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A Labor of Love: Art Production and the Social Practice Medium in *Learning to Love You More*, founded by Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July

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Committee Members:
Dr. Kimberly Paice (chair)
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Abstract

This study is dedicated to discussing the socially-engaged practices in contemporary art through the example of the Website project, *Learning To Love You More* (hereafter LTLYM), which was founded by Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July. Their project is pivotal as a leading example of social practices that have been recently defined in the art world. Although there are many artists now working with such transdisciplinary approaches, and there are even graduate Fine Arts programs dedicated to the study of such work, Fletcher and July are credited with bringing social practice to an international stage through instructional assignments. This study examines the theoretical and artistic context of LTLYM’s strategies and explains how this work exemplifies socially-conscious grounds or engagement.
**Acknowledgements**

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I extend my sincerest gratitude to artists Harrell Fletcher, Miranda July, and Jen Delos Reyes. Each artist’s willingness to carry on a dialogue with me, as well as offer insights and thoughts about the *Learning To Love You More* project, as well as their reflections about working in the social practice medium, have strengthened my research and knowledge on the topic. I enjoyed learning more about each artist’s backgrounds and influences.

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Introduction

I’ve always seen the work I do as a way for me to learn about the world through specific groups and individuals that collaborate with various forms.—Harrell Fletcher

Overview

This study explores the recent phenomena of social practice as an artistic medium through the Website art project Learning To Love You More (hereafter LTLYM), which was founded in 2002 by artists Harrell Fletcher (b.1967) and Miranda July (b.1974), and designed and managed by Yuri Ono. Fletcher and July have both explored social engagement in their own work prior to the start of LTLYM. Fletcher has done so with both artists and non-artists for more than fifteen years. He now leads the Social Practice Fine Arts program at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. July’s works include performance, film, and literature. Fletcher’s and July’s web project was featured in the 2004 Whitney Biennial for, and this show gave the project larger international visibility. It is Fletcher’s and July’s belief that providing the participants with ideas for projects removes anxieties associated with artistic expression and production. Social practice as an artistic medium has been recognized in contemporary art, and finds its roots in the avant-garde movements, such as Dada, in the early half of the 20th century, as well as in postmodern movements such as the Situationist International, and Fluxus of the 1960s. Fletcher, still actively working in the field of social practice, defines the medium in comparison to traditional studio practices in art, he states:

...social practice, in opposition to studio practice, is that it can be refereed, but doesn’t have to be. You can self-initiate where the work is shown, you can self-initiate your own writing on it that goes in a ‘zine or onto the web. The reality in the studio model is that most people never end up showing what they make...In

social practice, because part of the idea is that you need to have an audience, showing the work is automatically built into the process.  

It is important to recognize social practice as a medium and not an artistic movement. Social practice can be defined as anything that is not studio practice. Art that fosters social interactions between strangers and promotes collective experiences is considered social practice. Individuals worldwide visit the LTLYM Website. It holds a wealth of data, including text, images and videos. It is possible to understand the medium of social practice and LTLYM’s by comparing it with more traditional mediums and genres such as painting. Paint is an artistic medium that is typically involves using a paintbrush to produce a painting. Comparatively, the medium of social practice, in the case of LTLYM, is diffuse. It spans the Internet, sending out directions to participants. Those who choose to take part in the assignments, gather their own materials, carry-out, perform, and document their work. In turn, this process creates the LYLYM collaborative through social practice methods. Although, Fletcher and July founded the Website, all participants are considered artists and authors of LTLYM. The site has been funded through grants and sustained through collaborative efforts of its members. LTLYM exemplifies the participatory spirit that is alive in contemporary art today. It has continued to thrive and grow for seven years.

The project starts with invitations to Website visitors to participate and carry out assignments. Both practicing artists and non-artists are encouraged to participate. There are no

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3 Harrell Fletcher, “Right on Canada: Some Thoughts in Regard to the Open Engagement Experience,” in “Open Engagement: Art After Aesthetic Distance.”
filters for exclusion or any critiques of the ways that an individual interprets the assignment. Instead, LTLYM is a forum for participation and collaboration in the production of art. It does not require aesthetic skill or judgment. The assignments range from simple tasks, to more time consuming tasks such as, Assignment #14 (Write your life’s story in a day), Assignment #33 (Braid someone’s hair), or any of seventy other assignments of a varying kinds. Participants then post reports to the site upon completion of their chosen assignments. These individuals can remain anonymous or provide their names.

The accumulation of assignments has resulted in a virtual gallery of more than five thousand reports connecting individuals and communities from the United States to India. In turn, the group has featured their reports in numerous museum and gallery exhibitions, including the 2004 Whitney Biennial, and published the book *Learning to Love You More* (2007). This study demonstrates how LTLYM serves as an archetype model for the medium of social practice in contemporary art, and explores how the project incorporates participation by strangers, and uses technology to produce art for social purposes, rather than for commercial purposes. In turn, this study will show how LTLYM creates a commoditized-free economy in the production and distribution of art.

**Methodology**

As early as the 1930s, Marxist sociologist Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) used the social theories in his writing on art and aesthetics. By the 1960s, artists such as Andy Warhol (1928-1987) and Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) presented their ideas that everyone may be an artist, and are capable of creativity. French theorist Roland Barthes’s essay (1915-1980), “The Death of the
Author” (1968), of the same decade, discusses an understanding of shared authorship for all readers of texts.

Curator Nicolas Bourriaud (b. 1965) examines the role of the Internet and social context in contemporary art in his books Postproduction (2000) and Relational Aesthetics (1998). The theories of social practice have been developing since the early 20th century, but have only been defined as such for about five years. Many of the social practice have been discussed as socialist or as an institutional critique. My approach will consider these various theorists of authorship, social aesthetics and participatory practices in a social art historical critique of LTLYM. My study is an examination of LTLYM as exemplifying collective labor and art production. In fact, it offers the first art historical investigation of collective labor and art production in LTLYM through socialist reading of the project.

Literature Review

LTLYM is a collective project, and there has been a great deal of art criticism written about it over the past seven years. However, primary source material, in preparing the study has been interviews with the organizing artists themselves. Fletcher was invited to take part in the University of Cincinnati’s (UC) School of Art’s Visiting Artist Lecture Series in the spring of 2008. He worked with UC faculty to discuss curriculum development in the Fine Arts program, and he participated in discussions of student’s artwork. I spent time with Fletcher during his visit to UC, and out of our discussions, he agreed to be interviewed about LTLYM and social practices. Additionally, he facilitated my contact with fellow founding artist Miranda July, and a

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Fletcher, Samson, et al., 102.
social practice artist and instructor, Jen Delos Reyes. Both artists also agreed to interviews. Moreover, Fletcher, July, and Delos Reyes participated in “No Gallery Left Behind,” an exhibition at the College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning (DAAP) Galleries the spring of 2009, which I am co-curating with four other faculty and staff members. The primary research for this study has been crucial to shaping the artists’ involvement in the upcoming exhibition. Fletcher participated with conference organizer Delos Reyes in 2007 in a social practice conference at the University of Regina in Canada called “Open Engagement: Art After Aesthetic Distance,” featuring artists who work use social practices in art. The post-conference catalogue has informed my discussion of current theories and practices in the arena of socially engaged art (social aesthetics), including the focus on sharing, generosity, stranger participation, and collective authorship as key focal points of LTLYM.  

Secondary sources used in my study are contemporary art criticisms, interviews, and books that explore social aesthetics. The book *Learning to Love You More* (2007) was complied by Fletcher and July, and includes essays by art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson, and artists Laura Lark and Jacinda Russell. This is the only book that is dedicated to the group. Other secondary source literature includes surveys of social aesthetics. Grant Kester’s book, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2005), for example, examines the art world as a community that is built on participation and dialogue. The book *What We Want Is Free: Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art* (2005), edited by Ted Purves, examines art consumption and non-monetary exchanges in a socially conscious contemporary art world, and thus provides

examples of work that shapes socialist motives rather than capitalist motives in the production of art. This text, along with various social science texts help me to explain the gift-economy structure that is found in the functions of LTLYM.

An even better-known survey about participation, is a book on art methods in contemporary art complied by Claire Bishop’s called, Participation: Documents of Contemporary Art (2006), which explores participation, not only through essays of various scholars, but also in terms of analyzing availability of advanced communication technologies, such as the Internet. Roland Barthes’s, “The Death of the Author” (1968) and Nicolas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics (2002) are among the sources used to define the aesthetic of participation in her book. Nina Felshin’s edited But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art As Activism (1995). She includes examples of activist art, beginning in 1960s and through 1980s. Felshin’s book provides a study in the history of art activism, which refers to collaborative group, Group Material, who played a role in influencing artists working in the social practice arena. Similarly, editors Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette present an examination of artist collectives, social space and representation beyond formal aesthetic in Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination After 1945 (2007).

Other sources of available literature that are pertinent to my study are a number of articles that respond directly to LTLYM. For example, Mia Fineman reviewed Fletcher’s contribution to social practice in New York Times article, “The Biennial That’s Not at the

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8 Nina Felshin, ed. But is it Art?:The Spirit of Activism, (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995.), 87.
9 Ibid.
Biennial” (May 2004). Fineman explores art consumption as occurring in a socialist system, rather than in a capitalist system. Kenneth Baker’s *San Francisco Chronicle* article “At the Whitney Biennial, the Art is Overthought and Much of It Is Heavy with Conceptual Freight” (March 2004) reviewed the 2004 Whitney Biennial. Baker notes that LTLYM, “… provokes an affectionate curiosity about strangers as nothing else in contemporary art has…”

**Organization of the Study**

The first chapter is an organization of the study, and includes investigations of authorship, and historical precedents in art within the context of LTLYM. I associate the group’s methodology with historical and contemporary art criticism to articulate the importance of socially conscious artwork. The second chapter explores art and appropriation and collaboration in regards to the LTLYM Website’s assignments, and also provides the parallels that are present in the founding artists’ oeuvres. The third chapter explains the theories of gift-economies, and ways that the institutional critique of LTLYM operates in a system of generosity.

**Conclusion**

This study provides research on LTLYM’s impact in the world of participatory art and art production. LTLYM uses the medium of information technologies to link people who otherwise may never meet or engage in artistic ventures. LTLYM is crucial to the understanding of the artistic medium of social practice, and has worldwide visibility. This innovative Website brings

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11 Kenneth Baker, “At the Whitney Biennial, the Art is Overthought and Much of It Is Heavy With Conceptual Freight.” *San Francisco Chronicle* (March 29, 2004), E1.
together a community of artists and non-artists alike to facilitate a shared experience. As both Fletcher and July note in the introduction of the LTLYM book, innovation is often achieved when an individual lets go of trying to be original.¹²

Chapter One

Experiencing Learning To Love You More:

A Background on Authorship and Aesthetic Experience

In spring of 2004 the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York held its thirty-second Biennial. Since 1932, the Whitney Museum’s biennial has attempted “...to provide a relatively unmediated view of the state of American art, exhibiting work by artists who were shown by neither the art establishment nor the galleries.”\(^{13}\) These exhibitions often unearth cultural rifts and new directions in the art world. Metaphorically, one might say that the 1993 Whitney Biennial signaled an end to 1980s culture. Similarly, the 2004 Biennial acknowledges the end of the consumer culture of the 1990s, and the economically challenging years following the 9/11 attacks.\(^{14}\) In the post-millennium decade, American culture appears to be moving away from its consumption-driven habits, and the self-referential art that matched it in the 1990s. Instead of buying the largest sports utility cars available, consumers are investing in fuel-efficient electric hybrid automobiles, recycling programs have expanded, and citizens have been moving towards socially conscious practices in their everyday lives. With these cultural trends of consumption in mind, Whitney curators, Chrissie Iles, Shamin M. Momin, and Debra Singer organized an exhibition that expressed the rebirth of a socially conscious society and its relationship to the production of art. Artists Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July were among those who carried out this sentiment at the 2004 Biennial for the collaborative project,


\(^{14}\) Ibid.
Learning to Love You More (hereafter LTLYM). The Whitney created a greater exposure for the LTLYM Website, which helped to put the project on the map. This chapter defines the LTLYM’s approach towards stranger participation, aesthetic experience, and art production. This chapter begins with an introduction and an investigation of authorship through the ideas presented by Marxist writer, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940), and the French post-structuralist writer Roland Barthes (1915-1980). Benjamin’s ideas are discussed throughout this study. The latter half of this chapter discusses the ideas of aesthetic experience through the approaches of the Situationist International (hereafter SI), as well as theories presented by contemporary Curator and theorist Nicolas Bourriaud.

Authorship

Benjamin was born into a wealthy Jewish family in Berlin, Germany. He wrote about art in the 1930s when Marxist theories sought to challenge the fascism in Europe, and Nazism in Germany.15 Beginning with authorship in art, Benjamin’s essay, “The Author as Producer” (1934) investigates the role of the author, and he argues that a work of art should actively involve the viewers as participants in the production of the work.16 Benjamin’s example is the opinion pages included in newspapers by the readers of the text. Letters submitted by subscription-holders become an act of collective participation in the production of the newspaper’s content. In other words, by submitting their opinion to be printed in the

publication, the reader no longer plays a passive role as simply a viewer, but rather becomes an active contributor to the newspaper. Benjamin states:

What matters, therefore, is the exemplary character of production, which is able, first to induce other producers to produce and second to put an improved apparatus at their disposal. And this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers—that is, readers or spectators into collaborators. 17

Benjamin defines the term “apparatus,” as a successful tool, if it is able to turn consumers into producers. Further along in his essay, Benjamin refers to the “apparatus” as media and technology. Likewise, one might consider the Internet such an apparatus. The Internet is a tool for communication, and it is used in the LTLYM project as a method to turn consumers into collaborators through participatory assignments. Additionally, LTLYM was not established as a time or site-specific project; rather, it was designed to be a continuous participatory project that used social engagement through the assignment/report structure as a medium for production. Through these methods, the LTLYM project is able to transform the consumer (an individual visiting a Website) into a producer (an individual participating in the content of the Website). This Website can be regarded as a success in regards to turning consumers into producers in Benjamin’s earlier definition because it established an ongoing participatory project through the apparatus of the Internet for seven years.

As Benjamin shed light on technology, the French theorist Roland Barthes’ thoughts on authorship are useful to understanding artistic production in a collective environment. Roland Barthes was heavily influenced by structuralism and post-structuralism. He wrote “The Death of the Author” (1968) during the aftermath of the May 1968 student protests against French

politics in the Vietnam War. “The Death of the Author” was developed as a literary critique; however, the essay has been significant in defining a viewer’s role in contemporary art. Barthes was interested in the structures of signs, signifiers, and the position that each plays in language as it is used. Barthes classifies the *sign* (symbols) as a culturally constructed form by the *signifier* (the one perceiving the sign), and the *signified* is the resulting idea expressed by the signifier from the sign. He defines the author as the signifier in literature, as being similar to an omniscient center of being, such as the western notions of God. In his essay, Barthes challenges capitalist values of consumption, and promotes the removal of a central author in texts in order to provide plurality to the body of work. Barthes argues that the author is a modern figure who emerged with English empiricism during the Middle Ages, and this notion of “author” did not exist in ethnographic societies. A mediator or a shaman in such societies traditionally narrated a story, but Barthes argues that these narrative codes were never proclaimed to be the mediator’s own genius. Based on this argument, a work art is treated as a static, because the ideas of authorship exist only in empirical societies. Furthermore, Barthes comments on the connection between the author and the role of authority. He links authority to capitalist ideologies, which stress the importance of a human person as the author. Barthes notes, “…the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing…” In this statement, Barthes argues that the author

20 Nancy Shawcross, “Roland Barthes,” in *Art: Key Contemporary Thinkers*, 149.
22 Ibid, 75.
23 Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” in *Participation*, 41.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid, 43.
is in a sense no more than a stenographer. The creator is only the “author” or “writer” when he or she is in the act of writing. One’s existence as the author does not present itself before or after the act of writing has taken place; one exists only when the writing is taking place in that present moment. Based on Barthes’s ideas, one may construe that competition ceases to exist when there is a system of participation of many individuals contributing to a work of art. Moreover, if competition is removed as an element of production, a work of art becomes a collective effort and gains a collective voice.

Despite the thirty-year span between the writings of Benjamin and Barthes, their contributions to the ideas of authorship are valued in contemporary cultural studies. Moreover, the events of World War II in Benjamin’s lifetime, and the Vietnam War in Barthes’s lifetime created a need for socially conscious evaluations in artist works. Similarly, the techniques and practices explored by LTLYM parallel the ideas offered by these writers. The Website encourages participants to share ideas, engage in stranger participation, and consider a greater empathy towards the world at large. The artistic medium of social practice used in LTLYM assignments are contemporary examples of Benjamin and Barthes theories, as a movement away from individual authorship towards a collective authorship. In response to contemporary artistic practices, Fletcher notes, “WHAT if the art world was based on a socialist system instead of a capitalist one...what if the goals we were shooting for were sharing, equality and mutual support, instead of competition, rarefaction and celebrity?”

In this quote, Fletcher asks the art world to consider art work as dialectical, participatory, and shared through

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an experience or act. In doing so, such methods challenge the art market’s ability to buy, sell, and collect the work of art.

The LTLYM Website is designed to engage and encourage viewers to participate or produce. More than 5,000 individuals worldwide have completed the assignments, which range from easily accomplished to time-consuming activities. Providing participants with a variety of options and ideas becomes less daunting, and encourages the production of the seventy assignments that appear on the site. As Benjamin noted, the success of such a venture can be quantified in the amount of producers who are compelled to produce. LTLYM has inspired thousands of individuals for seven years to share their thoughts, ideas and creations. The power behind this Website is not only in its breadth of participants, but also in the fact that the assignments foster artistic creation that is shared by strangers. Participation and social engagement are examples of social practice, which is the driving force behind this artistic medium, and used in many of the LTLYM pieces. Stranger involvement and collaboration are the core aesthetics that shape the LTLYM project. The labor of many individuals and the shared experience of creating becomes the work of art, rather than the material objects that result from the production of the assignments.

Fletcher’s and July’s personal art experiences and practices influence the development of some LTLYM’s assignments, which is discussed in detail in chapter two. Artists and non-artists alike submit, and contribute their own assignments to be shared and completed by LTLYM participants. Through these exchanges, there is a movement away from the role of “creator” and into the role of “facilitator” by sharing creative ventures, and encouraging others...

27 Bryan-Wilson, 144.
to participate in the production of art on the LTLYM site.\textsuperscript{28} The founding artists, along with all the contributors to the LTLYM site become co-creators and share authorship in the project.\textsuperscript{29}

Since 2002, LTLYM has been an ongoing project in participation, sharing, and generosity, which subsequently resulted in a successful project that has been recognized for its aesthetic value in the art world. As a recent interview in the Winter 2009 of \textit{Art Journal} noted, the primary members of the Social Practice program at Portland State University have discussed the process by which the interdisciplinary quality of the work emerged in their art school, but has challenged the academic apparatus and art world because of its disregard for traditional aesthetic outcomes.\textsuperscript{30} On the seventh year anniversary in May of 2009, the project will conclude, and be maintained as an online archive. When asked about the role LTLYM will play in the history of art, co-founder Fletcher replied, “I hope that it burns the art world down to the ground, so that it can grow back up in a better way (non-capitalistic in all its various manifestations, star system, winner take all, elitist, consumable object oriented, etc).”\textsuperscript{31}

The role of authorship can be further investigated through the goals of aesthetic experience in art. LTLYM has played an important role in contemporary art, as it has created a broader definition of art through aesthetic experience rather than simply formal aesthetics. The LTLYM project is particularly important to the study of art because it indicates a shift from aesthetic autonomy towards a relational aesthetic as having a social practical value in art. The

\textsuperscript{29} An index of LTLYM participant names and assignments are provided on the Website, www.learningtoloveyoumore.com
\textsuperscript{31} Harrell Fletcher. 2009. Email interview with the artist by Annie Schorgl. Cincinnati, OH and Portland, OR. January 26.
Website relates to these shifts, contextualizing LTLYM's social practice medium by discussing some work of Situationist International (hereafter SI), and the role of the curator, critic, and viewer in Nicolas Bourriaud's (b.1965) relational theory of form. Fletcher and July began the LTLYM project with a goal of creating opportunities for people to have experiences with others, and also with the environment around them. It was their intention through the LTLYM site to develop assignments that would foster a greater empathy towards its participants. LTLYM did not form with an agenda of creating or being a work of art. However, the influential and popular theories of the Situationists and Bourriaud in today’s art world have led to the undeniable aesthetic value that is also recognized in the LTLYM experiences.

**Aesthetic Experience**

When asked about artistic influences upon LTLYM, Fletcher noted, “… we never really studied the Situationists or any of those folks, but we were aware they had existed, for some reason I never got really excited about that stuff, other than a few ideas I’ve heard attributed to them.” Fletcher noted that he never studied the Situationists in great detail, but he was aware of their work given the SI’s considerable popularity among contemporary thinkers. Although, the Situationists may not have directly led to the formation of LTLYM, their theories paved the way for recognition of aesthetic experience within potentially artistic contexts. The SI was formed in 1957 as a part of the French avant-garde, and the group’s height of

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34 Ibid.
significance occurred during the 1968 May Events before disbanding in 1972. Founding member Guy Debord (1931—1994) writes:

Our central purpose is the construction of situations, that is, the concrete construction of temporary settings of life and their transformation into higher, passionate nature. We must develop an intervention directed by the complicated factors of two great components in perpetual interaction: the material setting of life and the behaviors that it incites and that overturn it. Debord explains that goals of SI include interaction with the social and urban spatial arrangements, environment, and an attempt to change the outcome of the situation or spectacle. There are three components that Debord discusses. The first is “unitary urbanism” which he describes as the “use of ensemble of arts and technics as means of contributing to an integral composition.” Unitary urbanism involves recognition of the urban environments, such as architecture, individuals within the environment, and incorporating these elements into the aesthetic of situations that people create. The second component of SI’s strategies involves dérive. The term literally translates as “drifting,” but refers to an awareness of behaviors and environmental effects, and allows for a greater consciousness of relational encounters by participants in dérives, which offers an occurrence in urban places. The final component is détournment, which is the “re-use of pre-existing artistic elements in a new ensemble.” Debord further explains that the general goal of SI is to extend the mediocre moments of life, and reduce empty moments in daily life as much as possible. It is important to note that these

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37 Debord, in *Art in Theory*, 702.
38 Ibid., 704
39 Ibid., 702.
theories were influenced by Marxist theory. The SI felt that art should not just express passions of the world, but also have the ability to materially change the world, and extend its conventional boundaries.\(^{40}\) This collective movement created a political and cultural revolution, and strived to build a new civilization in its wake.\(^{41}\)

When asked about the pedagogical goals of LTLYM, Fletcher responded, “Just getting people to have experiences with other people and environment around them, and maybe develop a greater empathy for other people. Having a good time.”\(^{42}\) The statement made by Debord on the goals of the SI movement in 1957, and the later statement made by Fletcher in 2009 seems to speak to many of the same sentiments. The SI established a theory in cultural praxis that attempts to tap the desirous within what may otherwise pass for mundane moments of the everyday. Similarly, the LTLYM assignments look to create an experience, which will result in a greater understanding of an individual’s environment. There are several assignments to draw from on the Website. A complete list and discussion of the assignments will be discussed in chapter two in four categorical examples. LTLYM converts the mundane into the sublime, and creates a feeling of empathy among the far-flung, who commune with each other through the Website and with other people as they follow assignments that are designed to elicit social activities and collaborative groups of people.

Following in the footsteps of the Situationists, Curator and theorist Nicolas Bourriaud offered his thoughts and observations in the book *Relational Aesthetics* (2002). There, he writes that there is an area of struggle in the 20\(^{th}\) century between two ideas about the world: a

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\(^{41}\) Ibid.  
rationalist philosophy hailing from the 18th century Enlightenment and irrational philosophy influenced by Dada, and Situationists.\textsuperscript{43} However, Bourriaud notes that modernity can no longer be condensed into “rationalist teleology, any more than political messianism.”\textsuperscript{44} His argument recognizes that modernity informs contemporary art and carries on the fight of the Situationists to create participatory models, and that one cannot escape historicism. The relational aesthetic theory is summed up by Bourriaud:

So the essence of humankind is purely trans-individual, made up of bonds that link individuals together in social forms which are invariably historical...There is no such thing as an “end of history” or “end of art”, because the game is forever being re-enacted, in relation to its function, in other words, in relation to its players and the system in which they construct and criticise.\textsuperscript{45}

Basically he explains, the aesthetic criterion for art is imbedded in history. Returning again to the writings of Marxist sociologist Walter Benjamin, according to him, there is no past or future in art, there is only the present in relation to the past. The future is dependent on the relation of the protagonist who constructs the experience. Furthermore, it is the idea that art is linked to historicism, which is also implicated in Benjamin’s understandings of the relationship to redemption and messianism.\textsuperscript{46} In “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (1940) Benjamin wrote,

To articulate what is past does not mean to recognize ‘how it really was.’ It means to take control of a memory...historicism depicts the ‘eternal’ picture of the past; the historical materialist, an experience with it, which stands alone.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{43} Nicolas Bourriaud, \textit{Relational Aesthetics}, 12.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{45}Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
Bourriaud writing in the year 1998, much like Benjamin sixty years earlier, acknowledges that history can only be discussed and recognized from the lens of the present-day. For example, Bourriaud defines relational aesthetics not as a theory of art, but rather a theory of form because the notion of “art theory” implies that art has a place of origin and destination. In other words, this notion would suggest that there is an end to art. Rather than subscribing to this idea, Bourriaud believes that art is a continuous cycle of interconnected links. These links are similar to the example that Benjamin provides in his ideas about history, in which he defines historicism as a constellation system rather than a linear series of events. Similarly, Bourriaud’s relational aesthetic theory is defined as a form theory existing in the constellation system of art.

Bourriaud’s theory of form and historicism contextually relates to the LTLYM aesthetic. Simply put, it allows us to see the Website in the context of a relational aesthetic theory. It is a manifestation of experiences documented in what Bourriaud refers to as an “arena of exchange”. The arena is not only specific to the execution of the assignments through the specific participants and their experiences, but also in the arena of the Website as being the medium of exchange. Bourriaud also notes that the ambitious artists is one who includes their practice within historical modernity, and in doing so, an artist will not repeat the forms, claims or functions of prior art pieces because it is being dictated by chance. He notes, “This ‘chance’ can be summed up in just a few words: learning to inhabit the world in a better way.”

48 Bourriaud, 19.
50 Bourriaud, 19
51 Ibid., 13.
Bourriaud’s statement on chance happenings is crucial to understanding the methods practiced by LTLYM participants. LTLYM’s assignments are designed to challenge its participants to “inhabit the world in a better way”.

In conclusion of the discussions of artistic authorship and aestheticism, where Fletcher muses on the idea of making art, “…we want to blur the lines as much as possible. I don’t think trying to make art is a good idea. Better to do something else and maybe some art will happen accidentally. Whatever art is.”

Debord denied any artistic character in his final analysis of SI. Similarly, Bourriaud notes that the inert-human game that forms the object challenges the commodity basis placed on art. The LTLYM project embraces collective authorship, aesthetic value based on experiences gained from assignment/report format, and this aesthetic value of experience is linked to the constellation of art-historical concepts.

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52 Harrell Fletcher. Interview, January 26, 2009.
53 Bourriaud, 19.
54 Ibid.
Chapter Two

Sharing Assignments:

Appropriation and Collaboration within the LTLYM Assignments

What is lovely about children is that they can make such a production, such a big deal, out of everything, or nothing…the adults plod along, the children twirl, leap, skip, run now to this side and now to that, look for things to step or jump over or walk along or around, climb on anything that can be climbed—John Holt, 1983

There is something very nostalgic about the LTLYM assignments. Even the idea of completing “assignments” evokes thoughts of childhood and simplicity. Many of tasks either directly ask the participants to reminiscence about their childhood, such as Assignment #18 (Recreate a poster you had as a teenager), or ask the participant to take on a very childlike approach to observing and interacting with the world, such as Assignment #66 (Make a field guide to you backyard.) However, the assignments are carefully structured. Art Historian Erica Levin notes, “Though generated by the giddy logic of the brainstorm, the [LTLYM] entries listed are as structured as the most rigorous art school assignment.” Referring to the assignments, Miranda July aptly observes, “…Harrell and I both like the clunky ‘dumb’ approaches to complex things. This is that kind of over-simplified approach to the somewhat ephemeral task of being an artist.”

This chapter is an analysis of the seventy LTLYM assignments. There are three section headings to this chapter: 1) A List of LTLYM Assignment Classifications; 2) Examples of LTLYM Assignment Classifications; and 3) Art and Appropriation in LTLYM Assignments. The first section introduces classifications of the seventy LTLYM assignments. I have classified the

57 July, Interview.
assignments in four categories, in order to demonstrate LTLYM’s balance between simple, yet sophisticated approaches towards art production. The categories that I designed are grouped as: 1) Learning about yourself; 2) Learning about your friends; 3) Learning about your environment; and 4) Learning about strangers. The second section provides examples of these classifications. Finally, the third section discusses how these shared LTLYM assignments examine art and appropriation. This chapter investigates the designations of the assignments, and will be discussed in the context of the assignments role as art, through a discussion of artistic appropriation and the adaptation of Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July's own art work.

A List of LTLYM Assignment Classifications

The majority of LTLYM assignments deal with participants learning more about themselves through direct and indirect methods. I define the “direct methods” as those that instruct participants to do an assignment where they are the subjects of the instruction, or the subjects who they are interacting with are directly related to their approach. The direct methods are present among the following: Assignments #10 (Make a flyer of your day), #11 (Photograph a scar and write about it), #14 (Write your life story in less than a day), #16 (Make a paper replica of your bed), #18 (Recreate a poster you had as a teenager), #28 (Edit photo album page), #32 (Draw a scene from a movie that made you cry), #35 (Ask your family members what you do), #37 (Write down a recent argument), #39 (Take a picture of your parents kissing) #40 (Heal yourself), #41 (Document your bald spot), #43 (Make an exhibition of the art in your parents house), #45 (Reread you favorite book), #50 (Take a flash photo underneath your bed), #51 (Describe what you do with your body when you die), #52 (Write the
phone call you wish you would have had), #53 (Give advice to yourself in the past), #55
(Photograph a significant outfit), #58 (Record the sound that is keeping you awake), #61
(Describe your ideal government), #66 (Make a field guide to your yard). The next series of
assignments are classified as indirect methods for individuals to learn more about themselves. I
define these indirect methods as a way for the participants to carry-out an assignment that
helps them to learn more themselves through their approaches to exploring the world. These
examples include the following: Assignments #1 (Make a child’s outfit in an adult size), #6
(Make a poster of shadows), #7 (Recreate three minutes of a Fresh Air interview), #13 (Recreate
a moment after a crime), #19 (Illustrate a scene or make an object), #23 (Recreate this
snapshot) (Figure 1), #24 (Cover the song “Don’t Dream It’s Over”), #42 (List five events from
1984), #44 (Make a LTYM assignment), #48 (Make the saddest song), #68 (Feel the news), #63
(Make an encouraging banner), #70 (Say goodbye). These assignments indirectly relate to an
individual because the methods can be viewed in relation to the participant’s creative thought
process.

The next series of assignments relate to methods about learning to interact or
collaborate with someone else. Typically these assignments involve individuals who have a
prior relationship with each other. These assignments refer to working collaboratively, learning
more about a person on a more personal level in order to produce a report. This is an atypical
approach because the subject of the assignment becomes as important as the person who is
interpreting them. The following assignments are such examples: Assignments #3 (Make a
documentary video about a small child), # 5 (Recreate an object from somebody’s past), #9

(Draw a constellation of someone’s freckles), #25 (Make a video of someone dancing), #31 (Spend time with a dying person), #33 (Braid someone’s hair), #49 (Draw a picture of your friend’s friend), #47 (Re-enact a scene from a movie that made someone else cry), #56 (Make a portrait of your friend’s desires), #57 (Lip-sync to a shy neighbor’s Garth Brooks cover), #59 (Interview someone who has experienced war).  

Learning more about other individuals serves as a less self-referential approach towards producing work.

The next classification of assignments exemplifies the ways in which the site draws people together from across the country, and across the world. The LTLYM Website is an opportunity for strangers to interact with each other through the site. I classify the methods regarding learning more about strangers and sharing yourself with strangers in the following group of assignments: Assignments #12 (Get a temporary tattoo of Morgan Rozacky’s neighbors), #17 (Record your own guided meditation), #20 (Take a family portrait of two families), #21 (Sculpt a bust of Steve), #22 (Recreate a scene from Laura Lark’s life story), #26 (Design an article of clothing for Mona to crochet), #30 (Take a picture of strangers holding hands), #38 (Act someone else’s argument ) from the list provided by Assignment #37 reports, #46 (Draw Raymond’s Craver’s Cathedral), #64 (Teach us an exercise), #65 (Perform the phone call that someone else wish they could have had). These assignments create bonds among strangers, who may not otherwise experience an interaction with each other.

The books written by non-traditional arts educator John Holt influenced Harrell Fletcher’s approaches towards his own teaching and assignments. Holt noted in his book How

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60 Ibid.

61 Fletcher, Interview.
Children Learn (1983) that adults often plod along the streets, not embracing the niceties of life such as balancing on a ledge or jumping over puddles, which are activities that seem almost second-nature to children. The next classification of assignments is similar to activities explored by the Situationists, these LTLYM assignments encourage participants to drift within their urban environments and create spectacles. I have classified the final list of assignments discussed in this chapter as an exercise in learning more about your environment. These assignments include: Assignments #2 (Make a neighborhood field recording), #4 (Start a lecture series), #8 (Curate an artist’s retrospective in a public place), #15 (Hang a wind chime on a tree in a parking lot), #27 (Take a picture of the sun), #34 (Make a protest sign and protest), #29 (Make an audio recording of a choir), #36 (Grow a garden in an unexpected spot), #54 (Draw the news) #62 (Make an educational public plaque), #69 (Climb the top of a tree and take a picture of the view.) This final grouping of assignments asks participants to drift through their environments and heighten their awareness by constructing situations.

Examples of LTLYM Assignment Classifications

An example of a direct investigation of one’s self can been seen in Assignment # 14 (Write your life story in less than a day) with the example reported by artist Laura Lark, an artist and writer from Houston, Texas. Lark declares that she always felt that art and writing were solitary ventures until she participated in LTLYM. Although she had contributed to several assignments prior to Assignment # 14, this one became particularly significant to the artist.

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62 Holt, 305.
63 [www.learningtoloveyoumore.com](http://www.learningtoloveyoumore.com), Accessed March 27, 2009
64 Laura Lark, in Learning to Love You More, 144.
After completing and posting the assignment on LTLYM, Lark was amazed to receive several emails in response to her story. Even more surprising, the popularity of Lark’s story prompted the formation of Assignment #22 (Recreate a scene from Laura Lark’s life), which is an example of collaborating with others on the website. Eventually, Lark’s story was performed as skits by several different participants and translated into several languages, and these performances were shown while Fletcher asked members of the audience to read paragraphs about the corresponding videos at Aurora Picture Show, a non-profit vanguard film house in Houston, Texas on February 14, 2004.65 The readers of Lark’s story participated in the recreation of her life. Although she previously thought art must be a solitary act, she found that using the medium of social engagement offered new ways to create and express her most intimate feelings in a work of art. The experience that Lark felt as she embraced the ideas of collaboration is reflective of a statement made by Benjamin in “The Author as Producer,” he observes, “...the moment a producer engages...true solidarity is achieved.”66 This sentiment is also similar to the insights expressed by the founding artists in the introduction of the book Learning to Love You More (2007), Fletcher and July note, “Sometimes it seems like the moment we let go of trying to be original, we actually feel something new—which was the whole point of being artists in the first place.”67

Examples of assignments that encourage participants to collaborate with strangers may be found in Assignment #30 (Take a picture of strangers holding hands.) This assignment shares aspects of Situationist International theory. Debord notes that the construction of situations

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65 Lark, in Learning to Love You More, 144.
66 Benjamin, 775.
67 Fletcher and July, 1.
has the ability to take momentary ambiances in life and transform them into an experience of extraordinary quality.\textsuperscript{68} There is a quality about Assignment \#30 that considerably transforms the environment of strangers. For example, the subjects holding hands are placed in an initially awkward situation. Additionally, the individual who is constructing the situation, and taking the picture is asked to become more aware of their environment. Participants are expected to make the unexpected occur through this assignment. The resulting reports show participants with expressions that range from uneasy to extraordinary (Figures 2 and Figure 3.) Through these images, the subject’s emotions are expressive of the newly formed situation and environment, which has been suddenly transformed through their interaction with a stranger by holding his or her hand. Through this situation, the individuals are no longer strangers, because this constructed situation will forever link them in an experience on the LTLYM Website’s archives. This experience could be a trip to the grocery store or an afternoon jog. Whatever the setting or circumstances may be at the time before the picture is taken, a new set of circumstances results in an experience that facilitates individuals taking note of the people, and environment around them.

The series of LTLYM assignments which ask participants to interact or create new situations in their environments may be associated to yet another SI theory. LTLYM applies strategies that are similar to strategies discussed by Debord in Society of the Spectacle (1967), as written in paragraph thirty-seven of this text, Debord notes:

\begin{quote}
The world the spectacle holds up to view is at once here and elsewhere; it is the world of the commodity ruling over all lived experience. The commodity world is
\end{quote}

thus shown as it really is, for its logic is one with men’s (sic) estrangement from one another and from the sum total of what they produce.69

This quote relates to the group of assignments that asks individuals to interact with their environment, such as Assignment # 62 (Make an educational public plaque). LTLYM asks its participants to interact with their environment, and change the outcome of the landscape. For example, outside of a rent-controlled apartment building in New York City’s meat packing district, the last thing one might expect to see is the Cellular Automata Rule 30 illustrated on a piece of cardboard with permanent black marker (Figure 4). At first glance, the sign appears to be an artistic rendering of a Tetris game. However, the report posted on the Website explains that this Automata Rule is an important tool for understanding the way in which the world operates, both scientifically and symbolically. The creator of this educational plaque describes the Cellular Automata Rule 30 in detail:

This is the simplest program capable of producing mathematically irreducible results (chaotic, random, etc.) and represents the new paradigm of understanding nature as a simple programic structure rather than static mathematical models which have failed to account for the complexity of nature. This is symbolic of many movements from the shift from High Modernism to Blobitecture in architecture to the shift of deductive methods in sciences as in biology to understanding things in a series of systems as is systems of biology (used to understand the brain, cancer research, and AIDS research). It is very important and will soon (in the next 20 years or so) become the dominant paradigm for any type of engineering ideas and metaphors for thinking of the external world.70

Another example of an assignment, which may not be considered as relevant to understanding the dynamic and chaotic nature of the world, but can be an important skill to have in the appropriate situation is Jonathan Greenland and Scottie Caldwell’s educational plaque in front

70 Fletcher and July, 62.
of the library on Market Street in Charlottesville, Virginia (Figure 5.) The creators of these signs provide a visual resource on the proper way to set a table, including captions, diagrams, and the names of the utensils and dishes for each place setting. The Cellular Automata Rule 30 may be too convoluted for some to fully grasp, and the table setting may be inconsequential for a single individual who dines carry-out most nights, but both signs are examples of drifting through the environment and adding details that can dramatically change the landscape, and educates those who are among the environment, no matter how profound or mundane the instruction appears to be to an onlooker.

One of the greatest aspects of LTLYM’s methods is its use of humor in many of the assignments to bring people together. Walter Benjamin writes that the best way to encourage thinking and introspection is through laughter. He goes so far as to note that convulsion of the diaphragm triggers better opportunities for thought than the convulsion of the soul.71 It is evident that LTLYM contributors share this belief because the thought-provoking social assignments are often humorous in nature. Not only do many of the assignments have a comical edge, but also participants often choose to put an amusing spin on their interpretations of the assignments. For example, Assignment #2 (Make a neighborhood field recording), asks participants to include photographs and captions of their neighbors engaged in daily activities.72 Morgan Rozacky and Kate Kirby from San Leon, Texas took eight pictures of elderly neighbors, which included documentation of their neighbors playing the piano and guitar, and singing into a garden hose. Barney is one such neighbor who plays the guitar and records his musical compositions at his home (Figure 6). These charming snapshots by Rozacky and Kirby

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71 Benjamin, “The Author as Producer” 779.
72 Fletcher and July, 150.
inspired a LTLYM spin-off assignment, which asks participants to collaborate by connecting with strangers through Assignment #12 (Get a temporary tattoo of Rozacky’s and Kirby’s neighbors). LTLYM participant Erica Hill got a temporary tattoo of Barney with his guitar (Figure 7), which covered her entire back. Simple tools, such as red and black ballpoint pens create a collection of tattoos, which range from detailed portraiture and text to childlike representations of the San Leon residents.

Art and Appropriation in LTLYM

In the beginning of this chapter I discussed the LTLYM assignments in a list of various classifications that relate to several aesthetic experiences. The LTLYM assignments challenge the value placed on originality in the production of art. The use of appropriative techniques and challenging notions of originality have been explored in modern and contemporary art in much of the 20th and 21st centuries. As discussed in chapter one, Situationists proposed an aesthetic value in experience in the late 1950s, and in many ways LTLYM manifests these same qualities in the assignment/report structure. However, the social aesthetic found in LTLYM has a quality that addresses more than just a situational approach. Artists often base their success on exposure in institutional arenas, such as museums, commercial galleries, and art magazines, which will be discussed in detail in chapter three. The methods of appropriation in art are sometimes associated with negative connotations because it suggests to some critics that the material is contrived, and expresses a lack of innovation. However, this notion is a somewhat dated approach in the context of contemporary art. In regards to appropriating ideas and approaches in art in the context of the LTLYM assignments, Fletcher explains, “I think almost all
the assignments are adaptations of things we have done ourselves in some way or another and wanted to share with other people, like finding a really good burrito shop and then telling other people that they should check it out too.”

Originally, the authorless Situationists appropriated already existing artistic material through détournment to create a higher level of understanding and create a new work.

LTLYM confronts the values associated with originality. Drawing from his experience as an art professor, Fletcher explains his pedagogical goals behind instruction-based assignments, he notes:

The only way I found I could get students to produce what I considered to be good work was to prescribe very detailed instructions for the assignments I gave them. They usually resisted because their idea was that they were artists and they should be allowed to do whatever they wanted to do, but that usually resulted in not only empty work, but uninteresting looking work. When they were forced to do a very specific assignment...The finished pieces actually turned out really amazing. Which is sort of how and why the web project I do with Miranda July, Learning To Love You More, works.

LTLYM is concerned with the collective voice in art production. The author or producer and the product are both dynamic in nature. LTLYM creates a forum for expression through shared thoughts and ideas. The seventy LTLYM assignments are inviting, and remain very pure in their goals, which July explains:

...I think the thing I've learned most is how to give an assignment, what makes one work. which connects very much to my art, because I'm always trying to connect to people in a way that will make them feel so much that they do something new or say something new, feel braver. The assignments ask for this literally, and I think the ones that work best are usually the simplest and most open, emotionally...

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73 Fletcher, Interview, January 26, 2009.
74 Debord, in Art in Theory, 705.
75 Harrell Fletcher and Michael Rakowitz, Between Artists (Canada: A.R.T. Press, 2008), 21.
76 July, Interview.
In many ways, it is through purity in approach and simple assignments that LTLYM confronts the aspects of originality in artistic production.

Confronting originality is a defining characteristic the Website, and expresses its important role in the history of art. Fletcher and July challenge the idea of artistic appropriation in the LTLYM project. Many of the assignments were drawn from Fletcher and July’s own investigations in art. Fletcher and July remove themselves as the central creator of a concept, and invite strangers to participate in an interpretation of their ideas. The Website takes a new approach to the idea of artistic appropriation, which often carries negative connotations. When asked about sharing their own concepts with others on the site, both Fletcher and July replied in a similar fashion. Fletcher responded:

We just never bought into all that originality stuff that the art world seems to value so much. I think the idea of originality is really just for the capitalists, and artists pathetically went along for the ride. I think the pursuit of originality just gets in the way, so we wanted LTLYM to operate in a way that reduced the value of originality and instead was much more about having experiences and documenting them. I’ve often found that documentation is more interesting to me and also more aesthetically interesting to me than “art.” 77

July responded:

Part of the genesis of the site was this idea that sometimes it’s nice to be told what to do—that this can be creative. Since I didn’t have a great experience of this in school, this seems kind of radical to me, even risky. But in another way, it is just a more pointed, literal approach to what I’m trying to do anyway in my art. To inspire, motivate, not just move people, but cause people to move themselves… 78

77 Fletcher, Interview.
78 July, Interview
Keeping in mind Fletcher’s and July’s thoughts on originality values in art, the remainder of this chapter will discuss the adaption of LTLYM assignments from Fletcher’s and July’s earlier investigations in their own work.

The first example of appropriating Fletcher’s and July’s work in the LTLYM Website is Assignment # 6 (Make a Poster of Shadows.) The assignment shares many of the same qualities found in a July film that appeared in Risk/Riesgo (2003), which included a series of film shorts by U.S and Mexican artists co-produced and curated by Kathy High. This series investigated feelings of isolation, wishes and desires, and the resulting risks that result through one’s own isolating behaviors. July wrote and directed the film short Getting Stronger Every Day (2001). Fletcher was the cinematographer for this short. July’s Getting Stronger Every Day films people isolated in a room (Figure 8). The individuals in the film appear to blur their vision, and create ambiguous shapes of colors, or shadows, which are superimposed on the screen as low-tech digital images. July says that this film is about being lost and found, and reflects these feelings in a “low-tech” nature of the spirit realm. Assignment # 6 on the LTLYM Website draws on similar ideas explored by July in this earlier film. The instructions for Assignment #6 ask the participant to make a poster of shadows. The directions instruct the participant to use the colors pink, brown, light green, and orange to create the shadows. These are the same colors July used in the low-tech digital images in the film Getting Stronger Every Day. Eleanor (last name unknown) from Leeds, Yorkshire in England used orange to create beautiful two-dimensional forms (Figure 9) based on the LTLYM assignment. Similar to July’s film, LTLYM

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viewers are able to see the colorful shapes and shadows in everyday objects. In July’s film, the origin of the shape is not immediately apparent. It is not until one of the film’s actors holds up a stuffed-animal in front of the shape does the viewer realize that the shape or shadow is formed from the leg of a stuffed-animal. Similarly, Eleanor’s shapes take on a vague form, but these forms allow the viewer to create imagined places as a source of inspiration. July offers her film concept to LTLYM participants to consider in this assignment. Participants create both simple and complex shapes, which allow LTLYM viewers to interpret their concepts of shadows as they see fit. In response to using this film as an inspiration for the LTLYM assignment, July says:

...I’ve always liked shapes...I did have a Maholy-Nagy book in my early 20s and I really appreciated what he wrote about not falling for the trap of specialization. Because I knew very clearly even then that I would never do just one thing. But you know he also did work with shadows, and I think this assignment is influenced by him and my own interest in finding the abstract and spiritual in the every day.81

The next example of sharing artistic concepts is Assignment # 28 (Edit a photo page) (Figure 10). Appropriating, editing, and adding to a photograph is a practice that Fletcher has incorporated in a great deal of his own work. In the past, Fletcher has developed rolls of film found in second-hand stores. After developing the found photographs, Fletcher has explored adaptations and edits with mixed-mediad to these snapshots. For example, working with Bay area artists Mark Thompson and John Rubin on a project called The Boy Mechanic, Fletcher and Rubin exhibited a found snapshot of a couple in Walnut Creek, California. The artists then enlarged the image, and included an electronic display listing the names of every couple in the Walnut

81 July, Interview.
Creek phone directory. The piece was named *Lost Couple Photo*.\(^{82}\) Both LTLYM founding artists readily offer their ideas to be appropriated by the participants of the Website in areas that they have focused on in their own artistic careers, such as film and photography. As they share their concepts with the world at large, Fletcher and July have successfully removed the often negative notions surrounding appropriation, and offered a positive approach to this method in art through the LTLYM project.

As Fletcher and July share their investigations in art with the participants of LTLYM, they also recognize their connection to the history of art. It is evident that the founding artists place a great deal of value on collaborations, sharing ideas, and generosity in the production of assignments for the LTLYM Website. Fletcher and July may not have had a specific set of aims, treatise, or a manifesto in mind when they launched LTLYM, but it is made obvious by the generous nature of the assignments that they believe in the transformative qualities associated with experiencing the world through simple methods, such as looking for shadows or placing relevance to a lost or discarded photograph. Although, Fletcher and July are hesitant to classify LTLYM as “art”, or as a work that embodies specific theoretical implications, they do recognize the Website’s ability to work within the contextual framework of art. Fletcher and July do not acknowledge specific theoretical influences on the construction of the assignments, although July acknowledges that they are a part of the lineage of prior art movements and collectives. July observes:

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... Harrell went to art school and was probably influenced by people, and then influenced me, so I'm not saying we're not part of a lineage, I just don't know the names. I know Yoko Ono did instructional paintings. 83

In July’s acknowledgement of lineage, there is an obvious link between the social practice methods found in LTLYM, and the Fluxus artist Yoko Ono, who did a series on instruction paintings in the Sogetsu Art Center in Tokyo in 1962, and a year later at the AG Gallery in New York. 84  Ono displayed the canvases with instructions attached to them, such as Painting for the Wind (Summer of 1961), “Cut a hole in a bag filled with seeds of any kind and place the bag where there is wind.” 85  Fletcher also acknowledges lineages in the social practice methods with an earlier collaborative, “…in general I thought Group Material seemed really interesting.” 86  Group Material began as a group of disenchanted New York City artists, writers and activists, who felt that there was little opportunity available to produce and exhibit art. In 1979, the group decided to meet on Monday nights in each other’s homes, to discuss and determine new and alternative modes of producing and exhibiting art that would be appropriate for their aims. 87  The Group Material collaborative had become frustrated with the formal aesthetics of modernism as being divorced from social realities of the everyday life. 88  Group Material’s decision to use in collaborative methods and socially-engaged art followed their experiences working outside the marketplace after art school, which allowed them to create art largely without traditional limitations of aesthetic form and content. 89  Early literature that they put

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83 Fletcher, Rubin, and Thompson.
85 Ibid., 15.
86 Fletcher, Interview.
88 Ibid., 89.
out included press-releases, art manifestos, and exhibitions which attacked the art world’s market-based drives, its morally bankrupt values, and patterns of consumption. The influences that Group Material had on the formation of some of the LTLYM assignments are apparent. For example, Group Material wanted to discuss how culture was made and who made it, they introduced themselves to the neighborhood on 13th Street in New York City with the exhibition, *The People’s Choice* (January 9-February 2, 1981), later renamed *Arroz con Mango* (Figure 11). The exhibition featured objects such as mementos, folk art, photographs, and religious icons that were contributed by people who lived in the neighborhood on the Lower East side. Group Material asked their neighbors to donate:

...things that might not usually find on their way into an art gallery: the things that you personally find beautiful, the objects that you keep for your own pleasure, the objects that have meaning for you, your family, and your friends...Choose something that you feel will communicate to others...”

In line with Group Material’s earlier neighborhood exhibition, LTLYM Assignment #43 (*Make an exhibition of the art in your parents house*), and Assignment #8 (*Curate an artist’s retrospective in a public place*) incorporates these same strategies (Figures 12 and 13). These assignments tell us that an exhibition can be curated from items that have personal rather than aesthetic significance, and also can appear outside the institutional walls of a museum or gallery space.

These strategies that focused on collectivity and investigations of appropriation have been explored throughout the 20th century history of art, and particularly in contemporary art and scholarship. Historian Robert S. Nelson discusses appropriation as it is imbedded in French philosophies discussed earlier in chapter one. For example, the theories of the sign, signifier,

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90Deitcher, 18.
91 Avigikos, 94.
92 Ibid.
and signified as investigated by Roland Barthes. In this theory, signs are related to culturally-constructed symbols, the signifier is the one who is the perceiving the sign and the signified are the meanings given to the signs. Avoiding overtly theological implications in LTLYM pedagogy, Nelson gives an accurate description of appropriation, which can be applied to the goals of the Website, he notes:

> Artists, art historians, critics may lack the means to purchase actual works of art, but some have the power to transform ordinary objects into art and vice versa. In both cases, the quality or the significance of the object transfers to the person, creating the appropriative loop.\(^93\)

Furthermore, Nicolas Bourriaud compares this positive view of appropriation to a flea market, he writes that the flea market is “...where products of multiple provenances converge, waiting for new uses.”\(^94\) Again, we are reminded by Walter Benjamin that objects made by humans have historically been able to be copied and reproduced by humans.\(^95\) Although, Benjamin had no concept linking the concept of our digital age of media and the Internet, that would come nearly sixty years after his death, in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (1935-36) he prophetically alludes to the notion that technology will lead society to a greater availability for reproduction in artwork, and this reproduction should not be viewed as necessarily negative.\(^96\)

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Finally, artist and critic Douglas Crimp refers to artist Robert Rauschenberg’s as an example of artistic appropriation that challenged the institutional art world, in the ways in which LTLYM has as well. In Crimp’s essay “Appropriating Appropriation” (1983) he states:

...Rauschenberg’s early 1960s works was their destruction of the guarded autonomy of modernist painting through the introduction of photography onto the surface of the canvas. This was important not only because it threatened the exhibition of traditional production mode, but also because it questioned all the claims to authenticity according to which the major social institution of art—the museum determined its body of objects and its field of knowledge. 97

LTLYM continues the tradition of borrowing and sharing objects, images, and ideas, within the framework of the assignment/report structure. As prophesized by Marxist critic Benjamin, the availability of reproducibility will grow as technology continues to expand. Crimp’s quote examined appropriation and its ability to change the mode of production in art mediums as well as challenge the institution. Fletcher and July explore concepts associated with appropriation by sharing their own artistic ideas to be considered by the LTLYM participants. This chapter has introduced and explored the seventy LTLYM assignments, and offers a critique on the importance of originality associated with artistic production.

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Chapter Three

Giving the Gift of Art:

Establishing a Gift-Economy through LTLYM's Institutional Critique

Division was selfish, and selfishness was divisive. Community therefore re instituted equality to the extent that it re instituted fraternity (sic)—Jacques Ranciere

Looking at LTLYM as a whole, the goals are simply the creation of a project that embraces sharing, generosity, collaboration, and empathy that operates outside of an institutional art world. However, it appears as through the purity of the content, and the nature of the assignments is embraced by the very same art institution that LTLYM seemingly avoids. The lines are often blurred in regards to what is considered to be art in the postmodern era, and within the contextual framework of contemporary art in general. Even claiming to work outside an institutional framework requires a reactive understanding of what is outside, as defined by what the inside excludes. LTLYM’s inclusion in the 2004 Whitney Biennale resulted in exhibitions of the Website in gallery spaces, and recognition of it within various art journals, and publications, including the New York Times. This attention has led the art world to embrace LTLYM as a contemporary work of art. However, Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July did not initially create LTLYM as a work of art. LTLYM in many respects function in a poststructuralist mode, as it has inadvertently and unexpectedly blurred the lines between what is regarded and disregarded as art. The very nature of the LTLYM directly or indirectly becomes an institutional critique of the gallery and museum market-driven economies, and becomes an exemplary model of a gift-economy in art in a post-studio era. Despite the fact that LTLYM’s practices

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functions outside of a “brick and mortar” setting, is not to say that the Website is anti-institutional. Rather, the argument can be made that LTLYM serves an alternative to the capitalist-driven art institutions. The following chapter is divided into two sections that discuss the ways in which LTLYM functions as an institutional critique of the traditional modes of collecting and exhibiting work. LTLYM’s non-traditional exhibition space not only functions as a critique of the institution of art, but also establishes a world-wide economy based on generosity, by sharing assignments and reports through the Website, which results in alternative art institution. The first section will be to define and explore the institution of art, and offer criticism on the traditional system in which it operates. Following this section, the second half of the argument will establish how LTLYM’s seemingly aversion to traditional institutional art practices has created an alternative exhibition space, rooted in gift-economy strategies through the sharing and transfer of concepts and products.

**LTLYM and Institutional Critique**

The art world is often viewed as if it was a closed system, and it is evident that the LTLYM assignments to implode the very idea of a closed system of art. A work or project may be regarded as art or non-art, and may be either included or excluded from the art world. Such decisions as whether or not to regard something as a work of art is most often determined by discursively institutions: such as a commercial gallery spaces, museums, or art journals. Especially in the case of museums, institutions can be influenced by boards, and corporate sponsorships. The link between the institutional museum setting and social inequalities are implicit in work by emerging artists in the 1960s and 1970s. There was an apparent shift during
this period, a movement away from the museum, many artists felt its art historical associations, boards of wealthy collectors and business people, and elitism was not properly equipped to provide a critical arena to explore works with popular culture and the experience quotient in their content.\(^{99}\)

Beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, many artists actively sought to avoid the creation of movable and portable works, which the art market depended on, as a protest towards these institutions and their capitalistic motives.\(^{100}\) Instead, many artists focused on performance-based and site-specific works. Artist Hans Haacke dissects the downfalls an institutionally-closed system that demarcates art from non-art:

> Since the corporate blanket is so warm, glaring examples of direct interference rare, and the increasing dominance of museums’ development offices hard to trace, the change of climate is hardly perceived, nor is it taken as a threat. To say that this change might have consequences beyond the confines of the institution and that it affects the type of art that is and will be produced therefore can sound like an over-dramatization. Through naiveté, need, or addiction to corporate financing, museums are now on a slippery road to becoming public relations agents for the interests of big businesses and ideological allies. The adjustments that museums make in selection and promotion of works for exhibition and in a way they present them create a climate that supports prevailing distributions of power and capital and persuades the populace that status quo is natural and best order of things. Rather than sponsoring intelligent, critical awareness, museums thus tend to foster appeasement.\(^{101}\)

As Haacke explains, the artistic institutions are often influenced by outside forces, such as corporate donors and sponsors, which effect the classifications of art from non-art practices. A bureaucratic art institution of this nature creates a system of artistic hierarchies and artist

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alienation. The LTLYM Website challenges barriers that may be associated with such institutions.

It is pertinent to this study to first define what is typically regarded as an institution in order to compare how LTLYM creates an alternative space to gather, produce, and share work. In the 1960s, sociological articles were written at the same time when the artistic community began to challenge the roles of institutions in art. These articles provide this study with additional definitions of how institutions have traditionally operated in society. Sociologist Howard B. Kaplan gives several examples and definitions of a “community” as it relates to institutions. Kaplan notes that institutions can be defined as structures or spaces where communities gather in order to carry out specific activities in a systematic manner in a given period of time. ¹⁰² Similarly, sociologist Milton C. Albrecht notes that an art institution is, “...not only marked by membership and specific location, but by characteristic patterns of behavior in society.”¹⁰³ Using these definitions to understand the functions of institutions in society demonstrates how LTLYM does not operate as an anti-institutional example, but rather it serves as an example of an alternative institution in art. After all, LTLYM provides the meeting space through their Website’s domain, in order for its participants to gather and share their reports, and these collective notions of generosity and sharing are characteristic of the group’s mode of production. Rising to the challenges set by art institutions, such as museums and commercial galleries, Fletcher and July provide a space for production and exhibition through the LTLYM site. When asked about art and non-art related influences and goals of the LTLYM project,

Fletcher and July both take a careful stance on this topic. Fletcher notes, “We don’t even use the word art in regards to LTLYM because we don’t want anyone to feel alienated. The project still operates in an art context for the most part...”  

July follows up with a similar statement to the question of the institutions role in art, as she observes:

...as time went on I think we focused more on getting people to engage with other people, that became a goal of the site. We both think about art in a very loose, inclusive way, and that's not theoretical, it's just a personal truth for us in different ways because we've mostly existed outside the commercial art world. So this project reflects that. 

With Fletcher’s and July’s thoughts on the Website’s role in the commercial art world, it must also be noted that part of the success of LTLYM subsequent to being on the Web was due to its exposure in the 2004 Whitney Biennial. However, even in this somewhat institutional setting, Fletcher and July chose to push the boundaries of how one views exhibition spaces. As writer and critic Brain Sholis explained their approach:

…Fletcher’s [differences] comes from reversing the course of his 1990s predecessors: whereas they seek to push their activity out of the gallery and into the world, Fletcher literally brings the outside in.

So, it would seem that even at the Biennial, Fletcher and July attempt to work outside of the institution. To create their work, they deployed student volunteers to organize mini-exhibitions around New York City in non-traditional spaces and published a catalogue and guide book to be freely dispersed at the Biennial. Additionally, it is relevant to understand the “need” and roles for periodic Biennial exhibitions in the art arena. According to art critic Michael Brenson, Biennials grew out of a cultural need, and they attempted to resolve the conflict between the

105 Miranda July. 2009. Email Interview with the artist by Annie Schorgl. Cincinnati, OH and California. April 7
107 Sholis, 112.
“commitment to and the use of art in museums whose narrowness helped to make multi-cultural exhibitions necessary.” Furthermore, he believes that curatorial programs serve the interests of museum boards, and warns that such agendas become social, political, and economical, even while they are also aesthetic. Brenson’s provides an accurate definition for the necessity for Biennials to exist, because it provides alternative spaces for art to be exhibited, and such areas may be less affected by the narrow interests of museum boards and agendas.

Collaborative works of art have a weak profile in the commercial art work world because they are difficult to market, or in some cases impossible. LTLYM appears to be designed intentionally to critique the commercial art world, and to resolve conflicts of interest that arise in the conventional approach for display and creation of work. Collaborative art seems to have been the genius of the post-studio era in art, beginning in the 1960s and 1970s. Social practices and social aesthetics have become a part of this post-studio avant-garde. In reference to emerging collaborative works, Claire Bishop notes,

This mixed panorama of socially collaborative work arguably forms an avant-garde we have today: artists using social situations to produce dematerialized, anti-market, politically engaged projects that carry on the Modernist call to blur art and life.

Building on Bishop’s argument, art historian Hal Foster looks at the trend toward collectively-made art today, stating that:

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109 Ibid.
111 Bishop, “The Social Turn: Collaborations and Its Disconnects,”57.
Perhaps discursivity and sociability are foregrounded in art today because they appear scarce elsewhere (I speak, of course as a North American). The same goes for the ethical every day, as the briefest glance at our craven politicians and hectic lives might suggest. It’s as though the mere idea of community has taken on a utopian tinge. Even an art audience cannot be taken for granted but must be conjured up every time, which might be why contemporary exhibitions often feel like remedial work in socialization: “come look, talk, and learn with me.”

Foster aptly notes that the shifting practices in the art world have overt ties with our fast-paced, and increasing isolated day-to-day lives. So much so, that the concept of a community has in many ways become foreign to everyday existences. With these hurdles in mind, the emergence of socially-engaged practices helps to establish and create experiences in the everyday grind that are often taken for granted. There is no doubt that our culture is changing, however we must ask—who creates culture? The formation of cultures working outside the institution is not a new concept; punk music resisted institutional limitations, and created a new culture in the 1970s and 1980s. The next section will explore the emergence of social practices in art through similar cultural shifts, and discuss the creation of this emerging art medium, which has established a culture that works in a gift-economy system rather than a capitalist system.

**The Gift-Economy and LTLYM**

Artist, Jen Delos Reyes is an adjunct professor in the Social Practice program at Portland State University. When asked to give her thoughts on her experiences within the medium of social practice, she makes this connection with the DIY and punk culture, Delos Reyes notes:

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...I was a part of the DIY music scene in Winnipeg, MB. I organized shows, made zines, worked at a local venue and played in bands. I feel that ultimately in many ways I was affected by this experience, the energy and optimism of realizing that individuals could create and produce culture on their own. And that unlikely people from unlikely places were making and could make amazing art works.\textsuperscript{113}

The emergence of punk and garbage bands in the 1970s and 1980s appears to be an influence on the Do-It-Yourself (hereafter DIY) mentality in the art world that led to artists’ desires to work beyond and without museum walls. Independently-produced records were made and distributed autonomously, and in many ways the punk culture attempted to appropriate the media by appropriating the means of production.\textsuperscript{114} Philosopher and political theorist, Giorgio Agamben provides a definition of the ethics, and a human’s potential to create culture that relates with the DIY strategies, he states:

The fact that must constitute the point of departure for any discourse on ethics is that there is no essence, no historical or spiritual vocation, no biological destiny that humans must enact or realize. This is the only reason why something like ethics can exist, because it is clear that is humans were or had to be this or that substance, this or that destiny, no ethical experience would be possible—there would only be tasks to be done.

This does not mean, however that humans are not, and do not have to be something, that they are simply cosigned to nothingness and therefore can freely decide whether or not to be or not to be, adopt or not adopt a destiny...There is in effect something that humans are and have to be, but this something is not an essence or properly a thing: \textit{It is the simple fact of one’s own existence as possibility or potentiality}.\textsuperscript{115}

Fletcher precisely taps into the kind of potentiality that Agamben describes. For example,

Fletcher expresses optimism in social practice’s ability to create culture, as opposed to

\textsuperscript{113} Jen Delos Reyes. Email Interview with the artist by Annie Schorgl. Cincinnati, OH and Portland, OR. February 22, 2009.
traditional studio practices in the post-studio era. Similar to Agamben’s claim, Fletcher explains the potentiality for individuals to work creatively:

Let me define “art” as anything that anyone calls “art.” That can be a maker or a viewer. By calling something “art” it doesn’t make it art forever just during the time it is being appreciated as art. Similarly, I don’t think, as Beuys said, that everyone is an artist, I just think that everyone has the potential to be an artist.  

Keeping in mind the strategies used to create culture, the DIY trends in contemporary art are implicit in LTLYM and also in social practice modes in general. In a post-studio era, we recognize culture as something made and not purchased. This notion leads to a different type of art market that is in clear opposition to the capitalist-driven markets of the art institutions. Art critic Ted Purves defines this new economy as a gift-détournment. He gives this newly-formed culture in art the name gift-détournment, because he finds the DIY attitude of punk culture rooted in the Situationists, and the autonomous nature of production and distribution in contemporary art relative to the punk culture of the 1970s. Purves notes, “…only money and force of habit keep people from seeing that culture is something you make rather than something you buy.” The optimism in creating culture and avoiding sanctimonious and capitalistic approaches in art creates a new type of art market. This aesthetic can be referred to a market of generosity. Purves refers to a gift-détournment as he discusses the way in which our art production is rooted in Situationist détournment and moving towards an alternative, pre-capitalist gift economy. Jacques Derrida explains the genuine gift as something that

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118 Purves, 40.  
resides outside the obligatory realm of giving and taking. According to Derrida, accepting a gift with “thank you” acknowledges a gift as such and therefore places a reciprocating obligation on the generous act, which nullifies it as a gift. Whereas a genuine gift has no self-interest or reasoning attached to it.\textsuperscript{120} Purves notes that our contemporary culture is more spectacular and insidious than the Situationists could have ever imagined, and therefore our world must develop new systems of resistance.\textsuperscript{121} Purves discusses the generosity-economy in four main points. First he refers to the gift-détournment as concept in which a society is confronted by an unexpected act; secondly, a gift is something that creates relationships between the givers and receivers. The third point is the act of détournment that uses gift-giving exchanges as having the power to create spectacles. Finally, the fourth point refers to gift giving in the context of a hierarchical resistance, and thus becomes the measure of value in the expansion of art.\textsuperscript{122} The overall statement that Purves is making in his essay is that through gift-detournment, there is no concept of value and exchange in monetary terms. This is a system of reciprocal exchanges.

With Purves gift-détournment theory in mind, a gift economy appears to be possible in contemporary art, as it’s exemplified by the success and breadth of LTLYM’s framework of sharing, generosity and collaboration and transition of meaning. In Given Time (1977-78) French theorist, Derrida discusses the gift, he notes:

"On the condition of not being or appearing to be the gift of anything, of anything that is or that is present, come from someone and given to someone? On the condition of “being” a gift without given and without giving, without presentable thing and act? A gift would neither give itself, nor give itself as such, and that could not take place except on the condition of not taking place..."

\textsuperscript{120} \url{www.iep.utm.edu/d/derrida.htm}. Accessed April 7, 2009.
\textsuperscript{121} Purves, 28.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid.
Gift exchanges are viewed as tantamount to transformations. Moreover we may also consider the definitions provided by writer Lewis Hyde in his examples of gift economies. Hyde explains, “In the simplest examples, gifts carry an identity with them, and to accept the gift amounts to incorporating a new identity.”\textsuperscript{123} He uses the example of Alcoholics Anonymous (hereafter AA) as an example of an ideal gift economy. Nothing is bought or sold through AA, expenses are met through member contributions. The program is free to whomever, and since the teachings of the program is free and do not require participation or reciprocation, it is the perfect example of a literal gift.\textsuperscript{124}

Turning to social science perspectives on the gift, it is believed that motives to give are less dependent on the content and more dependent on the spirit behind the gift. According to social scientist Aafke E. Komter, a true gift’s value is not based on momentary terms but more by the personal investment of the giver to the recipient.\textsuperscript{125} This is to say, a true gift does not require a reciprocating action. According to Komter, it is a common misconception to assume that the gift principal has implications of reciprocation. Komter explains this claim with the example of blood or organ donation. Gifts such as these, are not assumed to have direct payback, rather when one gives blood or an organ, it is assumed within this social stratum that reciprocity will be given at a time of need.\textsuperscript{126} In other words, should one be in need, it is within a gift-giving economy that a person will offer their help to another. Such reciprocal exchange systems underpin all the works of LTLYM. Fletcher’s and July’s list of assignments invite participants to join the experience. Once one accepts the assignment, they are asked to share

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 57-58.
\textsuperscript{126} Komter, 36.
their results in a report posting on the Website. The assignment/report structure is a system of exchanges based on generosity and reciprocal giving. LTLYM is an exchange of ideas and experiences rather than an exchange of money or capital.

Drawing on other social science perspectives, gift-giving economies are typically matriarchal, in Africa, Asia, and even the Americas, such as the Iroquois Confederation, various peaceful female-centered societies function in this type of economy. Social scientist, Genevieve Vaughn notes:

...not only were there and are there many societies that function according to direct distribution of goods to needs, non-market gift-giving economies, but the underlying logic of this kind of economy is the basic human logic, which has been overtaken and made invisible by the logic of the market economy.

Weighing the different perspectives of a gift-economy on a socio-political level, as well as within the art market, it is apparent that not only is such an economy possible, but it is being made possible through art collaboratives like LTLYM. However, this brings up the question, how are artists able to make a living? This question is being answered by social practice methods. The strategies of this medium are attempting to neutralize the conflict of living as an artist, and creating works that are not commoditized. In the recent winter 2009 Art Journal article, Fletcher explains how this is possible:

If we look at the system of the normal studio practice, it’s all geared in the direction of commercial art and museums. Only a tiny percentage of people actually arrive there, and if they do, an even smaller percentage survive after five years. If that existed in any other program like getting an MBA or a law degree or a medical degree, those programs would empty out instantly; people aren’t going to go through all of this if they aren’t getting a job. But for some reason artists are willing to do that

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128 Ibid.
...So maybe we could create a program in which 95 percent of students went on to sustain themselves as functioning artists; but if that’s going to happen it’s not going to be through a gallery system, because it doesn’t have the capacity to support that many artists. So then, what do you do? ...You could look at all sorts of different practices [small business-people and small farmers] and then try to figure out how an artist would operate in those systems.129

As reflected in his statement, Fletcher suggests that in order for art to function outside of a bureaucratic institutional setting and still support practicing artists, we must try to supplement not only their work, but their every day through other practices. This methodology is at the heart of the social practice medium and provides artists with an alternative institution, or forum to produce, and exhibit work. LTLYM is a Website that functions within a gift-economy, because it is sustained through the collective support of many individuals. This solidarity has become a trend in contemporary art practices. Within the post-studio era, collaborative projects like LTLYM exemplify a movement away from capitalist motives in the art market, towards a more pure and generous art form.

Conclusion

...as someone who is fiercely caught up in originality and constantly having to come up with new ideas—it’s been good for me to have proof that feeling matters at least as much as originality.—Miranda July

Learning To Love You More is a project that erodes the boundaries of art, despite its function within the art world. There have been debates around whether or not art collaborative should be considered as fine art. This research is dedicated to promoting the study of social and collaborative art practices and debunking notions that it signals the “end of art.” Art critic, Donald Kuspit writes:

Art has been subtly poisoned by social appropriation, that is, the emphasis on its commercial value and its treatment as upscale entertainment, turning it into a species of social-capital. Co-opted by the common place, it loses its uncommonness. It has also been undermined by the belief that all one has to do is to have a “concept” to be an artist, which suggests that the concept of an artist, as well as of art, has lost clear meaning. This is why so many people think of themselves as artists, for everyone, after all has a favorite “concept” especially about some person, place, and thing they know.

Although Kuspit may believe that social art in our contemporary era signals the “end of art,” this thesis draws on the socialist theory and art theory, by scholars such as Walter Benjamin and Nicolas Bourriaud. This study argues that there is no “end of art,” because there is no “end of history.” The social and collaborative practices embraced by LTLYM belong to the constellation of art, artists, and art movements of the past, as history is viewed as a constellation rather than a “string of rosary beads.” Furthermore, this study argues that LTLYM is the leading example of a project that defines the social practice medium, which has

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130 July, Interview.
only been recognized and defined within the past five years. Moreover, socially engaged art practices like LTLYM, have served as an impetus for contemporary art trends like solidarity, generosity, participation, collaboration, and institutional critiques within the art world.

Through the contributions of many artists, critics, and scholars, particularly Claire Bishop’s *Participation* (2006), there have been several important essays and works, adding to the historical context, as well as the shift towards socially-engaged art practices in contemporary art. Bishop writes:

> Less familiar is the history of those artistic practices since the 1960s that appropriate social forms as a way to bring art closer to everyday life... These socially-oriented projects anticipate many artistic developments that proliferated since the 1990s, but also form a part of a longer historical trajectory.\(^{133}\)

The formation of LTLYM was a way for founding artists Harrell Fletcher and Miranda July to engage people throughout the globe, and bring simple assignments into friends and strangers everyday lives. The Website has been a success throughout its seven year run. Its impact is undeniable, as it has reached more than 5,000 people worldwide in the posted reports alone, not to mention the additional thousands of individuals who simply visit and view the work on the site. July discusses the beginnings and the end of LTLYM after seven years, she says:

> ...it was just very gradual and organic...there was never a big important article on it...speaking for myself, most of the assignments are somewhat autobiographical, they are like a secret history of the last seven years...Yuri pointed out that the 7\(^{th}\) anniversary was coming up and I noticed that we were about to have 70 assignments, so it seemed like a clean end. Time to put that energy into new things.\(^{134}\)

As LTLYM says goodbye (Assignment # 70: Say goodbye), it will continue to serve as an online archive of work, and therefore continues to function as a reminder that art can be

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\(^{133}\) Bishop, 10.  
\(^{134}\) July, Interview
viewed as both objects and experiences. It is the goal of this study to explain why LTLYM’s strategies serve as a leading example of a socially-engaged project that has challenged not only the definition of art, but the institution of art. Additionally, this study offers an analysis on the trajectory of contemporary art, and discusses the history and linage of artists and theorists, who participated in the dialogue, and the formation of these practices that subsequently resulted in the recognition of the social practice medium. In an era of economic distress, our everyday activities, including our consumption of art has shifted towards more socially conscious practices, such as those found in the strategies of the LTLYM project.
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Miranda July. Email Interview with the artist by Annie Schorgl. Cincinnati, OH and California. April 7, 2009.

Films

Figure 1
Unknown Artist, *Assignment #23 (Recreate this snapshot)*, (date unknown).
Figure 2
Vron, Assignment #30 (Take a Picture of Strangers Holding Hands), (date unknown).
Figure 3
Debs McCoy, Assignment #30 (Take a Picture of Strangers Holding Hands), (date unknown).
Figure 4
Morgan Silver Greenberg, Assignment # 62 (Make an Educational Public Plaque), (date unknown).
Figure 5
Jonathan Green and Scottie Caldwell, *Assignment #62 (Make an Educational Public Plaque)*, (date unknown).
Figure 6
Morgan Rozacky and Kate Kirby, “Barney,” Assignment #2 (Make a neighborhood field recording), (date unknown).
Figure 7
Erica Hill, Assignment #12 (Get a Temporary Tattoo of One of Morgan Rozacky’s Neighbors), (date unknown).
Figure 8
b&t, “German Family Reunion,” Assignment # 28 (Edit a photo page), (date unknown).
Figure 9
Figure 10
Eleanor (last name unknown), Assignment #6 (Make a Poster of Shadows), (date unknown).
Figure 11
Figure 12
Vindy Loo, Assignments #43 (Make an exhibition of the art in your parent’s house),
(date unknown).
Julie Doucet

Julie Doucet *1965 is a Canadian artist. She started with some autobiographical cartoons (Dirty Plotte, My New York diary,) and graphic novels. 2007 will be the release of her new 365 days diary. She does also collages and silkscreens. She lists her 10 best things in life as follows: Love, music, some sort of creative outlet, travelling, books, sleeping, the mysteries of nature, nice shoes, coffee, beer. Mostly I do agree her comics can be found in my top 10 because I love the witty pointed rarely offered fearless female point of view she creates.

Figure 13
Verena Matuschek, “Julie Doucet,” Assignment #8 (Curate an artist’s retrospective in a public place), (date unknown).