verdict greeted with defiance,” *The Guardian*, August 17, 2012.

Like the “magnetic graffiti” on the Richard Serra sculpture in the Bronx, yarn or craft graffiti considers itself harmless, while still not forfeiting the consequences to which it can give rise: making the sculpture speak for, at least at one moment, a cause that the user believes is important. Craft activist Arzu Arda Kosar of Santa Monica, California explains, “You can remove [the yarn] without actually damaging the original structure that you’re attaching it to, unlike paint. You can easily remove these items...it will degrade anyways, because yarn isn’t meant to be out on the street forever.”⁸³ With this in mind, one can even link the act of yarn-bombing to Pussy Riot’s performance and video: both are antagonistic, but ultimately a momentary and non-violent act, not meant to cause physical harm, but to make people question and interrogate their surroundings and who controls those surroundings.

In terms of Kwon’s public sculpture critique, these interactions with monumental sculpture become neither “plop” as a pejorative, art-as-public-space, or art-in-public interest. The sculptural-engagement becomes about the relationship between person and public space, as well as between persons participating or observing these actions. One yarn bomber states the motivation behind the act is “to make people smile” while another says it is “...positive graffiti, it’s not there to be ill-intentioned, or to give anyone a bad day.”⁸⁴ Yarn bombing stands on this line of being both joyful and angry, communal yet capable of causing divisions, through a material that will soon after be cut through with a pair of scissors.

The exhibition inside the Serra sculpture and the masking of monuments in support of Pussy Riot show that public art can speak of concerns in ways that can open arguments about public space. In both cases discussed in this section, the artists/activists use playfulness as a tool

⁸³ Jenna Milly, “Yarn Bombing Isn’t Just About Knit and Run Anymore,” *Huffington Post*, June 22, 2011. Originally published in *Turnstyle News*.

⁸⁴ Julie Mollins, “Graffiti knitters to hit streets on Yarnbombing Day,” *Reuters*, June 10, 2011

in their actions, yet in each case it is still considered clandestine activity. The fact that the impermanent activity is still self-aware of its illicit nature points to the indeterminacy of who is the "public" when we refer to "public art" or "public space." Sculpture becomes simultaneously a form of and a forum for communication, a "hidden transcript" that plays a role in this discussion that other forms of communication could not. As "spokessculpture," its actual instigator or instigators remain anonymous, allowing a visible, audible discussion that is unobscured by individual identities and rather representative of many who share similar concerns.

FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Richard Serra Sculpture (personal photographs)



Figure 2.2, “Jose Jumping Fence” (from Richardlovesmagnets Flickr)



Figure 2.3, John Kingsley visiting *Bellamy* (personal photograph)



Figure 2.4, *Tilted Arc*, New York Architecture (website)



Figure 2.5, Participants in Invisible Graffiti exhibition, “Richardlovesmagnets” on Flickr



Figure 2.6, artwork by Virginia Poundstone, “Richardlovesmagnets” on Flickr

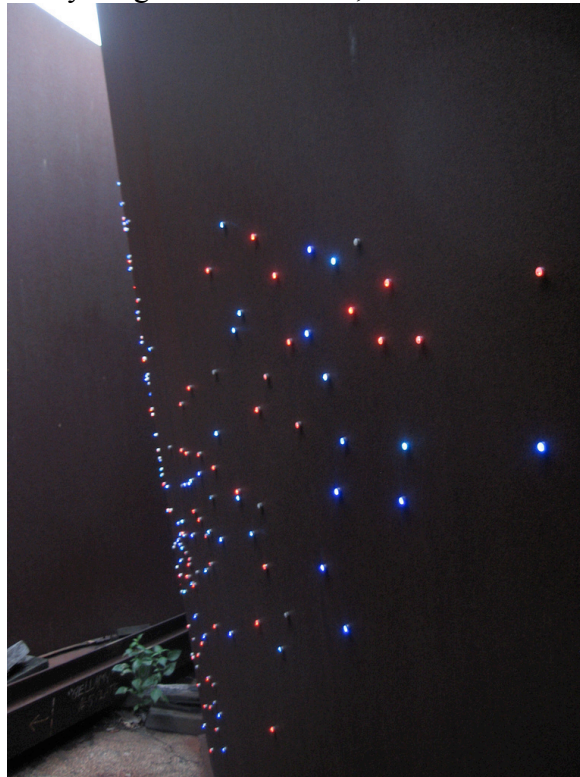


Figure 2.7, artwork by Anna Tshouhlarakis, “Richardlovesmagnets” on Flickr

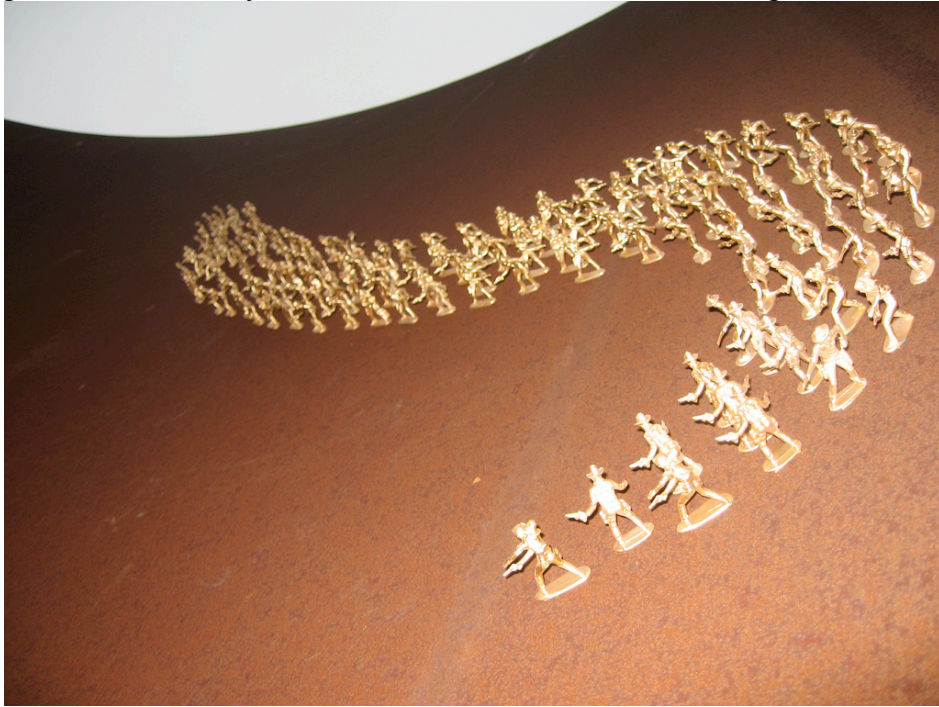


Figure 2.8, Artwork by Michael Smith, “Richardlovesmagnets” on Flickr



Figure 2.9, Flyer for Invisible Graffiti: Magnet Show, Flickr “Richardlovesmagnets”



Figure 2.10, Graffiti on a Serra sculpture in Germany (Photograph obtained through MoMA conservator Lynda Zychemann, 2008)



Figure 2.11. Pussy Riot Punk Prayer, screen capture from You Tube.



Figure 2.12. Monument to Alexander Pushkin and Natalia Goncharova-Pushkina, by Alexander Nicolaevich Bourganov (2005)

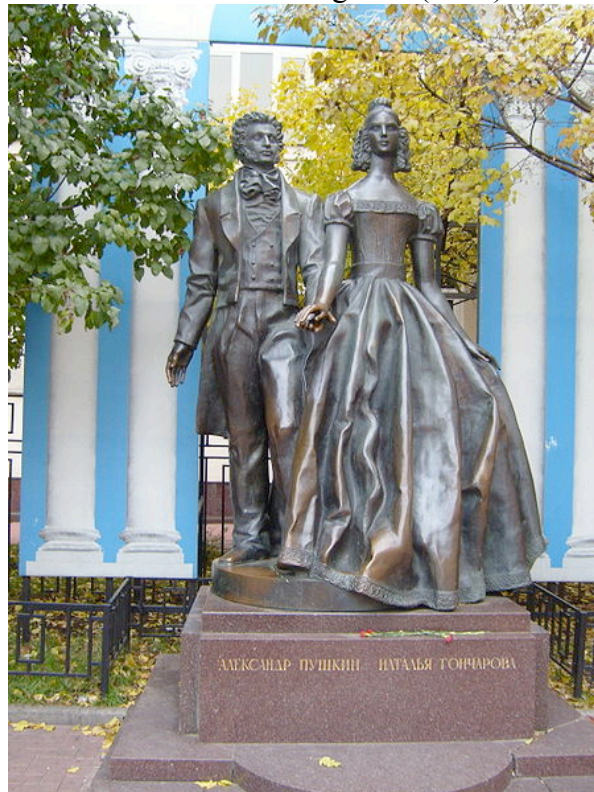


Figure 2.13 Monument to Alexander Pushkin and Natalia Goncharova-Pushkina, by Alexander Nicolaevich Bourganov (2005), altered by Pussy Riot supporters. (rt.com)



Figure 2.14 *Belorussian Partisans*, by SM Orlov, S.M. Rabinovich, and I.A. Slonim. (rt.com)



III. Plop Sculpture As Site For "Pseudo-Events": The Ballerina, the Bull, and the Barricade:

In late 2011, the Occupy Wall Street movement circulated a newspaper at their site of occupation in lower Manhattan's Zuccotti Park. The paper, called *Occupied Wall Street Journal*, included a map of the encampment, seen in figure 3.1. This map shows the locations of different functions throughout the park: the kitchen, media area, library, information center, as well as where the General Assembly met. Included in this map, indicated at the lower right corner, is a circle with an "X" through it, described as "WEIRD RED THING." The "WEIRD RED THING" -- which played an important role in the first few months at Zuccotti Park -- is better known as Mark di Suvero's *Joie de Vivre* sculpture. Di Suvero's 70 foot high steel sculpture was installed at the corner of Broadway and Cedar Street in lower Manhattan in 2006. In its time in the Occupy movement it served as a meeting place for protesters, who engaged with it not as a sculpture or as an art object, but because it was a highly visible space through which they could (and did) gain the media's attention.

This final section examines sculptures used in the Occupy movement, and how interventions with these sculptures create a new understanding of plop sculpture, as the protesters engage with the sculptures in media-driven ways. Before returning to the role of sculptures in and near Zuccotti Park, it is worth considering the sculpture that had a role in founding the Occupy movement: Arturo di Modica's *Charging Bull*. Public sculpture is often called a "gift to the people of a city"-- using this public sculpture as a site for protest activity can be read as a way in which people are claiming their gift, using it and its space for other ends than aesthetic enjoyment. When law enforcement barricaded *Charging Bull* and the sculptures of Zuccotti Park

as a result of their roles in the protest, it emphasizes the sculpture's symbolic power as well as the aims of the Occupy movement.

Through sculpture, the protest was visible and tangible, relating to the sculpture-as-puppet phenomenon seen in the Serra sculpture and the Pussy Riot yarn-bombs, while remaining strategically different. While the previous section focused on sculpture as an ally, to be used as a mouthpiece for a cause, in this section, I highlight plop sculpture as an extension of an authority being critiqued (in this case, an abstract authority—Wall Street). In this section, the protesters do not align their views with that of the sculpture-- rather, the protesters fight with the sculpture. They literally and figuratively occupy these sculptures not internally as a puppet, but externally, as an opponent. In the early months of the Occupy Wall Street movement, the protesters occupied sculpture in the same way they occupied Zuccotti Park and other encampments around the world, in order to be antagonistic and claim a "people's space." By looking at ways in which the protesters occupied sculpture, and the ways in which the media and law enforcement responded to these occupations, the definition of "plop" shifts from the critical understanding of it articulated by Wines and Kwon. These Occupy interventions gave plop a function, pushed a particular agenda, and treated the sculpture as though it were the enemy, not a friend, of the cause.

Another way in which this section differs from the last is explored in an understanding of the interventions as an event specifically for media dissemination. While the media also played an important role for the Pussy Riot protests, here I argue that the Occupy interventions with sculpture were constructed not for immediate consumption as much as secondary consumption through journalism and social media, encouraged through highly recognized and relatable sculptural icons.

Occupiers engagement with sculpture may remind some of the protests in Chicago in 1968-- when protesters used sculpture as a site to publicly address both the media and the authority that they were confronting. Figures 3.2 and 3.3 show protesters gathering at a Chicago monument and climbing onto the horse's back. The statue, located in Grant Park and designed by August Saint-Gaudens, commemorates John A. Logan, the Union Civil War General and Illinois Senator in 1868. On August 29, 1968, protesters swarmed the statue during the Democratic National Convention. Figure 3.3 shows how this "attack" on the sculpture formed a massive crowd, overtaking not only the base of the sculpture, but the entire hill that surrounds it.

In his book *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, Daniel Boorstin defines this type of media antic as the "pseudo-event." He describes this term as an event constructed for media, that uses "well-knownness" as a tactic. It uses what people know and recognize and disseminates this across other channels and networks. The pseudo-event is constructed especially for secondary consumption, creating what Boorstin calls a "thicket of unreality...a fog of experience" that does not discriminate between reality and what is constructed for media attention.

On another level, once the event – no matter how real or false it might be – is spread into the media, it becomes its own reality, which gives media the power to shape our reality. Boorstin states that this is an "art form [to suit] our convenience... To fabricate national purposes when we lack them, to pursue these purposes after we have fabricated them."⁸⁵ The notion of the pseudo-event makes the resulting image of the event paramount to the event itself. Especially in the Occupy Wall Street movement, which measured its success on some level to how often it made headline news, antics allow the protest to spread wider and further through the reports.

⁸⁵ Boorstin, Introduction "Extravagant Expectations," *The Image...*

Media theatrics surrounding *Charging Bull* and the sculptures of Zuccotti Park that will be discussed in this section might be understood in the same spirit of the Yippies, protesting in the late 1960s for the New Left. Founded in 1967 by Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, the Yippie movement combined political confrontation with over-the-top theatrics. For one of the Yippies first pranks in August 1967, Hoffman and a dozen activists went on a tour of the New York Stock Exchange. While standing at a railing overlooking the trading floor, the Yippies threw handfuls of dollar bills to the brokers, clerks, and stock runners who ran to collect it, disrupting the day's trading.⁸⁶ Hoffman used the fake name "George Metesky" to organize the tour-- adopting the name of the bomber who terrorized New York City with explosives in the 1940s and 1950s. After the stunt, the *New York Times* called Metesky a "hippie idol," and days later, the New York Stock Exchange installed bulletproof glass panels as a response to the act. Just as the sculptures discussed so far in this paper have been received as potentially violent sites, the nonviolence of the Yippies was received as a militant, potentially destructive action. Yippie antics were widespread in newspapers and television reports around the world, effectively infiltrating a greater public through media. Hoffman viewed the entire construction as theater with actors, a stage, and an audience for each prank. He was constructing a circus, describing himself as a "revolutionary artist"-- doing tricks for cameras, such as the front flip outside the Federal Building in Chicago while being tried for conspiracy in 1969.

Through its theatrics, the audience of Yippie pranks grew from the immediate people present at protests to a nationwide phenomenon of like-minded people. In his 1968 book, *Revolution for the Hell of It*, Hoffman discusses his role in the media, describing Yippie events as a way to market the revolution:

⁸⁶ John Kifner, "Hippies Shower \$1 Bills on Stock Exchange Floor," *New York Times*, Aug 25, 1967: 23.

The commercial is information. The program is rhetoric. The commercial is the figure. The program is the ground. What happens at the end of the program? Do you think any one of the millions of people watching the show switched from being a liberal to a conservative or vice versa? I doubt it. One thing is certain though... a lot of people are going to buy that fuckin' soap or whatever else they were pushing in the commercial.... *We were an advertisement for revolution.*⁸⁷

Through these conscious ideas of how the Yippies fit into television, Hoffman concludes that the short segments on television that covered Yippie pranks were enough to enter people's homes in ways that attracted people to protests and demonstrations. Their pranks were made to *sell* the revolution, the playfulness serving as a strategy to engage those who might not have normally been involved in the protest otherwise. The interventions with Occupy sculptures could be read as having the same goals--getting their movement into headlines could serve as a useful strategy to divide the public to either support or stand against the cause. The point is ultimately to circulate the protest to a wider audience.

However, as David Joselit argues, while Hoffman's ideas succeeded at first, in the end they failed when his ideas stopped acting as a commercial for activism and became the main program.⁸⁸ As a leader of the Yippies, Hoffman became immediately embraced by television personalities, a positive result in terms of the Yippies' initial goals to spread their ideals, and a negative in terms of continuing that agenda. Once embraced by the media, the antics became not *advertisements* but almost expected acts of Hoffman. After gaining notoriety for his stunts, the media invited Hoffman to give interviews on talk shows, and his persona dominated the Yippie message, to the point where the message became obscure and secondary to the lure of him as a celebrity. When this happened, no longer would the stunts serve the same activist purpose. The

⁸⁷ Abbie Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell Of It*, (New York: Dial Press, 1968): 133-34

⁸⁸ David Joselit, "Yippie Pop: Abbie Hoffman, Andy Warhol, and Sixties Media Politics," *Grey Room* (No. 8, Summer 2002): 65.

political message, the *advertisement for revolution*, becomes lost somewhere underneath Hoffman's persona, as the media represents him as a sort of caricature of the movement. While Hoffman failed in advertising the revolution through media when attention became so focused around him, the actions of the guerrilla artists and activists highlighted in this paper succeed, illuminating a success in anonymity and collectivity.

Friend Turned Foe: Wall Street's *Charging Bull*

On December 15, 1989, sculptor Arturo di Modica trucked a 7,100 lb. bronze sculpture to lower Manhattan, installing it in front of the New York Stock Exchange and announcing the sculpture a holiday gift for the people of New York. This 16 foot long sculpture, seen in figure 3.4 with its head lowered near its legs ready to attack (or eat its dinner), was not commissioned by the city or any of its financial institutions, and no committee agreed on its location. Quite literally, this bronze bull was *plopped* into the public space. A police officer said that security officials called enforcement to the intersection of Wall and Broad Streets, saying "there was a very large statue of a bull there, and it wasn't there yesterday..."⁸⁹ Police seized the bull, under the "warrant" of not having a permit and obstructing traffic, and brought him to a "prison" (or, a warehouse in Queens). The day the police seized the bull, the Dow was down 14.08 points. A *New York Times* article stated, "while analysts spoke of obscure economic forces, the clerks and sidewalk cognoscenti on the nation's street of dreams were bemoaning the unceremonious removal of [the bull]."⁹⁰ Upon request, the sculpture was re-installed two blocks south in the

⁸⁹ Robert D. McFadden, "SoHo Gift to Wall St.: A 3 1/2-Ton Bronze Bull," *New York Times*, Dec 16, 1989

⁹⁰ Ibid.

plaza at Bowling Green, where it stands today: Wall Street's mascot and icon, the *Charging Bull*.⁹¹

Charging Bull is, on one hand, the pinnacle of what has been called "corporate art" -- which can be understood as a kind of sub-category of plop art. As Gómez-Peña articulated in his categories of public sculpture discussed in the first section of this project, the bull is the quintessential "animal cast in bronze"-- type five of "The Worst Public Artwork."⁹² *Charging Bull* stands as a symbol of market aggression in the middle of the financial capital of the world, yet despite its aggression, Di Modica's sculpture has been adopted by some into the tourism vernacular, cited in guidebooks as an object to seek out within the city. Visitors who head to the Financial District to see the sculpture are told by their guidebooks to rub the bull's testicles for financial prosperity-- it has become a sort of Buddha of capitalism. Banks and other financial institutions have used this bull's distinctive composition in advertisements in order to entice people to whatever service the business offers. At the same time, *Charging Bull* has also fostered acts of guerrilla responses. Artist Agata Oleksiak ("Olek") covered it in neon yarn in early 2011, turning this aggressive, masculine symbol into a soft, plush toy, completely covered in purple and pink knit panels (figure 3.5).⁹³

Over the span of its residency in the Financial District, the bull has changed from being a symbol for the people to a symbol against the people. Di Modica created the sculpture in response to the market crash of 1987, optimistically declaring that through the sculpture he

⁹¹ "Wall St.'s Bronze Bull Moves 2 Blocks South," *New York Times*, Dec 20, 1989.

⁹² Gómez-Peña, "A proposal for 'the worst public artwork' contest"

⁹³ See Malia Wollan, "Graffiti's Cozy, Feminine Side," *New York Times*, May 18, 2011 and Ashton Cooper, "The Wild and Wooly World of Yarn Bombing, Street Art's Soft Sensation," *Artinfo.com* June 10, 2011

wanted to "encourage everybody to realize America's power." ⁹⁴ In response to the economic crash of 2008 and implemented policies associated with recovery from the crash, dissenters decided to use the bull both in its symbolism and its physicality, adopting it for a less optimistic response to a financial disaster.

In the summer of 2011, inspired by the Arab Spring, two editors from the bimonthly magazine *Adbusters* began to plan an encampment, which they would later call "the American Autumn" in their fall issue (see figure 3.6). Kalle Lasn (founder and editor of the magazine) and Micah White (senior editor) sent out an e-mail to *Adbusters* subscribers, stating "America needs its own Tahrir." Lasn and White discussed possible dates, and decided on September 17, 2011 -- Lasn's mother's birthday-- and so began the Occupy Wall Street (#OWS) movement.⁹⁵

The art department of the magazine designed a (photoshopped) image, of a dancer delicately balanced on one foot atop of di Modica's *Charging Bull* (see figure 3.7). In the background of the image, police in riot gear emerge out of a cloud of tear gas. Lasn approved of the image, heralding it for "the juxtaposition of the capitalism dynamism of the bull, with the Zen stillness of the ballerina."⁹⁶ Above the dancer, the image asks, "What is our one demand?" and at the bottom it declares the movement's title and date for the first time:

#OCCUPYWALLSTREET
SEPTEMBER 17TH
BRING TENT.

While *Adbusters* is associated with the date, title, and original premise of the Occupy movement, circulating the poster and hashtag #OCCUPYWALLSTREET on Twitter, once the movement

⁹⁴ McFadden.

⁹⁵ Mattathias Schwartz, "Pre-Occupied: The Origins and Future of Occupy Wall Street," *The New Yorker*, Nov 28, 2011

⁹⁶ Ibid.

was put into motion and other Occupy sites (physical and digital) were created worldwide, *Adbusters* had very little continuous leadership. In November, two months after Occupy began, *Adbusters* sent out an e-mail to their 90,000 subscribers, proposing that Occupy protesters declare victory by throwing parties in mid-December and withdraw from their encampments.⁹⁷ Of course, this did not happen as the movement grew and struggled to define itself and what it wanted to be. Rather, *Adbusters* most important contribution was putting the idea of an occupation out through the proper Internet channels to create excitement about the idea through their poster and viral “marketing.”

Lasn is a leader of the contemporary Culture Jamming movement, *Adbusters* one of the most widely known Culture Jamming publications, sustaining itself on newsstand sales and donations rather than by selling advertisement space. He founded *Adbusters* in 1989, which has been described in the *New Yorker* by Mattathias Schwartz as “[depicting] the developed world as a nightmare of environmental collapse and spiritual hollowness, driven to the brink of destruction by its consumer appetites.” Schwartz also describes the Vancouver-based publication as speaking to “a dark age coming for humanity” and concerned with “killing capitalism.”⁹⁸ From these quotes alone, *Adbusters* and Culture Jamming might appear to be an aggressive and spiteful movement. While this might be one way in which to view the movement, this too easily dismisses the optimism and playfulness found in Culture Jamming projects, which is evident in how the movement uses public sculpture.

Primarily, Culture Jamming is about reclaiming a specific vision of the world that is not ruled by consumerism. Lasn explains the goals of the movement in his book *Culture Jam*:

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

We're a loose global network of media activists who see ourselves as the advance shock troops of the most significant social movement of the next twenty years. Our aim is to topple existing power structure and force major adjustments to the way we live.... It will change the way information flows, the way institutions wield power, the way TV stations are run, the way the food, fashion, automobile, sports, music and culture industries set their agendas. Above all, it will change the way we interact with the mass media and the way in which meaning is produced in our society.⁹⁹

Throughout the book, Lasn explains some projects that he helped initiate, such as Buy Nothing Day (meant to be an alternative to Black Friday) and Turn Off The TV Week, proposing that people respond to the “spectacle of modern life” by creating their own situations. Lasn even carries around a universal remote (“TV-B-Gone”) that can turn off almost any television. He will go around to public spaces, such as airport terminals, and shut off televisions: “[people] look a bit dazed for about 10 seconds and then heads go down and they start reading the newspaper.”¹⁰⁰

The *Adbusters* founder describes the Culture Jamming philosophy as inspired by surrealists, Dadaists, and especially Situationist International because each group had similar motivators, a combination of “a belligerent attitude toward authority” and “a willingness to take big risks, and a commitment to pursue small, spontaneous moments of truth.”¹⁰¹ On Culture Jammers’ inspiration from Situationist International Lasn writes, “To the Situationists, you are-- everyone is--a creator of situations, a performance artist, and the performance, of course, is your life, lived in your way.... Situationist members suggested knocking down churches to make space for children to play, and putting switches on the street lamps so lighting would be under public control.”¹⁰² Lasn elaborates on Culture Jammers adaptation of these ideas by articulating a

⁹⁹ Kalle Lasn, *Culture Jam: How to Reverse America's Suicidal Consumer Binge--And Why We Must*, (New York, NY: Quill, 1999): Introduction.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Kalle Lasn, “Ad Busting and Culture Jamming,” *Satya Magazine*, May 2005.

¹⁰¹ Lasn, *Culture Jam*, 99.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 99-100

difference between “immediacy” and “mediacy.” He states that in a world run by corporations and packaged experiences, the latter has coopted the former. Life cannot be “immediate” when it is “mediated,” a concept that Culture Jammers aim to alter.¹⁰³

To fight consumerism and the glut of advertising, Culture Jammers such as Lasn employ memes, calling their fights “Meme Wars.” The hardcover edition of Lasn’s 2013 book *Meme Wars: The Creative Destruction of Neoclassical Economics* also uses the silhouette of the ballerina and the bull on its cover. Lasn describes memes as units of information that “leap from brain to brain to brain....[they can] change minds, alter behavior, catalyze collective mindshifts and transform cultures. Which is why meme warfare has become a geopolitical battle of our information age. Whoever has the memes has the power.”¹⁰⁴ *Adbusters* creates its memes by using understandable, recognizable, and highly circulated images and imbuing them with new meanings. Figure 3.8 shows a woman breastfeeding a baby covered in corporate logos -- Nike, Sony, Levis, Coca Cola -- to ask what kind of information we want to be feeding to children that have no voice in the matter. Figure 3.9 displays another *Adbusters* meme, showing Joe Camel in a hospital wing, sick with cancer as “Joe Chemo.” By using recognizable images, *Adbusters* believes that the new image will stay in the mind of whoever sees it, infiltrating already established ideas that have already been planted by corporations and advertisements.

By using a highly recognizable sculpture, the Occupy poster uses *Charging Bull* as a meme. Before *Adbusters* placed *Charging Bull* in conversation with Occupy Wall Street, tourists rubbed its testicles and New Yorkers passively heralded it as a mascot of their city and its corporations. Altering the image of the sculpture with the ballerina on top of it aims to complicate the public’s relationship to the sculpture, especially when considering the hashtag

¹⁰³ Ibid, 101.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 123.

“#OCCUPYWALLSTREET” centimeters below the bull. It asks the viewer to see the sculpture as an enemy rather than confidant. The grace of the dancer harshly contrasts with the brute force of the bull. Her “occupation” on the sculpture is a call to action. Coupled with the hashtag, she suggests a location, a meeting spot. This image circulated before Zuccotti Park was established as the site of protest and the presence of *Charging Bull* in *Adbusters* suggests that this sculpture be used as a stage for activity.

After it became associated with the Occupy movement, the sculpture quickly went from friend to foe of the people, exacerbated by police physically barricading the sculpture from public access-- highlighting the power of the *Adbusters* meme. On September 17, 2011, the first day of the Occupy movement, protesters surrounded the bull, which police argue led to its imprisonment. The bull had never been barricaded before since its installation at Bowling Green in 1989, and security did not physically leave its side once the barricades went up. NYPD even installed two security cameras in order to monitor it 24 hours a day.¹⁰⁵ The public sculpture, the “gift to the people of New York” was off-limits to the people of New York because of *Adbusters’* meme and the threat it inspired. In early summer 2012, barricades remained, but NYPD permitted access to the sculpture. One year after Occupy Wall Street began, police revisited the sculpture with an even more heightened security presence for the anniversary of the movement.¹⁰⁶ The barricades emphasize that the bull is the opponent: perhaps now more a symbol of Wall Street as an abstract “enemy” of the 99%, rather than on their side.

New York based artist and professor Gregory Sholette describes the police presence in his essay, “Occupology, Swarmology, Whateverology: the city of (dis)order versus the people’s archive.” He wrote his own account from September 17, 2011: “...there were those two, slightly

¹⁰⁵ Rebecca Harshbarger, “NYPD uncaging Wall Street bull,” *New York Post*, Dec 31, 2011

¹⁰⁶ Clyde Haberman, “The Bull Tied to Occupy Wall Street,” *New York Times*, Sept 17, 2012

chagrined officers standing watch over *Charging Bull*, the bellicose bronze sculpture that dominates the northern edge of Bowling Green Park. An irony lost on most who passed by is that artist Arturo DiModica's giant bovine was an unannounced "gift" that he dropped in December 1989 to lift Wall Street's downcast spirits after the crash of 1987.”¹⁰⁷

The barricades surrounding the bull changed the way in which people interacted with the sculpture, making interventions more difficult but not impossible. On December 6, 2011, Occupy Cinema announced on Twitter (and other various social media networks) that a ballerina would be dancing on top of *Charging Bull* between 6:30 and 8:00 p.m. Calling it “A Special Projection and Performance at *Charging Bull*,” the Occupy Cinema group projected Anna Pavlova’s *Dying Swan Dance* onto the bull. A video captured the event shows police surrounding the sculpture as music plays, either unaware or unamused by the events happening. The projection, which came from equipment set-up across the street, shined the image onto the bull’s body and onto the building directly behind *Charging Bull*, so that it appeared from certain angles as though the ballerina was actually on top of the barricaded bull (screen captures in figure 3.10 show both types of projection).¹⁰⁸

The prankster activist-group the Yes Men (Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonnano) also targeted the *Charging Bull* for a performance. The Yes Men organized the Yes Lab at the NYU Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics, in order to mentor their brand of creative activism. For their *Charging Bull* stunt, the ballerina becomes a matador. A video of the event shows two clowns jumping over the barricades to begin riling the sculpture up for his fight. One of the clowns played a harmonica, while a matador in full *traje de luces* climbed ontop of a

¹⁰⁷ Gregory Sholette, “Occupology, Swarmology, Whateverology: the city of (dis)order versus the people’s archive,” *Art Journal*, Winter 2011, Web-only.

¹⁰⁸ See “Occupy Cinema to Screen Ballerina Projection and Performance,” *The Huffington Post*, December 6, 2011.

squad car nearby, waving a red flag at the sculpture (figure 3.11), while police arrested the clowns (figure 3.12). The clowns were charged with disorderly conduct. While being arrested, one clown said, “This bull has ruined millions of lives! Yet he and his accomplices have been rewarded with billions of our tax dollars--and we, here to put a stop to it all, are thrown to the ground. ¡Un escándalo!”¹⁰⁹

As Lasn states in *Culture Jam*, “this is how the revolution begins: A few people start slipping out of old patterns, daydreaming, questioning, rebelling.”¹¹⁰ Understanding the sculpture as the opponent, it is no longer a sculpture plopped down in the Financial District with which tourists sometimes take pictures. It is an active sculpture used in propaganda, as a site for people to discuss and to reach media attention to give their cause a new, larger, recognizable stage.

The Sculpture of Zuccotti Park

In October 2012, the prominent art criticism and theory journal *October* presented an issue on the Occupy Wall Street movement, in which writers, artists, and historians offered their views on the impact of #OWS. In her response, Rosalyn Deutsche discussed the connection between Occupy Wall Street and physical space. She suggests a kind of equal importance of both physical space and the abstract space that the protesters are occupying, “a signifier of the power of financial institutions.” She writes (quoting Judith Butler):

Collective actions depend on the prior existence of streets and squares, but they also “collect the space itself, gather the pavement, and animate and organize the architecture.” This statement suggests that a city is not a

¹⁰⁹ Andy Bichlbaum, “Wall Street bull survives attack by matador; clowns arrested,” The Yes Lab press release, November 9, 2011.

¹¹⁰ Lasn, *Culture Jam*, 108.

framework into which users are inserted but an environment produced by the practices of users.¹¹¹

A few blocks north of the plaza at Bowling Green, Mark di Suvero's *Joie de Vivre* stands near Broadway, Church, and Cedar Streets (figure 3.13 shows a map of the *Charging Bull* sculpture in relation to Zuccotti Park). Di Suvero's sculpture (figure 3.14) is frequently explained in articles and blogs as "the red thing" and "an important meeting spot" in the same thought, raising the question: did the protesters engage with the sculpture as art, or did they engage with it because it was large and red? Examining quotes from protesters, it is the latter quality that seemed to invite its use, as well as articulate its status as "plop" sculpture.

Reporting on the "WEIRD RED THING" in Zuccotti, the art blog *Hyperallergic*, took a poll: "Do you agree with the *Occupied Wall Street Journal*? Is Mark di Suvero's *Joie de Vivre* Ugly?" Without getting into the distinction between "weird" (what the Occupiers said) and "ugly" (a term used by Hrag Vartanian on the blog), 66.38% of readers said "No, I like it" while the remainder were split between "Yes it's hideous!" and "It's alright but I don't think it's all that great."¹¹² Of course, it is important to keep in mind the source, as the average reader of *Hyperallergic* likely agrees with its tagline, "Sensitive to Art & its Discontents."

The figures in 3.15 show two ways how the sculpture was used by protesters, in terms of material engagement, also demonstrating this lack of holistic opinion about the sculpture. Protesters pasted stickers on it, wrote on it, and tacked other material to it, as though it were a bulletin board at a café. In the first image, two stickers were attached to the sculpture: "OCCUPY EVERYWHERE; OCCUPY EVERYTHING" – pointing out that this sculpture is

¹¹¹ Rosalyn Deutsche, "Questionnaire," *October* (Fall 2012, No. 142). Krauss, Rosalind; Annette Michelson, George Baker, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh, et al, eds.

¹¹² Hrag Vartanian, "#OccupyWallStreet Journal Map Calls Mark di Suvero's 'Joie de Vivre' Weird," *Hyperallergic*, Oct 6, 2011.

not free from the goals of the movement. The second image shows that someone wrote on the sculpture: “Corporate art is not art!” while another responded, beneath “Vandalism is also not art.” This material engagement feels similar to Il Pasquino discussed in section two—people using the sculpture for a dialogue about what the sculpture is, what its role is in the park and in the movement.

One month into the occupation of Zuccotti Park, 24 year old Dylan Spoelstra climbed Di Suvero’s sculpture, “for reasons that were not immediately known,” according to one report.¹¹³ The occupation of the sculpture is as literal as the occupation of the park; Spoelstra stayed in the sculpture for hours, calling for Mayor Bloomberg to resign, as well as for cops stationed at Zuccotti to evacuate. When an officer went to get him in a cherry picker, they high-fived one another, and were said to be talking and laughing. Was it a stunt in order to attract media attention, or was he just not sure of how he was going to get back down from the sculpture?

As a result of antics surrounding Di Suvero’s sculpture, soon it had barricades around it, just as *Charging Bull* (figure 3.16 shows *Joie di Vivre* barricaded, with Occupiers tents behind it). Ironically, the barricades were stamped with “METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART”, although the museum stated that it had nothing to do with limiting access to Di Suvero’s sculpture. Occupy Wall Street’s Arts and Culture Group wrote a letter to di Suvero, asking him to request that the barricades be removed from around his work. The letter states:

Your sculpture, “Joie De Vivre,” [sic] at Liberty Plaza (“Zuccotti Park”) has served as a visual backdrop for the movement in New York. The area underneath and around the sculpture has hosted meetings, rendezvous points, teach-ins and concerts. We are conscious of your role in the creation of the *Peace Tower* (1966 and 2006), and your public opposition to the wars in Vietnam and Iraq. Your work is an integral part of our

¹¹³ Caitlin Nolan and Tom Liddy, “Canadian Scales Statue in Occupy Wall Street’s Zuccotti Park Camp,” *DNA Info.com*, Oct 22, 2011. Also see “Occupy Wall Street Protester Scales Statue, Says He Won’t Come Down Until Bloomberg Quits,” *New York Post*, Oct 22, 2011.

collective history, and the tradition of artists who exercise their responsibility as public citizens.... We believe that cordoning off your gift to the people of New York goes against your intentions for the work, as well as the very spirit of public art. “Joie de Vivre” is especially poignant as this movement actively fights to empower people of marginalized economic status. Indeed, that struggle is the joy of life.... It is our wish, and we believe yours as well, that the sculpture be integrated spatially with the activities taking place at Liberty Plaza. Therefore, we ask you to make a public statement urging city authorities to keep all barricades away from this and other public sculptures in the area, allowing free access to the area under and around public sculptures.¹¹⁴

With di Suvero’s sculpture barricaded early in the encampment, protesters went across the street to another large, red sculpture. Isamu Noguchi’s *Red Cube*, which isn’t even in Zuccotti Park, yet became part of the movement because the protesters could no longer access their “WEIRD RED THING.” Figure 3.17 shows protesters gathering around the sculpture one evening, celebrating Simchat Torah. The image from the event, documented in the *New York Times*, shows a sizable crowd tightly packed around the sculpture, as though trying to be as close as possible to it. There is no question to the meeting point of the event; half the crowd seems to be actually underneath Noguchi’s work. With barricades already surrounding the sculptures of Di Modica and Di Suvero, the protesters cling to another lower Manhattan work, in order to attach their movement to another sculpture’s history (before it too becomes barricaded—see figure 3.18).

The occupation of plop sculpture, which illuminates its relevance, might be understood through an analogy of the People’s Mic, utilized in Occupy movement. At meetings and rallies, whenever one person speaks, the crowd echoes the words: speech is transmitted through chanting. Sholette further explains the concept of the People’s Mic:

¹¹⁴ Paddy Johnson, “#OWS Arts and Culture Group Asks Mark Di Suvero to Speak Against the Barricades in Liberty Park,” *Art Fag City*, November 8, 2011.

...a group of listeners broadcasts a speaker's words by loudly repeating them in unison. For larger gatherings, a second wave of repetition is sometimes necessary. On one level, this cultural innovation appears to be a "flesh and blood" substitute for an electronic technology that large public meetings have come to depend upon. On another level, the people's mic introduces mechanization directly into human-to-human interaction by alternating segments of speech with interruptions to generate gain, a series of discontinuous procedures that send physical ripples through a congregation transformed, one could say, into a temporary, self-regulating cybernetic community, an undulating cyberorganism.¹¹⁵

The plop sculpture serves as part of the chanting of the People's Mic. The sculpture echoes the concerns of the public, anonymously, carrying the voices and concerns farther through media visibility. The sculpture is allowed to become part of this community, part of the discussion happening on the street.

¹¹⁵ Gregory Sholette, "After OWS: Social Practice Art, Abstractions, and the Limits of the Social," *e-flux*, 2012.

Figure 3.1 Map, *Occupied Wall Street Journal* (copyright Hyperallergic)



Figure 3.2, Protesters in Chicago at Logan Memorial, August 1968. Copyright LIFE



Figure 3.3, Protesters at Logan Memorial, Chicago 1968



Figure 3.4. Wall Street Bull. “Wall Street's Charging Bull statue helps kick off 'Downtown for Dinner’”. *Nation's Restaurant News* Vol 40. 1 (Jan 2, 2006): 27. ProQuest



Figure 3.5. Arturo di Modica's *Charging Bull*, altered by "Olek" (Agata Oleksiak). Photograph copyright *New York Times* May 18, 2011



Figure 3.6, the American Autumn, *Adbusters* cover.



Figure 3.7, *Adbusters* advertisement. #OCCUPYWALLSTREET



Figure 3.8 Brand Baby Poster, courtesy of *Adbusters*.



Figure 3.9 Joe Chemo Meme, 1996. Concept: Scott Plous. Illustration: Ron Turner.



Figure 3.10, Occupy Cinema, “A Special Projection and Performance at Charging Bull”, screen capture from Vimeo.



Figure 3.11, Photograph copyright The Yes Lab, 2011.



Figure 3.12, Photograph copyright The Yes Lab, 2011



Figure 3.13, Map of *Charging Bull* (C) in relation to Zuccotti Park sculptures (A, Mark di Suvero; B, Isamu Noguchi)

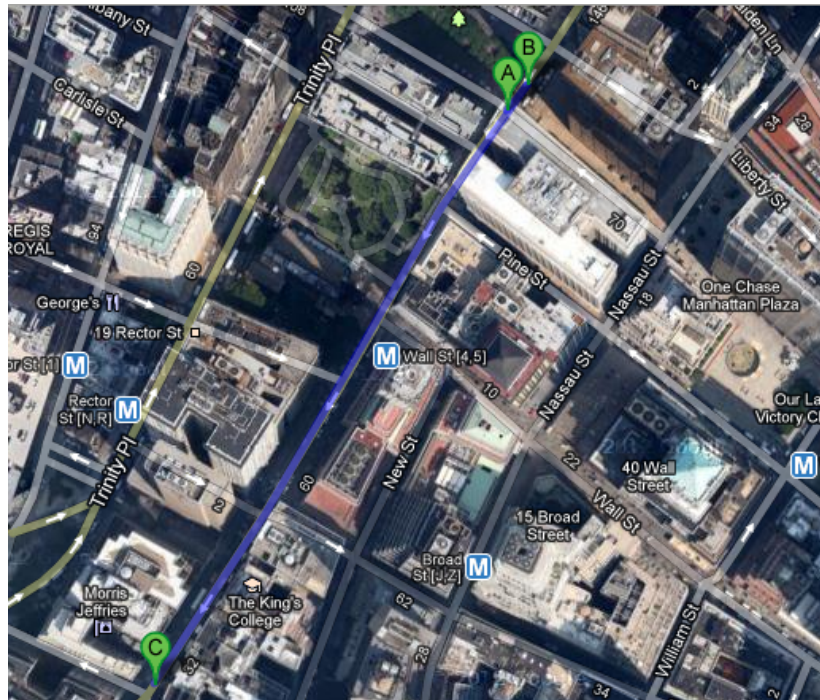


Figure 3.14, Mark di Suvero, *Joie de Vivre*, Flickr user “achimh”



Figure 3.15, Mark di Suvero's *Joie de Vivre*, Zuccotti Park (accessed via hyperallergic, photo copyright Carolina Busta)



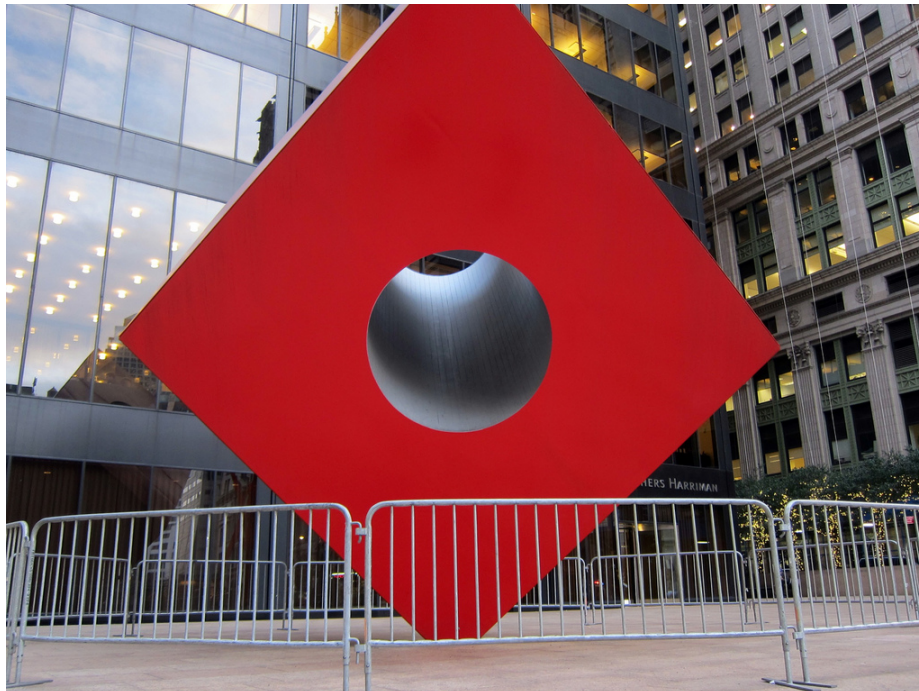
Figure 3.16, Copyright Mike Cane's xBlog, taken Oct 29, 2011



Figure 3.17, Protesters organized around Noguchi's sculpture, celebrating Simchat Torah on Oct 20, 2011. Photograph copyright *New York Times*



Figure 3.18, Isamu Noguchi's *Red Cube* on lockdown (OWS Day 84), photograph copyright Flickr user Scott Lynch (Scoboco) Dec 9, 2011



IV. Occupy Plop Art

Less than a mile from the *Chicago Picasso*, at the site of the Haymarket Affair, is another site of sculptural confrontation. In Chicago 1889, a police monument sculpture by Johannes Gelery was dedicated at the site of the Haymarket Affair, the labor rally only three years earlier in which a bomb was thrown killing and injuring policemen and civilians. Eight anarchists were charged with responsibility—then and now a debated decision, and they are widely regarded as innocent. Gelery’s police monument depicted a police officer with his hand raised in an authoritative gesture—symbolically reminding the working class locals who was in charge.

After the police monument’s installation, a contemporary writer in the late nineteenth century described the sculpture as “not an ideal policeman, a public caretaker and guardian, but a bronze thug in police uniform.”¹¹⁶ Like the reaction to the Picasso sculpture decades later, the police monument became symbolic of not one specific authority but of an entire authoritative body. It was not one policeman, but every policeman. The writer continues that the police monument represented a crime “against American free speech” describing it further as “a piece of hypocrisy in bronze that would wither the grass in any self-respecting park.”¹¹⁷

Gelery’s police monument continued to be controversial and treated as part of a larger symbol. In 1927, a streetcar purposely derailed into the Haymarket police monument, and then the Weather Underground attacked it with explosives on two separate occasions in the 1960s. After the first bombing of the sculpture, Mayor Daley ordered that it be rebuilt and reinstalled: “Let the younger generation know that the policeman is their friend, and to those who want to

¹¹⁶ Louis Freeland Post, *The Public: A Journal of Democracy*, volume 1, number 18. August 6, 1898.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

take law into their own hands, let them know that we won't tolerate it."¹¹⁸ After the sculpture was attacked by the Weather Underground again a year later, a 24-hour security guard cost the city \$67,440 per year.¹¹⁹

The police monument became friend to some (mostly other policemen and government officials), and foe to others. On the sculpture, as well as on the role of monuments, Nicolas Lampert writes:

A monument, by its nature, is already defined, static, and rarely allows for participation. A monument may allow for critique, for the viewer to respond to it, but it does not allow one to take an active role in adding to the dialogue and asserting one's voice into the landscape unless, of course, one does something drastic. In this manner, monuments often define a singular point of view that shuts out other perspectives.¹²⁰

In the early 1970s, the sculpture was moved to a private space (inside a police station, where it could not be easily accessed), leaving only a base-- a reminder of the controversy that the monument had caused.

The base, kept at the site from 1972 to 2004, became a site of occupation. In 2002, Michael Piazza's project *Haymarket 8-Hour Action Series*. As part of this project, Larry Bogad presented *The Police Statue Returns*, creating a giant puppet that resembled the original statue. Bogad paraded the puppet at the Daley Center and through the city, to the site of the original sculpture. Lampert reads this action as nostalgic. He describes the original monument as the ideal location to "vent frustrations and to engage in symbolic acts of class struggle." When the sculpture was removed, he writes, it was "akin to erasure, a means of publicly forgetting that any type of

¹¹⁸ Daley quoted in Nicolas Lampert, "Struggles at Haymarket: An Embattled History of Static Monuments and Public Interventions," *Realizing the Impossible: Art Against Authority*, ed. Josh MacPhee and Erik Reuland, (Oakland, California: AK Press, 2007): 260

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 260.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 262

struggle had taken place at the site.”¹²¹ The artist’s interventions with the base, then, became a way to resurrect what the sculpture had represented—a space to engage with the authority being critiqued.

This occupation speaks to the power of the police monument: even in its absence, people converse with the sculpture. Citizens remember the sculpture, remember what it represented, what its installation meant on a symbolic level, and what it meant to them and their community. Its impact echoes throughout the empty space. As Lampert states:

This type of creative street performance, unregulated and spontaneous, has an intrinsic beauty to it. Not only does it catch the public off guard, disrupting business as usual, but these types of actions, due to their atypical nature, encourage people to think and question not only their daily routine, but the daily routine of the city’s functions.¹²²

Sculptural occupation, and subsequently the relevance of plop sculpture, is neither “vandalism” nor “quiet contemplation”, but an understanding of the sculpture of a place for creative, critical activity. It is in these non-permanent interactions that we can measure the success of plop sculpture and a way that makes it important in urban landscapes.

Should a city’s public art committee be thinking of deaccessioning a public sculpture because of “irrelevance,” looking at news reports, in blogs, in social media outlets, as I’ve done in this project, could illuminate instances in which the public *has* engaged with their sculpture. It may not be engagements that end up in artistic monographs or tourism guidebooks, but they are actions that construct collective experiences and meanings around sculpture. These sources show that people are using the sculpture; people have found a way to adapt it to their lives and agendas. These actions illuminate the fact that there is a complexity to plop sculpture beyond “useless” and “irrelevance” –plop sculpture can in fact document a history of local sentiment.

¹²¹ Ibid, 264.

¹²² Ibid.

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