Rainbows and Sunshine: Experiencing Life and Art

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RAINBOWS AND SUNSHINE
EXPERIENCING LIFE AND ART

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts
Visual Arts

by
Matthew S. Rink
May 2010

Accepted by:
David Detrich, Committee Chair
Christina Hung
Heidi Jensen
ABSTRACT

In this body of work I create temporary public-interstices that provide enjoyment, respite and reflection within the everyday experience. These projects are living-breathing events where I act as the facilitator of pleasure or comfort to encourage the viewer to consider valuable moments in the present. These are alive with real-time tactility; something that can be eaten, witnessed, physically felt or shared.

Within this series, I challenge the ordinary by splicing in comfort, gratification and excitement at random to provide a temporary moment outside of the norm. These moments oppose the rampant drive for commodity; fueled by under-compensated over-working by offering valuable experiences at no cost. Through these temporary constructed events I aim to cultivate conversations and experiences that reinforce the present through a memorable occurrence.

I synthesize my art with life and the people that comprise it. My practice is centered on action so that the work can make a literal connection with the audience. Through this connection I aim to foster contemplation as I ask the participants to temporarily slow down, be comfortable, consider the surroundings, and enjoy the fleeting nature of life. My influences are sourced from life and my creations are placed right back into it.
DEDICATION

To my family.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First off, I would like to thank my committee, Dave Detrich, Heidi Jensen and Christina Hung for helping to keep me in check while producing this thesis and the adjoining body of work. I greatly appreciate all the time and advice you have given me along the way.

To my Mom Andrea, Dad Roger, and Brother Chris; your consistent support and encouragement allows me to fearlessly pursue my work. I will never take for granted the wonderful and opportunity filled life you have provided for me.

To Sarah; you are my inspiration and better half. I couldn’t have done this without your patience and love.
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INTRODUCTION

In the following writing, I outline a series of fabricated experiences and objects, as well as the subsequent results and speculations. Each of these provides an alternative prospective for living and appreciating moments in life. Although much of the work is complex and time consuming from a logistical standpoint, I aim for simplicity as an end result. I find that the most meaningful elements in our lives are comprised from a series of simple moments. Through my recent work, I create a series of absurd moments that ultimately ask the viewer to analyze the situation. In doing so, the viewer becomes more aware of their surroundings and can begin to develop a deeper connection and understanding to their location.

While this series of work manifests my playful aspirations for duty-free experiences, I must admit that I myself am a current product and pawn of a rationalized economy; attempting to climb the ladder to carve out my share as much as anyone else. Realizing this, I create moments of gratifying freedom for myself and others that help to compensate for a reality that is inevitably filled with hard work. At the end of the day I enjoy creating projects that simply make people happy and as such I would be content with that as the end product.
I am interested in how the line between art and life can be blurred to facilitate a direct and sometimes unexpected connection with the audience. Researching this priority in art history uncovers many rich examples of this type of work; Allan Kaprow’s Happenings, Joseph Beuys’ Social Sculpture, some of Nicolas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics and Hakim Bey’s notion of Temporary Autonomous Zones (TAZ). In addition artists and collectives such as Rebar, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Pedro Reyes, and Gordon Matta Clark amongst others, offer insight for methods of interaction and illustrate thoughts about art and the artist’s responsibility to the public.

In my own practice I am aligned with many of the ideals and theoretical frame works as previously stated: I appreciate the immediacy and sometimes chaotic excitement of Happenings; I respect dearly the socially powerful and publically encompassing writings of Joseph Beuys; I credit Nicolas Bourriaud for defining the benefits of microscopic social improvements, and I derive motivational power from the writings of Hakim Bey. My work reflects diversely within these while I compile and develop my own framework and trajectory for studio practice.

Regarding process, artist and architect Pedro Reyes distinguishes between two types of working; the ‘problem mode’, which stems from a separation between the artist and the situation versus the ‘solution mode’ where the artist identifies
an issue and poses the question ‘how can I help?’ Like-wise a determination is made between art objects that are ‘useful’ versus objects that are ‘useable’. This is exemplified within works such as Palas Por Pistolas (Pistols for Spades) which took place in Culiacan, a city in Mexico with the highest number of gun related deaths. In this piece Reyes organized a system for people to trade weapons in exchange for products or vouchers of equal value. In total 1,527 guns were exchanged and the same number of trees planted to symbolize the process. The guns were melted down and cast into spades used to actually plant the trees before being documented in the gallery. In this way, Reyes acknowledges both the public space and the gallery as valid platforms for conversation. I align myself with this openness as it encompasses a non-judgmental, non-generalizing stance for art-making. In addition I take cues from Reyes ideas about ‘useable vs. useful’ art.

In my current body of work, I consider use or action and experiment with various social situations to gauge reactions from a broadly defined public. Through this work, I prioritize play, relaxation and enjoyment; I explore the ‘solution mode’ of working by creating active examples of my ideal. This method is in contrast to the ‘problem mode’ of working where the artist might re-present the issues, such as stress or overwork, in order to transfer guilt onto the viewer as a catalyst for change. Although this method holds some history of success, I view this body of work as the foundation for the pursuit of socially ‘useful’ art.
CHAPTER 2
MATERIALS

As I aspire to level the space between artist and audience and ultimately art and life; my choice of materials reflects a specific adaptability, accessibility and practicality. A great deal of my materials are donated, scrounged and spliced together from hardware stores, lumber yards, steel suppliers and flea markets. The search for material itself allows me to connect with a variety of individuals and companies, many of whom are unfamiliar with contemporary art practice. I enjoy the process of gaining support for projects; justifying the absurd to complete strangers, sometimes resulting in free scrap or off-spec treasures.

Each of my projects is built from a variety of media to support these connections as they provide a diverse set of entries into the work. The materials list for *Jones Café* consisted of the makings for grilled cheese and tomato soup as well as a comfortable place to host a conversation. *Untitled (rainbow machine)* was built from flea market, surplus and garden parts, *Untitled (hammocks)* and *Untitled (inflatables)* were constructed from donated off-spec parachute fabric, scrounged steel from a decommissioned scoreboard and outdated architecture project parts.

*Jones Café* subtly filled an empty slot on the Main St. of an unsuspecting city while *Untitled (rainbow machine)*, *Untitled (hammocks)* and *Untitled (inflatables)* appear at random amongst everyday people and places. Through subtlety and
spectacle, reluctance and excitement, my work offers itself to the quotidian with enticements of comfort and freedom housed within absurdity.

In several of my projects, I work with a sense of ‘glorified ideals’ or imagery that insinuates elements from a seemingly ‘better time’. This is seen specifically in *Untitled (rainbow machine)* and its adjoining trailer used to facilitate *Untitled (tear drop-inflatable)*. By incorporating an aesthetic roughness and one-off fabricated parts, I emphasize traditional materials and techniques commonly lost in our mass produced society. *Untitled (rainbow machine)* and *Untitled (tear drop-inflatable)* connote several nostalgic interests including that of hot rods, motorcycles, and bicycles. The glorified histories of these subcultures have always had a major influence on my life and it seems important to preserve and pass them down.

The products of these subcultures offer examples of sheer creativity and experimentation. There is also a certain level of public spectacle similar to performance art and happenings that I feel connected to. Transformations from the ordinary (car or bike) into the extraordinary (hot rod or chopper) are common place and under constant evolution. Although the original object has been modified into something unique, the connection and core (donor vehicle) is still the same. These transformations provide inspiration for others to follow, and looking at car culture, this is absolutely true. It embodies a sense of Do-it-
Yourself (DIY)(or Do-it-Myself) that is central to all of my work and promotes a creative mindset that may not be solely centered in art, but rather in bettering or personalizing one's reality though the preservation of various crafts and techniques.

The practice of scrounging and re-purposing scrap or off-spec materials is yet another way of subverting the system of mass production by providing a useful and unique alternative to the economic structures we are nearly forced to participate in. I cross into these areas to draw in a more diverse audience and to promote active and cost free creativity. Working with bright colors, food, bikes, teardrop trailers or even a nap, I aim to intrigue the audience in exchange for their interest in art.
CHAPTER 3
PROJECTS IN ACTION

In 1971 artist Gordon Matta Clark opened the restaurant *Food* in SoHo Manhattan. *Food* was a ‘useful’ work, fully staffed by artists that presented the act of cooking as a performance; the kitchen like a stage was fully exposed and integrated into the dining area. The restaurant hosted a flexible and unique menu based on whichever artist was cooking that particular night. This resulted in a plethora of menu items from all over the world including “ceviche, borscht, rabbit stew with prunes, stuffed tongue Creole and fig”. *Food* lasted roughly three years before shifting into a more familiar structure and in this temporality it resembles more of a utopian enterprise than a business.

One of the most important points to this work is how it “enabled artists to earn a small living and fund their art practice without succumbing to the ideologically compromising demands of the art market.” In this way, *Food* offered a temporary alternative to the reality of supporting one’s self. There is a specific utilitarian function; that of selling food, but it was able to create profitable work that was also art.

In 1992 artist Rirkrit Tiravanija created the work Untitled (Free). In this work all the contents of the gallery, including the private office and the owner herself, were moved into public view while the empty space created was filled with tables,
chairs and the makings for Pad Thai. Tiravanija then proceeded to cook and provide free food for anyone who entered the gallery. The plates, bowls, burners, refrigerator as well as the participants eating became the art objects in this type of installation art. As the artist provides food to the viewer/participants he sets up a sort of gift agreement where “He cooks, you come; he gives, you take” and in doing so effectively undermines the idea of wealth through provision of free experience and product.

Both Matta Clark and Tiravanija played an important role in developing the lineage of food based interactive work. In each of the examples from above (and in many more by Tiravanija), the participants become the pivotal element that renders these works active and successful.

The theory of Relational Aesthetics, which is one of the more contemporary contexts for this work, takes as its point of departure the “whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space” Within this definition it seems that Matta Clark’s Food becomes a better example existing on the corner of Prince and Wooster Street versus the gallery context of Tiravanija. However both artists employ a ‘solution’ mode defined within the framework of Pedro Reyes. Tiravanija identifies and exploits the pitfalls of the ‘independent and private space’ directly and activates the artist to deal with the
situation. Matta Clark also creates a ‘solution’ by literally moving the work into the public space while prioritizing its ‘usefulness’ for both the artists and the public.

*Jones Café* (See figure 1. Below) expresses similar principles as each of these examples while making an attempt to be ‘useful’ as well as accessible to its participants. In addition this work moves itself out of a sanctioned art context, and masks itself within the pre-existing frame of society. With this action, I wish to address the previously defined criteria for relational work and its context outside symbolic space in a similar manner as Matta Clark with *Food*.

![Figure 1: (Video Still)](image-url)
Figure 2: (Video Still)

Figure 3: (Video Still)
As briefly noted above; Jones Café (See figure 2,3) consisted of temporarily re-opening a vacant restaurant and serving grilled cheese and tomato soup free to the public in a clean outdoor seating area complete with table cloths, napkins, utensils, waiter and kitchen staff. The piece occurred simultaneous to an annual festival that celebrated the local heritage of Fountain Inn, SC. This city shares a common condition with many across the country in that its downtown, despite a reasonable population of approximately six-thousand, is relatively vacant. A few businesses reside between the empty facades, but most are products of a struggling local economy; consignment shops and tax services.

The idea for the piece was conceived while working with the city in an effort to use art as a cultural activator in the downtown area. While walking down Main Street, considering the different ways art could address this particular concept, I travelled right past a beautiful, but vacant restaurant space. How could art do something to activate this prominent vacancy while exemplifying the benefits of a shared community experience? Simple; re-open the restaurant.

Jones Café was designed as a social/dining experience and in turn was familiar and accessible from its inception. The menu of grilled cheese and tomato soup, identified largely as a comfort food, presented itself as a potential trigger to warm memories. The manner in which it was served, free of charge to the participant,
resembled closer the provision of food between parent and child or friend to
friend, than the common monetary complexities of ‘eating out’.

*Jones Café* was a brief interstice situated within a unique set of conditions and as
most of the participants involved in the piece lived within five miles of the
establishment; it was well known that the restaurant was closed. As I was a
stranger to the community and my intentions unknown, the context of any type of
art institution or officially sanctioned civic event were subverted. In front of the
restaurant was placed a crudely made sandwich board painted on one side with
the words “free grilled cheese and tomato soup” and on the opposite “free art”.
This sign served two purposes; either to entice the curiosity of the community
through hunger or through the search of an unknown, but free art work. It also
demonstrated the dual nature of the piece attempting to blend elements of art
and life.

Soon after opening for ‘business’, a clear skepticism was in the air due to the
free-ness of the project. Consumer culture seems to have conditioned us to be
skeptical of anything labeled ‘free’, and the implication of such instantly signals a
red flag that something is being sold. Next of course is the question ‘why?’ Why
offer anything for free if not motivated by the potential for reciprocation? And
indeed within this question lies the answer. Why not? Do people not benefit from
a bit of food a place to sit for a moment? Are we not *all* entitled to some
happenstance conversation across a table cloth? The contemporary conditions that have made these kinds of deeds skeptical are inhumane. Jones Café rallies against this as a humane entity, to an extent that almost objectifies it as a soup kitchen or the like. The difference lies within its ephemeral and fleeting nature; assembling and operating as its own microcosm; than nothing after so much life. Temporary autonomy.

Similar to how Bruce Nauman justified his actions and use of his own body as art because they were created in the studio, site specific media art and performance opens the studio door to allow this sanctioned arts space to continue seamlessly into the world. In essence, actions by an artist that facilitate or fabricate real life events can be art if motivated by it.

In Jones Café, I utilize this open definition to facilitate an experience that borrows equally from life and art. While eating in a restaurant may not seem out of the ordinary, the simple menu and zero cost begin to raise questions. Jones Café exemplified this ideal by providing a successful example of an un-purchased enjoyable experience.

Jones Café differs from the examples of Tiravanija and Matta Clark by concerning itself less with the art world specifically and focuses rather on community at large. The artist became the facilitator of enjoyment for the people
and enters a system that produces edible objects and experiences. The cost of this work, at approximately two to three-hundred dollars, is less than many of my projects that fall short of the direct connectedness this created.

This brings up the question of the artist’s responsibility to society and how critiques can be activated into potential solutions to the often cited problems. *Jones Café* created a simple, temporary solution for dealing with an absence of downtown, community centered social gatherings. It targeted a local audience and afforded the opportunity to sit and converse with the public I concern my work with. *Jones Café*, which was the original name of the restaurant, titles itself well in regards to the anonymity of the everyday which this piece works to synthesize with.
The next project titled *Untitled (rainbow machine)* (See figure 4) followed shortly after *Jones Café* and continues to consider the role of the artist in society. In some ways, *Jones Café*’s ordinary nature and appearance, blended so closely to life itself that its validity as art was highly scrutinized. In contrast to this, *Untitled (rainbow machine)* is the first work to explore the artist as creator of the extraordinary.

More specifically it exemplifies moments of the here and now noticed amid aesthetic wonder. In addition it presents a rolling example of our transitory attempts to rationalize and ultimately control natural phenomena. *Untitled*
(rainbow machine) functions in two particular formats: first as an object to be reflected upon and idealized, and second as a fleeting spectacle captured through an off chance glimpse.

The machine itself is a refurbished Royal Enfield tricycle discovered at a flea market. In need of much improvement, I focused on following a simple aesthetic of mostly understated tones that synthesize the age and history of the machine. The steel was treated with ferric nitrate, a common patina in sculpture that quickly oxidizes the metal to give a rich look of aged steel in contrast to the remnants of the original paint. The dark but intricate brown tones on the steel frame and tank allow the whitewall tires and carefully reclaimed raw steel and chrome components to stand out. The handlebar grips and pedals were recovered with punched out leather from thrift store belts and the tank secured using two more leather straps and buckles.

Overall the tricycle resembles a carefully preserved rat-rod; a particular type of hot-rod sub-culture that aestheticizes worn pieces of history. These understated rat-rods embody an unrefined DIY approach that scabs together parts from various cars and trucks, used whiskey bottles for radiator overflow tanks and everything secured with found belts and straps.
The aesthetic of the tricycle itself sits in near contrast to the function of the rainbow machine component. This creates a tongue-in-cheek moment for the viewer as a respecting Harley Davidson rider who might appreciate aesthetic of the trike for its ‘bad-ass-ness’, finds out a moment later that it’s all for the sake of rainbow creation.

The mechanism for the rainbow machine is comprised of a tank, pump, hose and mist attachment. Each is fabricated on an adjoining lever to allow the rider to spray water into the air while in motion. Given the correct atmospheric conditions, passerby or viewer/participants could see a trail of rainbows in the remaining mist. Rainbows are always present when light refracts and reflects through water droplets, it becomes a matter of enhanced perspective however; a physical angle of the head and eyes, to see the rainbow itself. In reality, it is extremely rare to actually see the rainbow produced by this machine. Most viewers will experience it either parked; imagining its capabilities, or in action but only to observe water spraying out.

It is this rarity, its un-ordinary nature, which presents Untitled (rainbow machine) as an ideal where the viewer must imagine the process and results of rainbow making. One could predict or discover that while in motion, the spinning tire, contacted with the wheel and pump of the lever, causes an internal turbine to
spin, drawing water from the tank, through the hose, out the nozzle spraying into the air, thus creating a rainbow under the right conditions.

*Untitled (rainbow machine)* begins to represent an on demand, mechanized version of a randomly occurring series of environmental conditions. Noticing a rainbow is a very rewarding experience that momentarily diverts our attention from whatever it is we are doing, to appreciating a very brief moment in time. Following this principle, it is crucial not to exploit the capabilities of the machine, but to allow it to exist as an object of contemplation.

*Untitled (rainbow machine)* fosters an appreciation for the numerous fleeting moments of aesthetic pleasure and fun in our everyday experience. This subdued contraption has the potential to provide an opportunity for one to inhabit ‘the now’ in an instant where you can taste the air, feel the breeze and consciously absorb all the ambiance of the surroundings.
Figure 5(above), 6(below): Untitled (tear drop-inflatables)
In addition to making rainbows, *Untitled (rainbow machine)* was slightly modified to tow the next work *Untitled (tear drop-inflatables)* (see figure 5,6). This work is a fabricated vintage style teardrop trailer, complete with a gas-powered 2000watt generator, a pivoting high velocity fan, and three inflatable parachute forms. The trailer follows the rusty-brown vintage aesthetic of the tricycle with leather strapping holding the model-T style hatches. The galvanized sheet steel used in the riveted construction of the trailer was sourced from a decommissioned scoreboard providing it with a specific material link to the location within this round of iterations. Through this work I continue to examine the role of the artist as creator of random absurd aesthetic spectacle as the project roves through multiple public locations.

*Untitled (tear drop-inflatables)* resonates within the writings of Hakim Bey in his essay Chaos: Broad Sheets of Ontological Anarchism: Poetic Terrorism;

“WEIRD DANCING IN ALL-NIGHT computer-banking lobbies. Unauthorized pyrotechnic displays. Land-art, earth-works as bizarre alien artifacts strewn in State Parks. Burglarize houses but instead of stealing, leave Poetic-Terrorist objects. Kidnap someone & make them happy. Pick someone at random & convince them they’re the heir to an enormous, useless & amazing fortune—say 5000 square miles of Antarctica, or an aging circus elephant, or an orphanage in Bombay, or a collection of alchemical mss. Later they will come to
realize that for a few moments they believed in something extraordinary, & will perhaps be driven as a result to seek out some more intense mode of existence." vi

These thoughts outline a particular type of public engagement; that which challenges our surrender to the systematic grind often found in society. Through extreme absurdity and exaggerations I see this philosophy as liberation in support of unauthorized interjected beauty in public space. Perhaps it questions, in part, the validity of artist as philosopher, or social commentator in favor of aesthetic emancipator. It exhibits attainable simplistic goals that I feel bring the artist back to the roots of our intentions; that of identifying and exemplifying beauty: demonstrate the extraordinary, affect the viewer instantly; deeply and directly, but only for a fleeting moment, leaving wonderment and inquisition behind.
During sculpture deployment, I wear a dark blue mechanics cover-all (See figure 7). In addition to providing a subdued aesthetic similar to a member of a theater stage-crew, the outfit casts the artist in the role of humble laborer that produces this experience; which results in something larger than the artist. From start to finish, the project takes approximately forty-five minutes and turns into a performance event as the forms are moved into different compositions by the current atmospheric conditions of the site. They are each tethered to the rainbow machine and trailer by a long strap which assists in controlling the inflatables as they are manipulated. As air slowly leaks out, they permeate through an endless
range of possibility before being stuffed back into their storage area. The inflation and deflation time dictates the duration of the sculpture/performance and as quickly as it started, the massive shapes and colors are packed away and ridden off.

This work may come to represent many different things as the artist struggles to control form and color, yet the intensions are left open, the goals kept simple. In this way the work claims success the instant that attention is diverted from the road, sidewalk or thoughts, to question or observe the moment at hand.

The goal of Untitled (tear drop-inflatables) is to get people to look. The sculpture is deployed unannounced at random intervals so there is always a sense of the un-ordinary. The first iteration occurred at 7:30am in a field adjacent to a heavily trafficked intersection leading into Clemson University campus. As this hour presents an often unwelcomed wake up for many people heading to class, it can become a much hated time of day. What better time to provide a random aesthetic experience than this? As I rode onto location, the morning sun was just beginning to shine through the thick fog that had set after a chilly night. As the forms inflated, the sun seemed to simultaneously burn through the mist revealing a beautiful day. The now highlighted brightly lit green, blue and orange shapes, ultimately enhanced the perception of the space around them. Judging by generous horn-tooting, I can safely say it was at least noticed.
The next few iterations were located in different areas; in the massive quad of the library adjoining a busy sidewalk, a courtyard between two buildings in the rain, the public ‘front lawn’ of the university, the golf course and the iconic levy that holds lake Hartwell from flooding campus. Each engaged a different audience, at times apathetic, at other times questioning, but always looking. My hope is that the sculptures are viewed as compositional elements in the landscape; and that the audience is able to look past the sculpture itself into the surrounding environment. *Untitled (tear drop-inflatables)* continues to illustrate the link between all of my recent work; that of living in and appreciating a fleeting moment in time.

Each site hosts activities of routine; driving onto campus at the same time every day, walking from your car past the library on the way to class, moving across courtyards between buildings, driving past a field or the golf course, or going for a run or walk on the levy at sunset. In my experience, these transits become so common that you begin to look past the individual characteristics of the site; yet these places are so utterly familiar in the sub-conscious memory that something added or changed becomes the key to re-looking. Fog, rain, wind currents, light, rolling hills and color become more visible in the context of these pieces and each site was chosen to highlight a different element of these.
“What is a happening? A game, an adventure, a number of activities engaged in by participants for the sake of playing.”\textsuperscript{vii} Allan Kaprow defined happenings as actions which are extricated from the specific environment they take part in; they are rooted in and often based upon the very experience of everyday life. As I consider our local University environment in addition to my own experience as a mid-twenties student like the many around me, I wonder how much priority is given to the sake of play. As we prepare ourselves to fit into our chosen roles of adulthood, there seems to be less and less time for reflection and rest. Every idle
moment is a potentially missed opportunity. To compensate for this condition, *Untitled (hammocks)* (See figure 8) was built to provide a successful example of a contrasting priority; a surprise rest area for anyone passing by.

Figure 9: *Untitled (hammocks)* (detail)

Marked by D.O.T. style blue and white rest area signs similar to the ones you might see on the highway (See figure 9), I develop a metaphor for our fast paced lives as I advertise the intended use of the created space. Following the arrow on the sign leads the participant to twenty-four hammocks of various colors
arranged without a discernible pattern hung from a curious white geometric structure somewhat reminiscent of childhood construction sets. The structure is built in two mirrored parts on either side of a walkway. Each half boasts two hammock configurations; the first, a circular web formed from eight hammocks, all sharing a center connection and the second, which are four additional hammocks hung in open bays of the structure. Each of these options for ‘hammocking’ affords a different experience; the circular web promotes social interaction, literally connecting people within their ‘personal space’ while the second configuration is a more reflective setup where participants were commonly found reading, sleeping or studying. Having the option allowed this work to cater to the individual needs or desires of the user, however in some cases where most of the hammocks were filled, a person was more or less obligated to pick a particular configuration based on availability alone. This creates a situation where the person, still willing to hammock, places themselves within a group of new people and has the opportunity to interact with them (See figure 10 below).
In an ideal and specific utopian analysis of *Untitled (hammocks)*, I refer to architect Constant Nieuwenhuis (Constant) and his description of ‘New Babylon’ viii. This set of utopian blueprints takes as its starting point a completely automated society. Having all basic survival needs accommodated for, society concerned itself only with ‘ludic’ or play based activities. As this example is the near contrast to my current perception of our society, I find that *Untitled (hammocks)* provides a moment of ludic respite. The open forum of fabric, fresh air, sunshine and conversation seems to “facilitate contacts between people. Ties
are made and unmade without any difficulty, endowing social relations with a perfect openness. As the true definition for utopia is ‘no-place’ I clearly understand the improbability of such a prospect. However, if anything can be grasped from the unlikely nature of such a place, it’s that certain elements such as free pleasure and comfort should find their ideal place within our present lives.

The construction and aesthetic choice for color in this sculpture/participatory installation fostered an interesting material history. The structure was built from prefabricated threaded pipes and cast dodecahedron connectors that function similarly to toy building sets such as K’Nex. This ‘playgroundesque’ frame work, a 1970’s aesthetic of painted white steel; now peeling and scratched from usage, visualizes its age and history. The pipes and connectors were part of architecture practical that have spent the past 15 years in storage. The pieces were used to demonstrate structure before being replaced by computer generated equivalents. This factor becomes a metaphorical element as the materials employed a hands-on approach to construction design; something now lost in the age of digitized methods. As this project served as an open social forum throughout its installation, it places a similar emphasis on direct connections between participants in contrast to our more commonly chosen digital social networks.

The hammocks themselves were made from off-spec parachute fabric that was donated by Colorworks Inc. This manufacturer provided nearly six hundred yards
of this extremely strong rip-stop nylon in a variety of colors. The fabric was cut into standard lengths and then converted into a hammock by tying a specific knot around each end. By using a combination of nylon webbing, the hammocks were hung from the frame in a randomized manner. The color choices are a byproduct of the process of gathering materials rather than deliberate selection based on specific historical connotations.

Over the two days it remained on location, hammocks were consistently filled with participants after having either discovered the space at random, or hearing about it from previous ‘hammockers’. The types of interactions, demographics and conversations were too numerous and varied to summarize with any type of specificity, but the activation of the piece by hundreds of people over its duration affirmed the desire for momentary (and often extended) rest.
CHAPTER 4
GALLERY DOCUMENTATION

Each of the aforementioned projects; *Jones Café, Untitled (rainbow machine), Untitled (tear drop-inflatables), and Untitled (hammocks)*, was formulated specifically outside of an institutionalized art context. As such, the specific content previously addressed to this point discusses their function during the live events themselves. To honor the audience-inclusive nature of these projects, each has been documented in a manner that emphasizes the spirit of the work. This documentation has been organized and edited to fit within the gallery context alongside a few select relics. My intension is to utilize this blank slate as a space for contemplation as well as an opportunity to open up the works to yet another audience.

As this series of work previously presented itself to a site-specific public, the ultimate success would be to engage this new audience within the gallery space as well. While my work doesn't spend too much time critiquing art history and contributing to the tightly knit lineage therein, I feel that it contributes to the art world by gaining support for art through public exposure and involvement. I feel strongly that these projects exemplify the validity of art in our society and likewise the more support we can garner for our practice the better.
In addition to the relics and documentation that is intended for contemplation, I have modified two previous pieces to provide additional entry points into my work, as well as the gallery space itself.

Figure 11: *Speak (gallery inflatables)*

The three forms of green, blue and orange, originally deployed by *Untitled (tear drop-inflatables)*, have been placed in the front windows of the gallery connected to a sound activated switch mounted on a sign labeled ‘speak’ (See figure 11). The sign follows the same blue and white D.O.T. style as the hammock’s ‘rest area’ sign and is placed just outside the gallery door, greeting passer-bys in the
hallway. The sound activated switch, which splits sound into three channels, low, mid, and high, outputs through bright orange extension cords connected to fans. As sound is captured by either people walking by talking, or stopped to engage with the work, the fans convert the sound to air which inflates the forms accordingly.

On the most basic level, this work intends to make a connection between the outside space; symbolically ‘the public’ and the inside gallery space. As participants jokingly interact with the ‘speak’ sign, either clapping, yelling, or singing some sort of abstract a-cappella, they activate the otherwise deflated documentation into a bright living work of art. Having made this connection with the work inside the gallery, my hope is that the participant will have an increased interest and take the time to literally enter the space and activate its potential for contemplation.
To emphasize this reflective potential, I have also reconfigured *Untitled (gallery hammocks)* (See figure 12) to accommodate five participants within the gallery. The new rectangular configuration houses one hammock of each color previously used in the larger installation. The structure has been situated on the backside of the wall that the original documentation is projected on (See figure 13 below), giving an illusion of the active history of these hammocks. While this gallery setup is not as conducive to social interaction as the original, it follows a similar ideal of utilizing art to provide a moment of respite in a somewhat unexpected
location. The gallery space, which is quiet when participants are not yelling at the ‘speak’ sign, does provide a peaceful alternative location for a nap or study. It continues to establish positive associations with viewers and participants who may be new to the gallery context. While using the hammock, the participant is able to view and contemplate some of the other work in the gallery. In the heightened state of awareness fostered by the hammocks, the possibility of making connections to more complex forms of art becomes a consideration.

Figure 13: *Untitled (hammocks)* (projection)
While my work carries some similarities to past and present art makers, I try to offer a refreshing spin on interactive work. The ideal participant for me is someone who may have a particular distaste for art due to some unknown conditioned perspective from the past but upon experiencing my work may reconsider. I intentionally base the imagery and location of much of my work in likely locations to cater to this audience.
CONCLUSION

In my art making, I synthesize with life and the people around me. I center my practice on action so as to eventually empower art with the responsibility to incite real change in whatever issue it takes on. I value all criticisms regarding the way I communicate through my work and consider these as I pursue a common and accessible visual language.

The messages I portray through this body of work are simple; slow down, be comfortable, consider your surroundings, and enjoy the fleeting nature of life. I have done my best to portray these ideas through active experiences. With these I intend to create a physical connection with the participants while ideally piquing their continued interest in art. My influences are sourced from life and my creations are placed right back into it.

I conclude with a paraphrased quote from Constant; “To succeed in life is to create and re-create it incessantly. [We] can only have a life worthy of [ourselves] if [we] create [it]...[We] will be able, in complete freedom, to give existence the form of desire. Far from remaining passive toward a world in which [we are] content to adapt, for better or worse, to external circumstances, [we] aspire to create another one in which liberty is realized. In order that [we] may create life, it
is incumbent on [us] to create that world. And that creation, like the other, entails the same uninterrupted succession of re-creations."

This quote, taken from an exhibition catalogue in 1974, followed an important era of monumental change from the 1960’s. Many of the theories from this time were all encompassing of society; providing vast new totalitarian frameworks to live by. While I share and encourage the importance of change with a similar dreamlike ambition as Constant, my projects focus on the present; by fostering slight alterations in everyday perception. My work tackles attainable micro-goals that compile into a series of meaningful successes. As I continue on, learning from these experiences and increasing the level of ambition involved, I hope to effectively situate my role as an artist that institutes beneficial change in our society.


ENDNOTES


iii Jerry Saltz “A Short History of Rirkrit Tiravanija – Thai Artist Who Cooks Meals as Installation Art” Art In America, February 1996.


