Grains of Gold in All This Shit:
Web 2.0, Crowdsourcing and Participatory Art

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…imagine if everybody is online, if anybody makes webpages, it will become overwhelming. Who would search for grains of gold in all this shit?[1]

- Alexei Shulgin, 1997

When the dot-com bubble burst in March 2000, the love affair with dot-com start-ups ended and the realisation set in that online commerce is fragile; it exists in a consumer capitalist world where value is based on immaterial abstractions and speculation.[2] In 2004, O'Reilly Media, a media company specialising in computing and internet publishing, did what many savvy businesses have done when faced with bad publicity and lack of investment – they rebranded. Except, instead of rebranding their own company, O'Reilly rebranded the entire internet and called it 'Web 2.0'. This wasn't the old, unreliable dot-com that could skyrocket and collapse in less than a year, this was a new web that was safe for investment again.[3] This time, instead of dot-coms laboriously creating the immaterial product or content that users were consuming, users would create the content. The users would invest/volunteer their time and effort in the site which in turn would create revenue out of the user. When early internet artist Alexei Shulgin made his 'grains of gold' comment on the Nettime mailing list in 1997, the small community of active online participants possessed the niche programming and computer skills to set up their own websites. Non-programmers who were lucky enough to already have access to the internet did not, for the most part, have the tools to create websites or web content. Shulgin was part of the net.art movement which included Vuk Cosic, jodi.org, Olia Lialina, and Heath Bunting. Net.art was a consciously avant-garde movement that celebrated the internet as a space for democratisation of art whose members created web-based works that played with the forms and building blocks of HTML, the dominant coding language of the internet.[4] The underlying elitism of the net.art group

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[1] TIlman Baumgaertel, "Interview with Alexei Shulgin," 4 Nov. 1997, 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9711/msg00005.html>.
[2] Jorn Madslien, "Dotcom bubble burst: 10 years on," *BBC News* 9 Mar. 2010, 1 Sep. 2010 <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/8558257.stm>.
[3] Tim O'Reilly, "What is Web 2.0? Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software," *O'Reilly* 30 Sep. 2005. 1 Sep. 2010 <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html >.
[4] Using frames, hyperlinks, etc, the artists participating in the net.art movement of the early to mid 90s were experimenting with non-hierarchical structures on the web. See Rachel Greene, *Internet Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004). See

is evident in Shulgin's statement, but it is, perhaps, not surprising given its context. The World Wide Web was quite small in 1997, and people formed communities online that resembled villages where everyone knew each other and maintained an intense insular dialogue. The internet art community maintained much of their dialogue on the Nettime mailing list where they shared and discussed projects and linked to each other's pages. Mass participation, internet memes, militant anonymity, algorithms and AdWords did not yet exist in the way we experience them on the internet today.[5] In fact, at the time Shulgin's comment was posted on the Nettime mailing list, Google's founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin were only just registering the domain name google.com for their Stanford-PhD-incubated start-up search engine based on an entirely new paradigm of searching – the relationships between websites.[6] Seven years later O'Reilly was rebranding the internet and ushering in an era of mass user content creation – the mass production of "shit" that Shulgin feared had begun.

Web 2.0 can be found everywhere in art today, both on and offline. The Web 2.0 ideas of 'social networking' and 'crowdsourcing' have filtered through to the art world where artists are, whether consciously or not, using Web 2.0 principles and forms in their work. This is not surprising given that, historically, many science and engineering ideas have started out as highly specialised knowledge yet have become culturally embedded in the wake of being taken up by artists, political activists, philosophers and social scientists. One example of this, in the early days of computing, is how the term 'systems' and the generalisation of 'systems theory' became part of the fabric of 1960s culture. In his essay, "Systems Upgrade: Conceptual Art and the Recoding of Information, Knowledge and Technology," Michael Corris discusses the rise of system-based thinking outside the realm of math and science in the 1960s:

Dieter Daniels and Gunther Reisinger, eds., *Net Pioneers 1.0: Contextualizing Early Net-Based Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010).

[5] Karl Hodge, "It's all in the memes: Is the internet spreading a virus through our heads?" *The Guardian* 10 Aug. 2000. 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2000/aug/10/technology>. Also, Jean Burgess, "'All your chocolate rain are belong to us'?: Viral video, Youtube and the dynamics of participatory culture," *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, eds. Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2008) 101-9.

[6] "WHOIS – google.com," 15 Sep. 1997, 1 Sep. 2010 <http://whois.dnsstuff.com/tools/whois.ch?ip=google.com>. Also, Lawrence Page and Sergey Brin, et al., *The PageRank Citation Ranking: Bringing Order to the Web*, Technical Report (Stanford University InfoLab, 1999) 1 Sep. 2010 <http://ilpubs.stanford.edu:8090/422/>.

> Systems theory, in particular, maintained a strong hold on the 1960s imagination. Typically associated with the aims and objectives of the military, or corporate management, systems theory was first promoted in a generalised form 'capable of addressing patterns of human life'… The concept of a 'system', which became part of the *lingua franca* of the 1960s, was not destined to remain the exclusive property of a technologically minded elite of engineers, scientists and mathematicians. In the hands of intellectuals, artists and political activists, it would become a key ideological component of the 'cultural revolution'.[7]

Systems art and many types of conceptual art are programme-based art practices that don't necessarily make use of literal computers but nevertheless utilise the logic and language of systems, computing and programming. Sol LeWitt said in 1967, "The idea becomes a machine that makes the art."[8] Despite the perhaps misleading use of the term 'machine', LeWitt's statement gets to the heart of programmatic thinking – the art is the output of a series of directives.[9]

Similarly, Web 2.0's forms can be seen in contemporary practices, both online and offline. Although collectives and participatory art existed well before the invention of the internet and certainly before Web 2.0, there are a number of characteristics that distinguish participatory art in the Web 2.0 era from the participatory and collective activities of the past. This paper will focus particularly on the use of 'crowdsourcing' in artistic practice. Despite its formal definition as a kind of digital sweatshop, 'crowdsourcing' has become a buzzword that simply means seeking creative input from the networked crowd online. Artists engaged in participatory art practices have, whether consciously or unconsciously, harnessed the formal characteristics of crowdsourcing for their projects in recent years. Some of these projects have their roots in the forms of earlier, more

[7] Michael Corris, "Systems Upgrade: conceptual Art and the Recoding of Information, Knowledge and Technology," *Mute Magazine: Culture and Politics After the Net* 1:22 (December 2001): 37-8.
[8] Sol Le Witt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5:10 (Summer 1967): 19-83.
[9] The use of the word "machine" is misleading in that it conjures up images of the late Industrial Age or Machine Age, whereas systems and programming are more tied to the immaterial digital world ushered in by computing and later the Information Age

collaborative web practices such as 'open source' but nevertheless venture into the changing landscape of crowdsourcing.

Web 2.0, at least as a marketing term, is widely accepted as having been 'born' in 2004. Digg, Facebook and Flickr were launched in 2004, and YouTube in 2005. A few other popular Web 2.0 projects came a few years before: Blogger was launched in 1999, Wikipedia in 2001, and last.fm in 2002. Only now are more sophisticated voices of critique outlining some of the many problematic aspects of the Web 2.0 revolution. *Only* six years in critical theory terms is admittedly a very short span of time, but the rate at which the web is developing and the rate at which the way we live is altered to accommodate these new technological tools means that in less than a decade the cultural shifts and pitfalls are ripe for critical attention. While most of the early commentary on Web 2.0 comes from present and former Silicon Valley entrepreneurs and journalists, a niche area of critique has emerged from the likes of online peer reviewed journal *First Monday*, *Mute Magazine,* and the Institute of Network Cultures.[10]

Artists have picked up on trends in labour and production in society in general and these trends can be seen in works of art that encourage participation and collaboration, effectively outsourcing labour and production to a group of participants and ultimately using them as a medium. By utilising the forms and tools provided by Web 2.0, artworks are subject to some of the same critical issues of Web 2.0 generally. Two aspects of Web 2.0 criticism are particularly relevant to this discussion: the increasing role of the amateur in creative production and issues around exploitation and dehumanisation in the Web 2.0 shift. Without acknowledgement that the problematic aspects of Web 2.0 are embedded in the form of Web 2.0, artworks utilising these forms reproduce these issues as well. In this paper I will discuss several works of art that are alike in form and aesthetic to Web 2.0 crowdsourcing. Taking into consideration how the critical discussion of participatory works of art has been sidelined by discussions of ethics, it is evident

[10] "First Monday: Peer-Reviewed Journal on the Internet: Volume 13, Number 3 – 3 March 2008," 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/issue/view/263/showToc >, "Mute Magazine: Culture and Politics After the Net," 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.metamute.org/ >. "Institute of Network Cultures," <http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/portal/ >.

that Web 2.0 technologies have inspired a false sense of utopia among artists who are often using Web 2.0 forms to create something that outwardly looks like democracy, sharing and community but is actually an artificial, hierarchically imposed façade. Alternatively, several more successful works that take on the forms of Web 2.0 contain ideas and content that compliments and problematises these forms, enriching them and creating additional layers of meaning.

WEB 2.0 AND PARTICIPATORY ART

Origins of and issues around participatory art

Several theorists describe the development of participation in art today in terms of art's ties to religion where the art object has historically served a function in communities and religious practice. Boris Groys, in his essay for the catalogue of the SFMOMA exhibition *The Art Of Participation*, argues that the secular art object is in a vulnerable position in the modern world, subject to arbitrarily defined aesthetic value assigned to it by a passive public who no longer expect an art object to deliver any practical or spiritual function.[11] He states, "For this reason many modern artists have tried to regain common ground with their audiences by enticing viewers out of their passive roles, bridging the comfortable aesthetic distance that allows uninvolved viewers to judge an artwork impartially from a secure, external perspective."[12] Likewise, Nicolas Bourriaud discusses participatory art or, as he terms it "relational" art, as part of a "production of relations," where "works were first situated in a transcendent world, within which art aimed at introducing ways of communicating with the deity."[13] Bourriaud sees the art of today as having established a different set of relations, he explains:

> After the area of relations between humankind and deity and then between mankind and the object, artistic practice is now focused upon the sphere of inter-human relations… all manner of encounters and relational inventions today represent aesthetic objects likely to

[11] *The Art Of Participation: 1950 to Now* ran from 08 Nov 2008 – 08 Jan 2009 at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. See Boris Groys, "A Genealogy of Participatory Art," *The Art of Participation,* eds. Rudolf Frieling and Boris Groys (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008) 20-21.
[12] Groys 21.
[13] Nicolas Bourriaud, "Relational Aesthetics: Art Of The 1990s," *Right About Now: Art & Theory Since the 1990s,* eds. Margriet Schavemaker and Mischa Rakier (Amsterdam: Valiz Publishers, 2007) 47.

> be looked at as such, with pictures and sculptures regarded here merely as specific cases of a production of forms with something other than a simple aesthetic consumption in mind.[14]

The desire to root the origins of participatory art in devotional art is perhaps partially due to the contrast evident in the departure of participatory art such as Fluxus from its immediate predecessor, Greenbergian Modernist painting, which the viewer could only assess from a vast aesthetic distance.[15] When faced with this drastic change in tactic, the apparent re-emergence of art involving community, on hiatus since the secularisation of art, becomes more plausible.

If, in the process of art's secularisation, the art object has become disconnected from religion and community, and therefore the viewer, then participatory art, in order to bring the viewer back into proximity in a secular world needed a secular ideology to bind participants together; this is often manifest in political ideologies. Groys describes the connection between religion and participatory art today in this way:

> Religious community is thus replaced by a political movement in which artists and their audiences both participate. That said, the practices that are relevant to the genealogy of participatory art are chiefly those that not only subscribed thematically to a sociopolitical goal, but also collectivized their core structures and means of production.[16]

Participatory art is often based around an active socio-political ideology or agenda. Due to the ethical dimension to these works, critics often shy away from defining criteria by which to judge the relevance and artistic value of these works. Theorist Anthony Downey states, "Collaborative art practices, in short, appear to be judged on the basis of the ethical efficacy underwriting the artist's relationship to his or her collaborators rather than what makes these works interesting as art."[17] Downey draws from Claire Bishop who states that:

> …the urgency of this *political* task has led to a situation in which socially collaborative practices are all perceived to be equally important *artistic* gestures of resistance: there can

[14] Bourriaud, "Relational Aesthetics: Art Of The 1990s" 48.
[15] Stephen C Foster, "Clement Greenberg: Formalism in the 40s and 50s," *Art Journal* 35:1 (1975): 20-24.
[16] Groys 21.
[17] Anthony Downey, "An Ethics of Engagement: Collaborative Art Practices and the Return of the Ethnographer," *Third Text*, 23: 5 (2009): 595.

> be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved or boring works of socially collaborative art, because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond.[18]

According to Bishop, this has led to a situation where criticism of participatory works merely judges how successfully collaboration has been achieved, "the degree to which they supply good or bad models of collaboration."[19]

One method by which these types of works can be more rigorously critiqued is by interrogating the role of the individual author in the work. Bishop argues that ethics-based critique rates the artist highly for relinquishing authorship, "And this may explain, to some degree, why socially engaged art has been largely exempt from art criticism: emphasis is shifted away from the disruptive *specificity* of a given work and onto a *generalized* set of moral precepts."[20] Bishop goes on to describe the ways in which artists such as Francis Alÿs, Thomas Hirschorn, and Phil Collins create their work without sacrificing themselves and their aesthetic and socio-political underpinnings for the sake of ethics. Bishop states that, currently in criticism of participatory art, "…self-sacrifice is triumphant. The artist should renounce authorial presence in favour of allowing participants to speak through him or her. This self-sacrifice is accompanied by the idea that art should extract itself from the 'useless' domain of aesthetics and be fused with social praxis."[21] By dissolving authorship, we lose aesthetic and socio-political considerations in favour of ethics. The rehearsal of ethics in contemporary art effectively creates a dialogue without any meaningful content within that dialogue.

Groys, on the other hand, argues that authorial power may actually be increased in the dissolution of authorship within participatory art. He states:

> One might also claim that the enactment of this self-abdication, this dissolution of the self into the masses, grants the author the possibility of controlling the audience – whereby the viewer forfeits his secure external position, his aesthetic distance from the artwork,

[18] Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents," *Right About Now: Art & Theory Since the 1990s,* eds. Margriet Schavemaker and Mischa Rakier (Amsterdam: Valiz Publishers, 2007) 61.
[19] ibid 61.
[20] ibid 64.
[21] ibid 67.

> and thus becomes not just a participant but also an integral part of the artwork. In this way participatory art can be understood not only as a reduction, but also as an extension, of authorial power.[22]

If, as Groys suggests, the artist/author has the possibility of controlling the audience through making it an integral part of the work, and if at the same time the artist is rehearsing an abdication from not only individual creation but also authorial responsibility, this indeed grants the artist the ability to pull the strings in a dialogue devoid of meaningful content. The more artists try to artificially create situations in which the impetus and responsibility for the project lies with the audience, the more these interaction become a kind of re-enactment of dialogues and communities that usually develops organically and not as a result of top down organisation.

Rudolf Frieling, on the other hand, takes a more pragmatic viewpoint on the subject of artistic authorship in participatory work, asserting:

> Ultimately, if artists wish to operate within the art world, they will inevitably be perceived as the ones responsible for the work, even if they involve collaborators, let others take on the actual production, utilize online networks, or – and this is our specific focus here – court unknown participants.[23]

Due to the embedded mechanisms of capital and value within the art world, artwork has to effectively be attributed to a known author in order to be fully assimilated therein. For this reason, many artists who operate anonymously or semi-anonymously within a larger art collective create works that are not valuated or commodified by the art world, a situation they often welcome; but this absence from the art market often results in these works being ignored by critics, theorists, academics and other figures who bring attention to and canonise artworks.

[22] Groys 23.
[23] Rudolf Frieling. "Toward Participation in Art," *The Art of Participation,* eds. Rudolf Frieling and Boris Groys (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008) 35.

Crowdsourcing

These issues of authorship, participation and ethics are particularly relevant in work that employs the forms of social networking and crowdsourcing, whether that be web-based, non-web-based or somewhere between the two. Jeff Howe, who coined the term in *Wired* magazine in 2006, describes the evolution of crowdsourcing as a means to harness cheap labour:

> For the last decade or so, companies have been looking overseas, to India or China, for cheap labor…Technological advances in everything from product design software to digital video cameras are breaking down the cost barriers that once separated amateurs from professionals…The labor isn't always free, but it costs a lot less than paying traditional employees. It's not outsourcing; it's crowdsourcing.[24]

Howe utilised several examples in his original article and several follow up articles that pointed to crowdsourcing being particularly useful in the creative industries, as a means to circumvent professional photographers, designers and other creatives.[25]

Daren C. Brabham is one of the leading researchers into crowdsourcing; he states that:

> Crowdsourcing works when an organization has a problem to solve or a product to design, and the organization opens that challenge up to an online community with specific solution parameters… the sponsoring organization eventually takes ownership of the ideas and puts them to use.[26]

This seems to be the next logical step for capitalism online. Web 2.0 sites like YouTube make vast amounts of money through user generated content that is provided without any recompense, but YouTube doesn't direct its users what kind of content to make. In order for a company to put parameters on user creativity, they only have to offer a very small monetary reward if any reward at all, often in the form of an open call contest, which means that only one worker is paid for a winning design/idea.

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[24] Jeff Howe, "The Rise of Crowdsourcing," *Wired* June 2006, 1 Sep. 2010. <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.06/crowds.html?pg=1&topic=crowds&topic_set>.
[25] Jeff Howe, "Is Crowdsourcing Evil? The Design Community Weighs In," *Wired* 10 Mar. 2009, 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.wired.com/epicenter/2009/03/is-crowdsourcin/comment-page-2/>.
[26] Daren Brabham, "Crowdsourcing," 25 Jun. 2010, 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.darenbrabham.com/>.

Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher employed crowdsourcing in their project *Learning To Love You More* (2002-2009). July and Fletcher made a list of assignments to do various tasks such as "5. Recreate an object from someone's past" [*Illus. 1*], "11. Photograph a scar and write about it" [*Illus. 2*], and "30. Take a picture of strangers holding hands" [*Illus. 3*], and put out an open call for people to complete the assigned tasks and send documentation in to the *Learning To Love You More* website.[27] Yuri Ono collaborated with July and Fletcher and maintained the website. In an interview with *Indigest Magazine*, Ono was asked about what kind of tasks participants were willing to do. She responded:

> When we ask more from a participant, like grow a garden, and take pictures of the garden, over time. People just don't want to bother with that. They don't want to spend the time to do it. We go for a happy medium, not assignments where its really easy, but not ones that ask for too much. Generally we like assignments that try to involve the person in their community, or asks them to share themselves with us.[28]

Ono seems to suggest that the same thing that motivates someone to post a video on YouTube is what motivates people to participate in an art project like *Learning To Love You More*: self-interest. If the tasks in July and Fletcher's project did not give their participants the opportunity to broadcast something about themselves to others, it's unlikely they would have been as eager to participate. Miranda July explains that one of the intentions of the project was to promote a means by which participants could be encouraged to perform self-meditation, making the participation in the project a kind of therapeutic activity. In an interview on the project, she states, "…we started creating assignments for the general public that are very exacting and yet intended to lead people back to their own experience."[29] The issue inherent in July and Fletcher's mission statement is that it does not mesh with the fact that participants are then asked to submit documentation of their assignment to be published on the *Learning To Love You More* website.[30] The notion of broadcast seems to be incidental or functional within the structure of the project although it is effectively the most central and necessary feature of the piece.

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[27] "Learning To Love You More," 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.learningtoloveyoumore.com/index.php>.
[28] Dustin Luke Nelson, "InDigest InDialogue: Yuri Ono," 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.indigestmag.com/ono1.htm>.
[29] Dave Welch, "Powell's Books Author Interviews: Miranda July Belongs Here," 18 May 2007, 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.powells.com/authors/mirandajuly.html>.
[30] "Learning To Love You More: Hello,"1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.learningtoloveyoumore.com/hello/index.php>.

In the utilisation of an ostensibly non-hierarchical model of participation, July and Fletcher seem to be rejecting the notion that they have a point of view – a point of view that is clearly expressed in the structuring of their assignments. The assignments suggest a desire for people to recognise or scrutinise the mundane, everyday objects and events of life, to reflect on memories and mortality, and to make things by hand. The assignments also communicate a palpable sense of nostalgia. This point of view is well suited to using participants because what material could be more everyday than the stranger passing by? Using participants does not, however, somehow break down the hierarchical structure of the piece as a work of art. When asked by Allan McCollum in an interview, "... You don't simply think about artists versus non-artists, there's a whole continuum you engage that's in between. You seem to ignore the hierarchy of various levels of expertise that most people describe. But how do you feel about this hierarchy?" Fletcher responds, "I recognize that the hierarchy exists, but I also try to act like it doesn't exist because it's part of my own morality or something. I believe that hierarchy is wrong. And so I try to act in a way that it doesn't exist."[31]

Despite the seductive creativity of the assignments created by July and Fletcher, despite how they capture the imagination and evoke a desire to participate, they are still assignments performed by the general public for July and Fletcher, under their banner and to their credit. It is often argued that the participants in these activities are volunteers and therefore, how could it be exploitative? The underlying exploitation here is similar to the exploitation that occurs on Web 2.0 sites generally.

Looking at crowdsourcing from the point of view of corporations, one of the key ways in which the Web 2.0 model differs from the Web 1.0 model is that Web 2.0 sites no longer produce the pages that make up their websites. The likes of Facebook, Flickr, and YouTube all operate through user-generated content. While ostensibly providing a service/platform and facilitating one of the pillars

[31] Allen McCollum,, "Harrell Fletcher," *Harrell Fletcher: Where I Lived, and What I Lived For.* Brittany, France: Domaine De Kerguehennec, 2009. 1 Sep. 2010 <http://homepage.mac.com/allanmcnyc/harrellfletcher/mccollum_interview.html>.

of the "new" web – sharing – these sites are also accruing vast amounts of wealth from free labour. Web 1.0 websites employ some or many people to create the content or products that draw users to their sites, but Web 2.0 has only had to create and maintain a platform from which *users* build the site. These user videos, pictures and pages create more traffic on the site and bring in more advertising revenue, and these users do so happily and without any compensation. Andrew Keen, a former Silicon Valley entrepreneur turned Web 2.0 critic, briefly touches upon the situation where web corporations are exploiting the free labour of Web 2.0 users in his book *The Cult of The Amateur*:

> Indeed, Larry Page and Sergei [*sic*] Brin, the multi-billionaire founders of Google, are the true Web 2.0 plutocrats – they have figured out how to magically transform other people's free content into a multi-billion-dollar advertising machine.[32]

Although Keen doesn't expand on this concept much more than citing a few examples of websites that employ this tactic, the situation described could be read as the ultimate Marxist nightmare. While Marx thought religion was the opiate of the masses, Web 2.0 has shown itself to be just as powerful a sedative, keeping Web 2.0 users often blissfully entertained or occupied, unaware of the underlying exploitation they are being subjected to on Web 2.0 sites.[33] This is essentially digital outsourcing of labour and production.

We are increasingly moving towards a world where it is impossible to resist becoming part of the "crowd" in all walks of life. A person who has never watched a video on YouTube or participated in a social networking site is an increasingly excluded person from society and our shared global culture. It is now necessary to acquire cultural capital through participation in Web 2.0.

Furthermore, the crowd has the power to price out the professional in the Web 2.0 world. In a 2009 follow up article on crowdsourcing by Jeff Howe in *Wired*, he contemplates the ways in which professional designers are being priced out by "spec" design crowdsourcing where many

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[32] Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur* (London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2007) 136.
[33] Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of Right'*, trans. Joseph O'Malley (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1977) 131. 1 Sep. 2010 <http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=uxg4AAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q=opium&f=false>.

do the job but only one gets paid for the chosen design. Howe quotes design blog The Logo Factor as saying: "The folks that run these outfits have managed to figure out a way to get thousands of people — some skilled enough to earn a decent living — to work for them gratis. It's an amazing sleight-of-hand."[34] While this is happening in creative industries, it might be argued that the comparison doesn't carry over to the art world. But if artists like July and Fletcher are uncritically creating work in the same form as the crowdsourcing they see in the world, they are creating the same unethical relationship as corporations who utilise crowdsourcing. Seen through the lens of ethics and whether or not a good model of participation is created, it can be asserted that *Learning to Love You More* is essentially a bad model (with the best intensions) by virtue of its crowdsourced structure. The aesthetic of *Learning To Love Your More* is based on this structure of participation, and it is impossible to consider the success of the piece without considering whether it created the democratic, open model of participation to which it aspires. The concept of the piece is confused in that the aesthetic form does not communicate in the way July and Fletcher intend it to. That is, they are attempting to create an empowering, self-reflective activity for their participants but are instead expressing their point of view through people, taking up the omnipotent role described by Groys where, by dissolving themselves into the masses, they are able to control the audience. People are no longer participants but instead become a medium to be moulded into whatever form the artist conceives while the artist relinquishes responsibility over the content produced.

In a slightly different model of participation, Ele Carpenter's project *Open Source Embroidery* (2005-present) draws a parallel between open source software development and traditional needlework crafts. Carpenter invited participants through workshops and online social networks to create one hexagonal piece of the 216 web safe hexadecimal code colour quilt [*Illus. 4*].[35]

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[34] Qtd. by Howe in "Is Crowdsourcing Evil?" – Steve Douglas, "Design is a 'Snooty' Business: Forbes," 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.thelogofactory.com/logo_blog/index.php/design-snooty-business-forbes/>.

[35] Computer colours are encoded with a 6 character hexadecimal code (a base 16 system utilising the characters 0-9 and A-F); in the early days of the internet, most computers had 8-bit graphic cards which could not display the full range of colours the vast majority of computers today can display. Web standards, originally developed by the World Wide Web Consortium ["The World Wide Web Consortium," 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.w3.org>.] dictate that the web designer should aim "to deliver the greatest benefits to the greatest number of web users" ["The Web Standards Project," 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.webstandards.org/about/mission/>.]. The "web safe" colours were 216 colours that could be viewed by

Carpenter sees needlework, in which the back of the embroidery shows how the pattern was constructed, as similar to open source software/coding, where the ability to look at the 'back end' or hidden coding structure allows developers to learn, tweak and share the code.[36] The resultant pieces of Carpenter's open source quilt were displayed both with their front end design [*Illus. 5*] and back end mechanics [*Illus. 6*]. 'Open source' and 'crowdsourcing' are similar concepts but have been distinguished by academics as essentially separate entities. Brabham states that, "Wikis and open source software production are not considered crowdsourcing because there is no sponsoring organization at the top directing the labor of individuals in the online community."[37] While Carpenter's project can be seen as a kind of idealisation or demonstration of open sourcing in that it attempts to rekindle the kind of open exchange, sharing and community that grows organically in knitting circles and software development communities, the project veers towards crowdsourcing in that Carpenter essentially assigns Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs) that are then performed to specification, allowing for creativity within set parameters.[38] The nature of the art world places a natural hierarchy on participatory art. This usually consists of an artist with an idea that is put forth to some form of public for contribution. Unlike open source software development, where participation is motivated by entertainment and is essentially a hobby for highly skilled amateur or professional programmers, crowdsourcing is done by an unskilled or amateur public who are often motivated by money or professional development.[39] While the hierarchical structure of artist initiated participatory projects is not new to the Web 2.0 era, the tendency of assigning tasks for the public to complete seems to echo the form and role the public are increasingly taking up in the highly networked world of Web 2.0.

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computer users with 8-bit graphics on their machines. While web safe colours is generally acknowledged to be unnecessary now, a great number of web developers feel some nostalgia for the original web palette [Lynda Weinman, "No Dithering Colors in Browsers," 2004, 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.lynda.com/resources/webpalette.aspx>.].

[36] 'Open source' is essentially exactly what it says it is: the source computer code from which programmes and websites originate is open for anyone to have a look at and alter in any way they choose. 'Back end' is a term in computing for the unseen coding which allows the programme or web page to run. The 'front end' is the user interface that can be accessed via web browser or running and application

[37] Brabham, "Crowdsourcing"

[38] HITs are tasks which a computer algorithm has a relatively hard time completing while a human often finds quite straightforward. Crowdsourcing initiatives like Amazon's Mechnical Turk ["Amazon Mechanical Turk," 1 Sep. 2010 <https://www.mturk.com/mturk/welcome>.] pays pennies for people to perform HITs such as creating a video, writing a review or tagging photos.

[39] Daren C. Brabham, "Moving the crowd at iStockphoto: The composition of the crowd and motivations for participation in a crowdsourcing application," *First Monday* 13:6 (2 June 2008), 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2159/1969>.

It's easy to look at Carpenter's project from the perspective of ethics. Carpenter herself frames the project in terms of ethics: "The OSE [Open Source Embroidery] workshops are aimed at people with craft of programming and/or HTML skills to come together and explore the ethics and principles of their practice."[40] It seems then that Carpenter is trying to create, as Clare Bishop phrases it, a "good model" of collaboration. The best Carpenter can do in this case, however, is attempt to *recreate* a type of collaboration that is difficult if not impossible to authentically form given the hierarchical relationship between artist and participant. Essentially, open source says 'Do what you want with it', crowdsource says 'Do this task or solve this problem based on these parameters'. Open source not only invites a higher level of creative thinking but also dispenses with traditional ideas of authorship and copyright. Many people who use open source see it as a more just means of distribution, a sentiment echoed by Carpenter in her discussion of new media and participation:

> …new media didn't invent participation; people who work with social networks on the ground already knew how much time and genuine involvement is needed to facilitate meaningful interaction. New media seems to have pulled 'participation' into the culture of 'cool' technology. But the most radical impact is the politicized culture of digital media testing the legal and ethical frameworks of production and distribution.[41]

Carpenter highlights an important element of the role of digital media in society in that it has, to a large extent, called the established hierarchy of production and distribution into question.

From outward appearances, the file sharers, social networkers, YouTube video remixers, meme makers and content appropriators of the Web 2.0 world are operating against traditional capitalism – utilising content with a blatant disregard to copyright and ownership, creating a digital utopia of "free". On closer inspection, these are the forces that are tearing down the previous model of capitalism and re-enforcing the new, more adaptable version of global capitalism in which even global labour is free or nearly free – not just for impoverished nations but for the

[40] Ceci Moss, "Interview with Ele Carpenter," 1 Oct. 2009, 1 Sep. 2010 <http://rhizome.org/editorial/2975>.
[41] Moss, "Interview with Ele Carpenter"

richest nations as well. Lev Manovich argues that this remixing tendency is due to the extent to which creativity has been invaded by capitalist media. He says:

> …given that a significant percentage of user-generated content either follows templates and conventions established by the professional entertainment industry or directly reuses professionally produced content… does this mean that people's identities and imagination are now even more firmly colonized by commercial media than in the twentieth century?[42]

For example, if a Web 2.0 user chose to use a new social networking service that none of their friends or acquaintances were on, there would be no point unless they could convince their friends to use it as well. Web 2.0 services are contingent upon social networks which in turn bind users to a certain type of creative output and communication.

Crowdsourcing then becomes a way for the capitalist machine to reappropriate an idea similar to open source or wikis or digital sharing/shareware and make it work for the production of capital. Crowdsourcing, in a way, is the capitalist method of harnessing the digital concept of "free". Whereas the music industry, film industry and countless other content producers have spent years trying to combat the growing societal belief that digital music, movies and other digital files, as well as websites and online newspapers should be free for users to consume and share, the rise of crowdsourcing suggests that businesses can conversely assert that labour should be free (or nearly free) as well. That's not to say that somehow we are working towards a digital communism where everything will be shared. As crowdsourcing becomes more acceptable, models are put into place to make paying for digital content more palatable i.e. the ease of use of iTunes, its assimilation with all Apple products. So "free", a revolutionary idea in the digital realm that started out with those who were operating outside of the traditional conventions of consumer capitalism online, is pulled away from the revolutionaries and integrated into the larger capitalist project on the internet.

[42] Lev Manovich, "Art after Web 2.0," *The Art of Participation,* eds. Rudolf Frieling and Boris Groys (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008) 71.

This is relevant to Carpenter's piece in that, by appropriating the idea of open source and utilising it in the art world context, she is unwittingly performing an activity that is similar to the larger project of capitalist forces online. Just as Web 2.0 entrepreneurs have appropriated "free", Carpenter has appropriated "open source" in the creation of something that more closely resembles crowdsourcing. If both the participants and the quilt are the materials that Carpenter is utilising in her curatorial project, then she is able to mould them into a form that resembles open source software and quilting circles but actually contains the hierarchical formation of curator/artist-led project that clearly expresses the artist's point of view rather than empowers amateurs.

The issue in both Carpenter's project and July/Fletcher's project is that both clearly have objectives and points of view that they are expressing through their work but abdicate responsibility for the contents of their work by using a crowdsourcing model, creating a situation where they self-sacrifice in favour of the "noble amateur" – Andrew Keen's term for the idealised role of the amateur in Web 2.0. Keen is the most well-known and well publicised figure in the critique of Web 2.0 on grounds that its promotion of amateurism is destroying our cultural fabric. His incendiary 2007 book *The Cult of The Amateur* contains a passionate argument against the online movement that he sees as ushering in the demise of experts, trained professional and "cultural gatekeepers"– in journalism, music, filmmaking, etc – in lieu of Web 2.0-empowered amateur bloggers, MySpace garage bands and YouTube webcammers.[43] While Keen's argument is incredibly problematic and largely unsubstantiated, his declaration that the increasingly amateur nature of cultural output in Web 2.0 is taking over from the hierarchies of publishing, production, etc, is worth considering in the context of art.

Andrew Keen's book is largely filled with nostalgia. He prefers printed newspapers, for example, merely because they have been around a long time, and he unfairly labels all internet information as "unreliable or biased", ignoring the longstanding tradition of political bias in printed

[43] Keen 9.

newspapers, especially in his native UK.[44] Despite the preponderance of unsubstantiated arguments against Web 2.0 that can be found in Keen's book, he nonetheless hints at one of the more intriguing intricacies of Web 2.0 'democracy' – that the democracy is perhaps an illusion:

> Wikipedia, which is almost single-handedly killing the traditional information business, has only a small handful of full-timers, in addition to Jimmy Wales. It brings to mind Sir Thomas More's much-quoted remark from his 1515 satire *Utopia*, where, in reaction to the Enclosure Laws that banned the peasantry from the fields of the great estates, he wrote that 'sheep are devouring men.' Five hundred years later, in the Web 2.0 world, computers are consuming journalists with the same results: Many people are losing their livelihood, and a few lucky souls – landowning aristocrats in More's day and executives at companies like MySpace, YouTube, and Google in our own – are getting very, very rich.[45]

As 'professionals' lose their jobs and companies make more and more money off of amateur content, Web 2.0 executives are the elite group that wins out. This is the point at which Keen's argument that Web 2.0 is ushering in the demise of elitism and hierarchy in favour bland amateurism falls apart. As he himself points out, the "noble amateur" and democracy online are a ruse that only *appears* to be elevating the amateur. While traditional hierarchies were at least transparent, the more insidious hierarchies of Web 2.0 are hidden under a façade of democracy, masquerading as user empowerment.

In light of this, Carpenter and July/Fletcher are actually reasserting their expert status and power because their projects are largely the top down crowdsourcing model of participation rather than any kind of real collaboration. Fletcher's secret hope that his work will effect social change may be Carpenter's secret hope as well. Although both would probably admit that very little real attitudinal change comes from their work, they both hold onto the social space as the key site of interest. Carpenter states her intention as, "I wanted to create a space where both the expert and

[44] Keen 124.
[45] Keen 131.

the amateur could come together within a critical context."[46] It's an interesting notion, placing experts and amateurs in dialogue, but when the project is dictated from such a singular point of view and with obvious social goals in mind, it becomes a dictate to share and be a community when sharing and community are things that develop organically, not from artificially imposed dictates or parameters. One of the main aims of Carpenter's project is to celebrate the amateur. She states:

> I like the idea of folksonomy, where meta-data classification is defined by 'folk' rather than curators. The Internet has enabled folk and amateur communities to network across distance. Folk culture represents a community of interest defined by its users. The principle of openness and interactivity on the net and the question of how to sort and filter data has led to new social forms of taxonomy sometimes called 'folksonomy'. Social tagging values the 'amateur' perspective, not as unprofessional, but as rooted in everyday experience.[47]

Extrapolating from both July/Fletcher's comments and Carpenter's comments it becomes apparent that artists are interested in the forms they see growing online – the open source and hobbyist communities that develop and fluctuate online. It seems that they are attempting to create a platform from which these activities can happen in an art context. However, these artists are doing more than merely creating a platform, they are recreating digital sharing/collaboration from a hierarchical art world perspective while abdicating responsibility for the content of their work.

In the rush to celebrate the supposedly democratic and open principles of the internet, artists are eager to organise "collaborative" projects in the spirit of early internet hobbyist communities and open source development groups. Even offline or semi-offline projects often emulate these forms. By celebrating the amateur, these artists simultaneously exploit the amateur and undermine their utopian mission while elevating themselves to a saintly position of self-sacrifice in order to empower the people. This is the unfortunate aspect of crowdsourcing participatory work – the

[46] Moss, "Interview with Ele Carpenter"
[47] ibid

artists rarely set out to exploit their participants, on the contrary, many of these artists espouse their desire to empower their participants. By utilising the forms of Web 2.0 uncritically, however, these artists unwittingly mimic the problems and issues associated with Web 2.0.

And so, a conspiracy theory: what if Facebook was set up to collect data for market researchers and advertisers? What if every user's profile is just a survey that gathers demographic information as well as tastes and interests? What if Facebook users have voluntarily linked themselves to their peer group who have also filled in this survey? Would this not be the greatest repository of marketing information that ever existed? And Facebook users have willingly given Facebook's owners/advertisers this information for free.

While the Web 2.0 conspiracy theory is certainly a simplification of the motives and goals of both web designer and user, the resultant situation described is an undeniable reality: Web 2.0 sites like Facebook have amassed some of the most robust and complex databases ever seen. Jaron Lanier, author of *You Are Not A Gadget*, another critique of Web 2.0 from a Silicon Valley pioneer, seems to agree with the implication of the conspiracy theory, that Facebook was never meant for the user:

> …one must remember that the customers of social networks are not the members of those networks. The real customer is the advertiser of the future… The whole artifice, the whole idea of fake friendship, is just bait laid by the lords of the clouds to lure hypothetical advertisers."

Following this logic, Web 2.0 users have been duped into giving away valuable marketing data by the seductive powers of media.

Not only have they been blinded to the marketing database they're building but also to the dehumanisation that occurs when fitting people into the strict confines of computer data.
The database has fundamentally changed the way people experience media and life. Media theorist Geert Lovink states, "We no longer watch films or TV; we watch databases. Instead of

well-defined programmes, we search one list after another."[48] The confines of life in the database are evident in the lack of nuance in networked relationships. Lanier attributes this to the very properties of computing:

> The binary character at the core of software engineering tends to reappear at higher levels. It is far easier to tell a program to run or not to run, for instance, than it is to tell it to sort-of run. In the same way, it is easier to set up a rigid representation of human relationships on digital networks: on a typical social networking site, either you are designated to be in a couple or you are single (or you are in one of a few other pre-determined states of being) – and that reduction of life is what gets broadcast between friends all the time. What is communicated between people eventually becomes their truth. Relationships take on the troubles of software engineering.[49]

Lanier attempts to expose the limitations on human expression and interaction that occur when computer technology is used to plug humanity into databases. Ultimately, Lanier argues, the database model of human identity and interaction becomes the norm and the nuance of human life outside of quantifiable data is lost.

In *Postproduction*, Bourriaud writes:

> In a universe of products for sale, preexisting forms, signals already emitted, buildings already constructed, paths marked out by their predecessors, artists no longer consider the artistic field (and here one could add television, cinema, or literature) a museum containing works that must be cited or 'surpassed,' as the modernist ideology of originality would have it, but so many storehouses filled with tools that should be used, stockpiles of data to manipulate and present.[50]

If we are looking at collections of data in artworks, Lanier would argue that the artwork is then becoming a reduction. Bourriaud privileges "use" or "function" in *Postproduction* and databases are indeed effective ways to reduce unwieldy nuances of human relationships into useful

[48] Geert Lovink, "The Art of Watching Databases: Introduction to The Video Vortex Reader," *Video Vortex Reader: Responses to YouTube*, eds. Geert Lovink and Sabine Niederer (Amsterdam: Institute of Network Cultures, 2008) 9.
[49] Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not A Gadget* (London: Allen Lane, 2010) 71.
[50] Bourriaud, *Postproduction* 17.

binaries. With data as a medium, there are fewer accidents, elements and meanings that can't be predicted or controlled.

Evan Roth and Ben Engebreth's crowdsourced project *White Glove Tracking* (2007) [*Illus. 7*] is another instance in which the forms of crowdsourcing and open source are evident in what could possibly be a textbook example of postproduction.[51] The piece contains two layers of participation, the original more menial crowdsourced task of isolating the white gloved hand of Michael Jackson in the video of his televised performance of Billie Jean, and then the open source/crowdsourced level where programmers possessing a higher skill set were able to use the data collected via the crowd to programme new videos and remixes utilising Michael Jackson's isolated white glove. For example, one programmer used the data to make Jackson's hand abnormally large throughout the performance [*Illus. 8*], one created an effect where Jackson's hand is on fire [*Illus. 9*], etc.[52] This can be seen as a kind of comparison study of crowdsourcing and open sourcing within the confines of the piece. This comparison is interesting in that it locates the difference between crowdsourcing and the use of open source materials. The level of calculation in the use of each in relation to the pop culture subject matter makes the exercise purposefully inane. The inane content serves to highlight the distinction between the first level and second level of participation. The labour of the first wave of participation is unskilled but the task is quickly achieved using a large number of people. The labour of the second wave, by contrast, is skilled and therefore only a small number of people are willing and able to participate. On the other hand, the inane content of the piece works *against* it as well, and it becomes an exercise in use of the technological tools available to crowdsource. With each new technological tool that becomes available, pioneers see the opportunities to utilise it for the creation of art. However, many artists create work that merely celebrates the new tool rather than create meaningful form or content with it.

[51] Evan Roth, "Evan Roth," 1 Sep. 2010 <http://evan-roth.com/>.
[52] Evan Roth, "White Glove Tracking," 1 Sep. 2010 <http://whiteglovetracking.com/>.

Sharing and Copyleft in Crowdsourced Art

Several artists' works not only utilise various forms of crowdsourcing but also simultaneously question the existing Web 2.0 structures where the spoils of group labour are generally accumulated by the corporation or artist who facilitates the project, rather than shared by the community.

Aaron Koblin has created a body of work dealing with crowdsourcing and its problematic elements. In his piece *The Sheep Market* (2006), Koblin used Amazon's Mechanical Turk crowdsourcing tool to solicit 10,000 Turkers, the site's online crowdsourced workforce, to draw a picture of a sheep facing to the left for 0.02 ($USD) [*Illus. 10*].[53] In his piece *Ten Thousand Cents* (2008), made in collaboration with Takashi Kawashima, Koblin similarly uses Mechanical Turk again, paying 0.01 ($USD) to 10,000 people to draw a tiny section of the $100 bill [*Illus. 11].* The resultant prints [*Illus. 12*] are being sold for $100. Koblin not only utilises but also challenges the crowdsourcing model. Similar to Santiago Sierra, there's an obvious gesture towards the exploitative nature of his materials that serve to highlight the inherent problem. Koblin even references Sierra in his 2006 UCLA thesis paper.[54] It is clear from Koblin's thesis that he's approaching crowdsourcing and the Mechanical Turk workforce from the angle that it allows companies to underpay labourers to the point of exploitation. Unlike Sierra, however, there is an unwillingness on Koblin's part to stoke controversy and personally profit from the venture. Therefore, he is giving the proceeds from the sale of his $100 prints to the charity One Laptop Per Child.[55]

Despite the project's acknowledgement of the issues around crowdsourcing and Koblin's willingness to take ownership over his project, there's something that rings hollow about Koblin's crowdsourcing work perhaps because there is no point of view beyond the utilisation of the technology for the purposes of critique. Although Koblin cleverly acknowledges the hypocrisy in

[53] "Amazon Mechanical Turk," 1 Sep. 2010 <https://www.mturk.com/mturk/welcome>.
[54] Aaron Koblin, "The Sheep Market: Two Cents Worth," MA thesis, UCLA, 2006. 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.aaronkoblin.com/work/thesheepmarket/TheSheepMarket.doc>.
[55] Aaron Koblin, "Ten Thousand Cents: Purchase Prints," 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.tenthousandcents.com/top.html#purchase_prints>.

creating a “collaborative” project in which the artist takes the credit for the larger vision, he does so without having any relevant or interesting content beneath the utilisation of crowdsourcing. The medium of crowdsourcing is used as an end in itself and so becomes like a demonstration of that technology, although it does contain the added acknowledgement of its exploitative nature. When Koblin requests that users draw a section of the $100 or a picture of a sheep, the message around the exploitation of workers through crowdsourced capitalism comes through heavy-handedly. The repetition of the exercise in these two iterations likewise feels overdone.

Another artist who has used crowdsourcing models to critique the crowdsourcing drive operates under the pseudonym “.-_-.” He calls *.re_potemkin* (2008), his most recent project, a “copyleft crowdsourcing free/open source cinema” project. In *.re_potemkin*, .-_-. asked art and design students at Yildiz Technical University to re-create Sergei Eisenstein’s 1925 silent film *The Battleship Potemkin* shot by shot, each working on different parts of the film [*Illus. 13*].[56] Unlike Aaron Koblin’s work, *.re_potemkin* is not a literal example of crowdsourcing since it is not the product of an open call but rather the collaboration of a closed student community. In Koblin’s work there is a kind of self-contained aesthetic where the work is the form is the work i.e. the work is crowdsourced and it is about crowdsourcing. The only layer of contemplation in Koblin’s work is in the publishing of statistics on how much money each of his participants is making per hour or by selling the product of their labour for a significant mark-up (albeit with proceeds going to charity). *.re_potemkin,* on the other hand, takes on a far broader scope in the choice of signifiers it borrows. Rather than sheep and money – two very strong and un-nuanced signifiers for Koblin’s anti-capitalist point of view – *.re_potemkin* utilises *Battleship Potemkin*, a film that took propaganda to another level through its use of highly emotive filmmaking techniques. The choice of this film calls the ideological optimism and utopian outlook of Web 2.0 into question. As Rob Myers writes on Furtherfield.org:

> The ‘commons based peer production’ of free software and free culture is not, to use Jaron Lanier's phrase, ‘Digital Maoism’. But the comparison is a useful one even if it is

[56] “.re_potemkin: >> a copyleft crowdsourcing free/open source cinema project_” 1 Sep. 2010 <http://re-potemkin.httpdot.net/>.

> not correct. Utopianism was exploited by the Soviets as it is exploited by the vectorialist media barons of Web 2.0. .re_potemkin gives us side-by-side examples of communism and crowdsourcing to consider this comparison for ourselves.[57]

Going deeper than comparing communism and crowdsourcing, however, .-_-. directly confronts the aesthetics produced by two different economic ideologies. If *The Battleship Potemkin* is indicative of the creative output of early Communist Russia, then the 'crowdsourced' version contains the remixing, DIY postproduction impulse inherent in the Web 2.0 world. The operative aesthetic order of today is the rehashing, remaking, remixing that this project conjures.[58]

Lanier's concept of "digital Maoism," as mentioned by Myers, is closely related to Web 2.0 amateurism and has its anchoring in the 'democratic' or 'levelling' nature of this technology. Lanier describes how Maoism celebrated the peasants and punished the intellectuals while suppressing any hierarchy that did not coincide with the internal hierarchy of the Communist Party and equates this situation with Web 2.0 today:

> In the same way, digital Maoism doesn't reject all hierarchy. Instead, it overwhelmingly rewards the one preferred hierarchy of digital metaness, in which a mashup is more important than the sources who were mashed… If you have seized a very high niche in the aggregation of human expression… then you can become superpowerful.[59]

Copyright is not only nearly impossible to enforce in the realm of Web 2.0, but our networked society is increasingly seeing copyright as immoral or unjust. The digital is assumed to have been born free – therefore the individual creating an original piece of work who goes against the online laws of nature is seen as greedy, selfish, conservative, etc. As Lanier notes, the remixed and remashed dominate Web 2.0 sites, but will this eventually lead to the demise of original content? Lanier foresees a new kind of dark age where people are endlessly regurgitating old content without any new or original art, music, design or film. He states, "It's as if culture froze just before it became digitally open, and all we can do now is mine the past like salvagers picking over a

[57] Rob Myers, ".re_potemkin," 5 Jun. 2010, 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.furtherfield.org/displayreview.php?review_id=400>.
[58] Nicholas Bourriaud, *Postproduction* (New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002).
[59] Lanier 79.

garbage dump."[60] While this may be an overly alarmist sentiment – that the internet effectively stalled culture – Lanier rightly addresses the possibility of a dark side to 'postproduction'.

His point of view is in direct contrast to the optimism espoused by Nicolas Bourriaud in his book *Postproduction*. From Bourriaud's perspective, postproduction signals a move beyond the modernist tabula rasa and the idea of a finished or discrete work of art.[61] Bourriaud proclaims:

> In this new form of culture, which one might call a culture of use or a culture of activity, the artwork functions as the temporary terminal of a network of interconnected elements… The artwork is no longer an end point but a simple moment in an infinite chain of contributors… In generating behaviours and potential reuses, art challenges passive culture, composed of merchandise and consumers. It makes the forms and cultural objects of our daily lives *function*.[62]

Judging by his language, Bourriaud sees postproduction not as a dark age but instead a moment of revolt where artists can now break away from the confines of a progressive art history where each new generation must somehow surpass the previous generation. In many ways, he is correct in that the art world today doesn't recognise or reward "progress". However, professional artists are not the only ones engaging in this type of creative process – everyone/anyone can and is partaking in remix cultural creation.

Joseph Beuys said around 1979, perhaps ironically, that "everyone is an artist." But not everyone in the 70s had access to the tools, the galleries, the information, and the institutions that make one a professional artist. Perhaps Alexei Shulgin foresaw the significant change that the web would bring when he made his "grains of gold" comment – the internet and Web 2.0 tools at the very least facilitate the potential for amateurs/non-professionals to easily create and publish their creative output for the first time to a large global audience without any need for the approval of gallerists, curators, museums or art schools. These Web 2.0 tools tend to facilitate forms of

[60] Lanier 131.
[61] Bourriaud, *Postproduction* 17, 19.
[62] Bourriaud, *Postproduction* 19-20.

postproduction as opposed to original production essentially making everyone the kind of artist Bourriaud describes; everyone is carving a pathway through the refuse of civilization – typically in their own self-image.

Guy Debord's concept of the spectacle is still alive and well, though now it is not "a pseudo-world apart, solely as an object of contemplation," but a pseudo-world that consists solely of isolated self-broadcast.[63] Everyone is busy furiously representing themselves online and are very rapidly creating an image of life and an artificial world divorced from reality. The Twitter feed and the Facebook status update are indicative of the suspension of life in lieu of representing life. The constant stream of posts announcing brief inanities such as "I am at the supermarket" or "Just had my hair cut" has allowed nearly everyone to represent themselves to an abstract public while maintaining an isolated state. In his 1967 text, Debord writes:

> Lewis Mumford, in *The City in History*, points out that with the advent of long-distance mass communication, the isolation of the population has become a much more effective means of control. But the general trend towards isolation, which is the essential reality of urbanism, must also embody a controlled reintegration of the workers based on the planned needs of production and consumption. Such an integration into the system must recapture isolated individuals as individuals *isolated together*. Factories and cultural centers, holiday camps and housing developments – all are expressly oriented to a pseudo-community of this kind. These imperatives pursue the isolated individual right into the *family cell,* where the generalized use of receivers of the spectacle's message ensures that his isolation is filled with the dominant images – images that indeed that indeed attain their full force only by virtue of this isolation.[64]

One might also add to Debord's list of pseudo-communities Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr. The technology of Web 2.0 has facilitated a broadcast culture that furthers individual isolation. Increasingly Web 2.0 users are communicating passively, broadcasting to a general or abstract audience of online friends in a concise 140 character Twitter message or Facebook

[63] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle,* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994) 12.
[64] Debord 122.

feed. Web 2.0 sites facilitate this frantic self-representation that people have come to feel is both useful and necessary and so these users are blissfully unconscious to both the dissolution of the complexities of human life that can not be distilled into a multiple choice survey, and the exploitation of valuable personal information for the benefit of advertisers.

Underneath the façade of user empowerment and self-expression facilitated by Web 2.0, the utopian ideal of "free" online has mutated into the acceptability of free labour, as previously noted. In the online world, long established copyright and ownership laws tied to physical nations and nation-state governments are often unpoliceable but, in a free market/neo-liberal sphere such as the internet, so too are labour, exploitation, and taxation laws difficult to regulate or police. The result is that a Web 2.0 world is increasingly stratified between those who own all the online "industries" and "resources" and those who must participate by utilising a small number of online products, tied together through social networking.

.re_potemkin confronts this reality in both its form – the remixed, the remade, the crowdsourced – and its potent signifier *The Battleship Potemkin,* which is itself the innovative creative output of a utopian ideology. By very carefully utilising an open license and open source/non-proprietary video codecs that allows free distribution and use of the piece, .-_-. questions the accepted practice where Web 2.0 corporations own the content published or created using their products. Myers notes:

> With crowdsourced intangible goods the best way of rewarding people who donate their labour to produce those goods is simply to give the resulting product to them under a licence that allows them to use it freely. Non-profit projects such as GNU and Wikipedia do this very successfully, but corporations are always tempted to try and privilege their "ownership" of other people's work. Where crowdsourced labour is exploited without fair compensation this [is] called sharecropping.[65]

[65] Myers, ".re_potemkin"

While placing ownership back into the hands of the workers avoids the sharecropping aspect of crowdsourcing, .-_-.'s piece also invites a meditation on the status of open source/licensing on the internet today.[66] Although the practice of open source has existed since the invention of computers, the term was only coined in 1998 in response to the browser Netscape releasing their source-code to the programming community.[67] Although open source operating systems like Linux have been around for twenty years, their popularity has remained relatively low, despite them being free, because the concept of open source seems to appeal most to those with programming or hacking nous. Open licensing and open source are often an unwieldy world that non-technical people rarely venture into. The idea of sharing resources and the benefits of labour freely, in a similar manner to communism, is ostensibly a fair and equitable way to operate, but in the context of open source or crowdsource, it only seems to be popular when labourers have equal tasks or equal skills, or have formed a tight-knit community. By soliciting work from a student population rather than the internet at large, *.re_potemkin* questions the boundaries and conditions under which people are willing to work for free.

The investigation of shared licensing, in a post-GNU license world, can be seen in work that is operating on a non-digital level as well.[68] In Rebecca Lennon's piece *I Could Never Live Like You Do* (2010) [*Illus. 14*], she draws inspiration from a North Korean photograph of thousands of people standing in a well-organised, colourful formation. Lennon staged a similar performance over four hours with thirty participants where each of the participants was asked to wear clothing of a certain colour (orange, white or brown) and asked to hold up a matching sheet of paper. The participants are called 'shareholders' and Lennon has given each of them part ownership of her piece. The contracts between the shareholders and Lennon are displayed in the installation to show that they are all part owners of the piece. While other artists who have made participatory works certainly pay participants in certain circumstance, notably Santiago Sierra in his work which

[66] Nicholas Carr, "Sharecropping the Long Tail," 19 Dec. 2006, 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.roughtype.com/archives/2006/12/sharecropping_t.php>.
[67] "Open Source Initiative," 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.opensource.org/history>.
[68] GNU license is a type of online licensing developed for free, open source software which protects the software developer while allowing for open source and free distribution ["The GNU General Public License," 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.gnu.org/licenses/gpl.html> .]

highlights exploitation of various groups of people in often quite shocking ways, Lennon addresses the idea of ownership and sharing in a manner which is inevitably touched by the issues of ownership in the digital realm.

Like *.re_potemkin,* this piece rewards free labour by allowing the participants to share the work. In this case it's unlikely that any of the shareholders were motivated to participate because of the financial rewards they may receive via the sale of the piece. The more likely scenario is that they were drawn in from the point of view of interest in the art world and as members of that world at least to some extent. In this way, the piece utilises crowdsourcing but garners participants through a similar motivation to open sourcing. An example of an academic project that operates in a similar way is Galaxy Zoo, a crowdsourced project started in 2007.[69] Galaxy Zoo asks astronomy hobbyists on the internet to go through thousands of images taken by NASA's Hubble Space Telescope and identify galaxies based on a set of criteria given by academic astronomers, thereby significantly decreasing the workload of the trained professionals and allowing them to publish results far more quickly. The task is simply tagging pictures based on given galaxy shape specification, something that companies regularly pay people on Mechanical Turk to do. In the case of the NASA project or Lennon's piece it can hardly be argued that the tedious tasks the participants are asked to perform are done because they are re 'fun' (something that may motivate participants in Carpenter's and July/Fletcher's projects, for instance).
It can be argued, then, that people are willing to look for galaxies or participate in an art project because they feel it somehow benefits the greater good or is a valuable contribution to society. In this case, the gesture of giving participants shares in the piece is a symbolic gesture. Overtly, it's an egalitarian gesture. However, the choice of North Korean source material, a place where brutal authoritarian rule flies under the banner of communism, and the recreation of a task that is so menial it requires a strong centralised imperative, suggests that there is a necessary cynicism underlying Lennon's gesture. The element of sharing is a token. The internet resurrected a utopian dream of a society where free and open sharing of creativity facilitated by technology

[69] "Galaxy Zoo: Hubble," 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.galaxyzoo.org/>.

supersedes the dominant capitalism of the non-digital world.[70] The open source movement in its many manifestations is the reminder of that dream. While people still participate in collaborative projects for altruistic reasons, they are increasingly doing so within a capitalist crowdsourcing framework rather than the open source collective framework. Lennon's piece has the properties of crowdsourcing while self-consciously leaning towards more egalitarian models of sharing, some of which were resurrected in the 1990s via things like 'open source' or GNU licensing. Older forms of collaboration are increasingly being subsumed by technology-led capitalist models of collaboration such as crowdsourcing, and participatory art practices are increasingly reflecting this change.

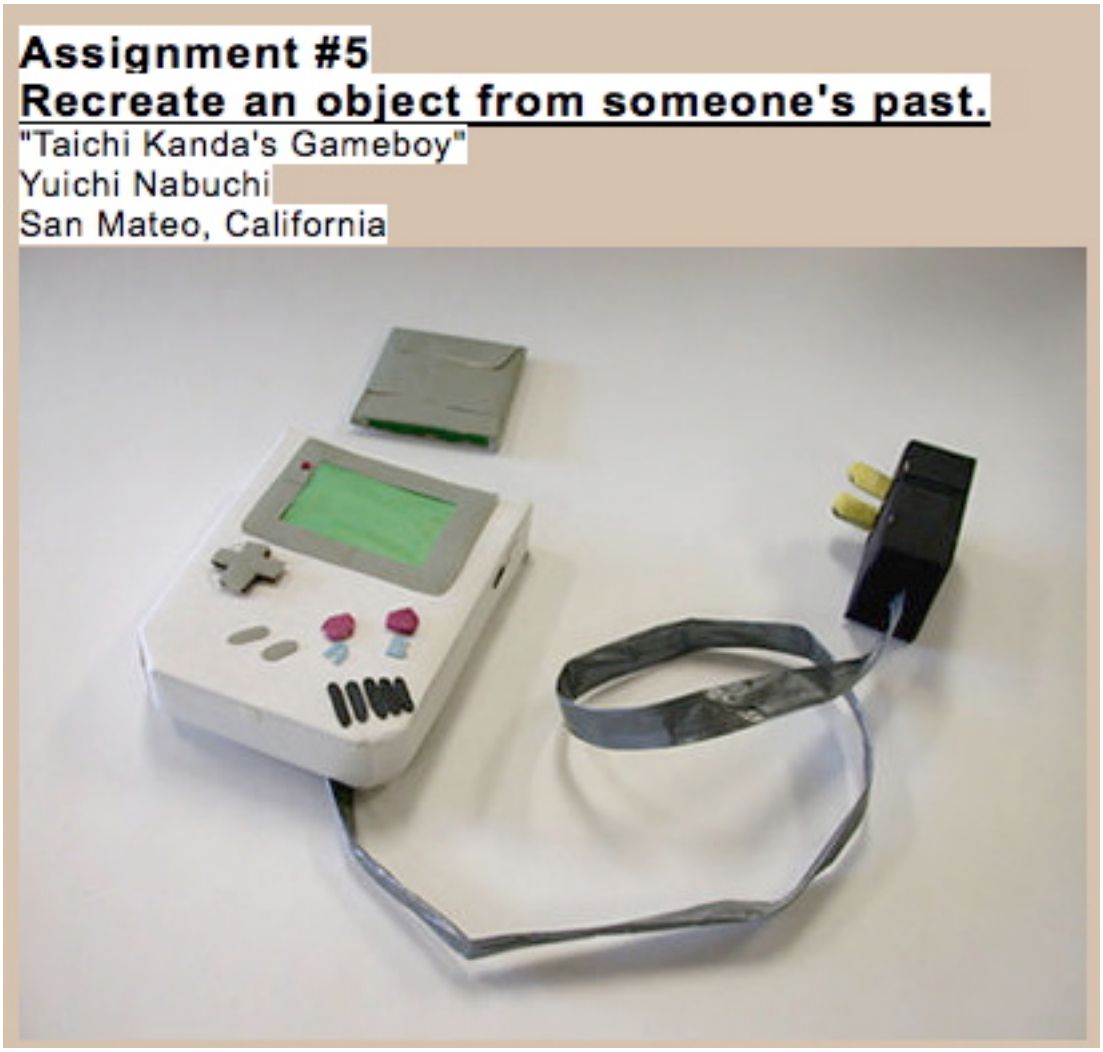
CONCLUSION

As collaboration and participation in art begins to look like crowdsourcing, it becomes more and more useful to think about this type of work within the critical discussion that surrounds Web 2.0 generally. The celebration of the amateur filters through mass media discussion into artistic practice, but the utopian democracy on the web does not deliver what it appears to promise. Exploitation often follows in the wake of corporations who create "user-empowering" platforms. The potential of dehumanisation, via the reductive form of the computer database, exists alongside the creative potential of exploring these databases. The most interesting works of art within this realm today are not those that merely call attention to these issues but also utilise the data or detritus of previous generations constructively and in a way that truly reflects contemporary life.

[70] Richard Barbrook, "The Holy Fools," *The Hypermedia Research Centre*, 1 Sep. 2010 <http://www.hrc.wmin.ac.uk/theory-holyfools-print.html>.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Illus. 1



Learning to Love You More, **Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher, 2002-2009**
(Source: http://www.learningtoloveyoumore.com/reports/5/nabuchi_yuichi.php)

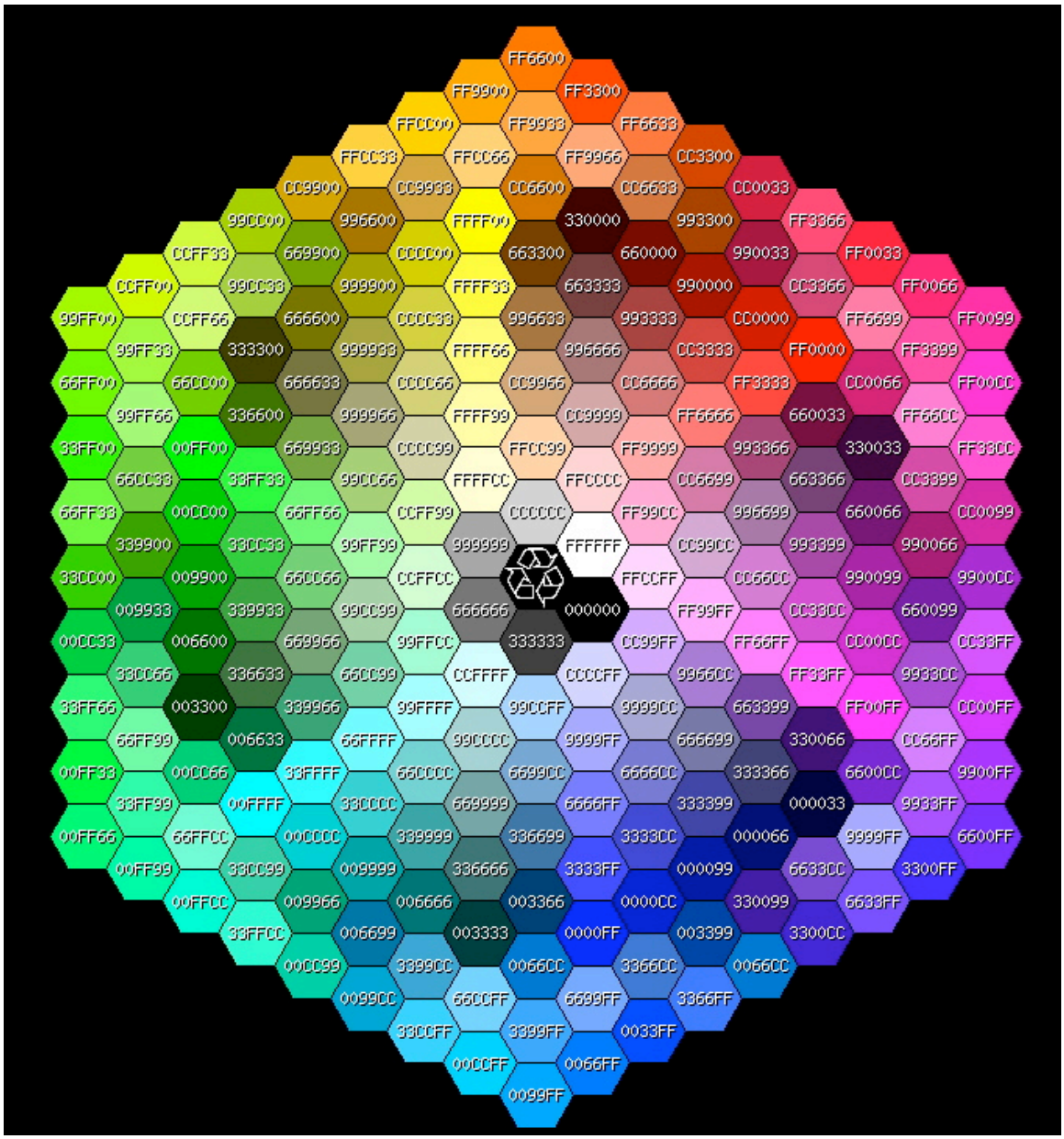
Illus. 2

***Learning to Love You More,* Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher, 2002-2009**
(Source: http://www.learningtoloveyoumore.com/reports/11/carolin_aina.php)

Illus. 3

Learning to Love You More, **Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher, 2002-2009**
(Source: http://www.learningtoloveyoumore.com/reports/30/hernandez_tony.php)

Illus. 4



***Open Source Embroidery*, Ele Carpenter, 2005-present**
(Source: www.open-source-embroidery.org.uk/*)*

Illus. 5

***Open Source Embroidery*, Ele Carpenter, 2005-present**
(Source: http://www.flickr.com/photos/http_gallery/3002155515/sizes/m/in/set-72057594063826759/)

Illus. 6

***Open Source Embroidery*, Ele Carpenter, 2005-present**
(Source: www.open-source-embroidery.org.uk/*)*

Illus. 7

Source Code

CLICK TO VIEW VIDEO

Download Application:

MAC --	yellow_box_example_MAC_APP.zip	65mb
PC --	wgt_yellow_box_example_PC_APP.zip	63mb

Download Source Code:

Processing --	yellow_box_PROCESSING.zip	66mb
Open Frameworks project (MAC) --	yellow_box_example_MAC_SC.zip	68mb
Open Frameworks project (PC) --	wgt_yellow_box_example_PC_APP.zip	70mb
Open Frameworks (no movie) (PC) --	wgt_yellow_box_noMovie_PC_SC.zip	7mb
Open Frameworks src --	yellow_box_src.zip	4kb
Flash (thanks J-Dubs) --	white-glove-tracking_jw_FLASH.zip	92mb

***White Glove Tracking*, Evan Roth, 2007**
(Source: http://whiteglovetracking.com/)

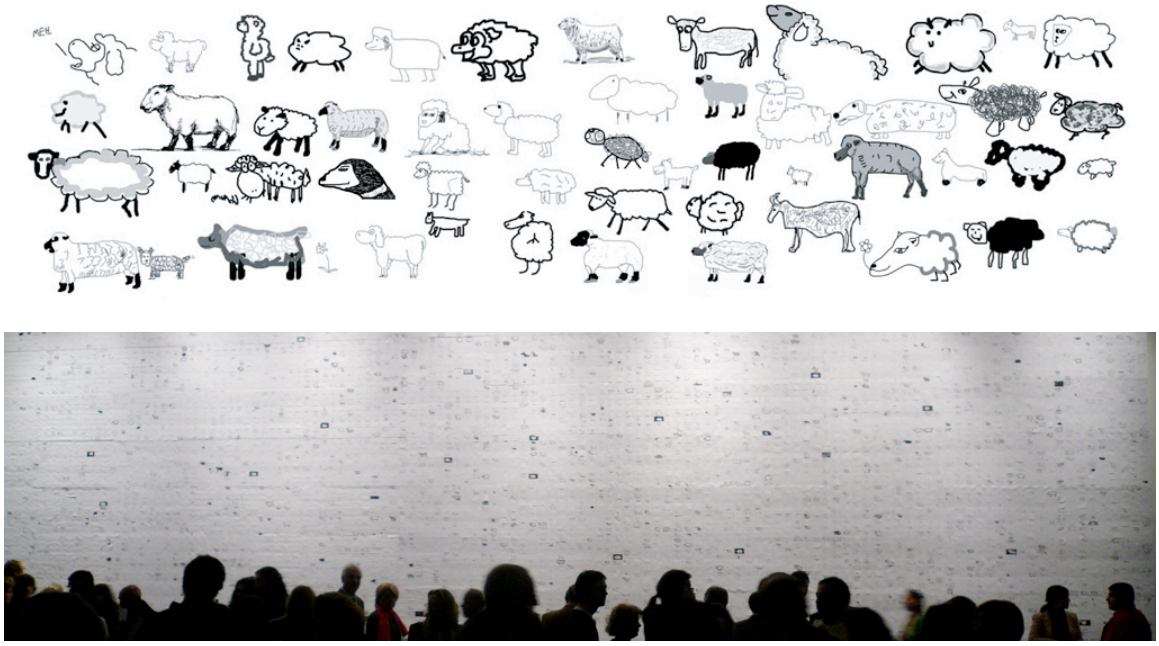
Illus. 8

***White Glove Tracking*, Evan Roth and Ben Engebreth, 2007**
(Source: http://whiteglovetracking.com/gallery.html)

Illus. 9

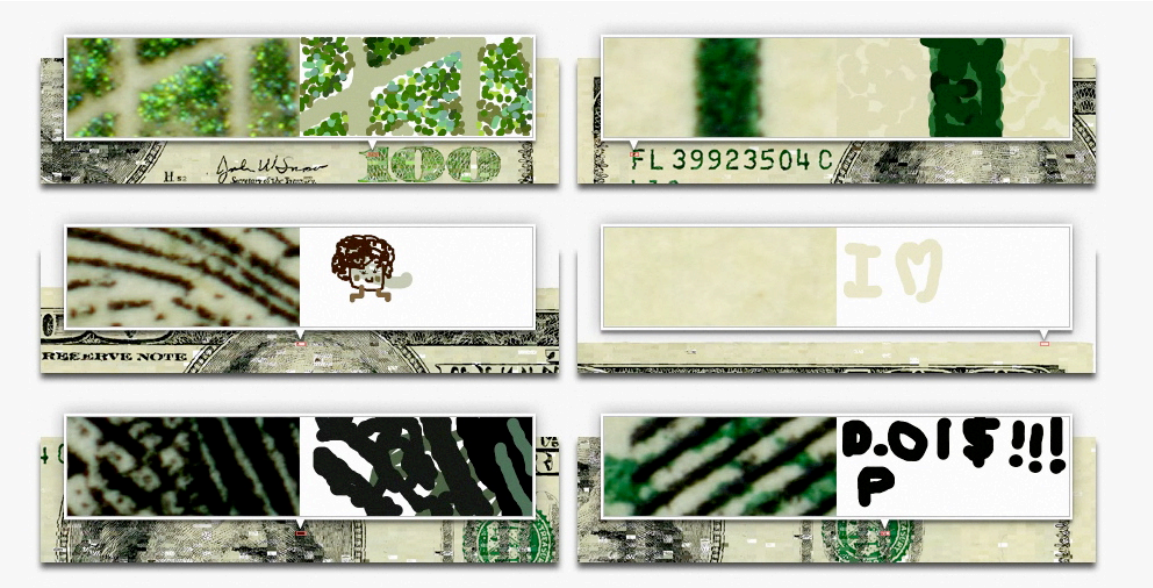
***White Glove Tracking*, Evan Roth and Ben Engebreth, 2007**
(Source: http://whiteglovetracking.com/gallery.html)

Illus. 10



***The Sheep Market*, Aaron Koblin, 2006**
(Source: http://www.aaronkoblin.com/work/thesheepmarket/index.html)

Illus. 11



***Ten Thousand Cents*, Aaron Koblin and Takashi Kawashima, 2008**
(Source: http://www.tenthousandcents.com/top.html)

Illus. 12

***Ten Thousand Cents*, Aaron Koblin and Takashi Kawashima, 2008**
(Source: http://www.tenthousandcents.com/top.html)

Illus. 13

***.re_potemkin*, .-_-., 2007**
(Source: http://www.furtherfield.org/displayreview.php?review_id=400)

Illus. 14

***I Could Never Live Like You Do*, Rebecca Lennon, 2010**
(Source: http://www.rebeccalennon.co.uk/ICOULD%20NEVER%20LIVELIKE%20YOU.htm)

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