

HAHA AS A CATALYST FOR COLLECTIVE MEMORY

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FLOOD, 1993

Haha, 1769 W. Greenleaf St., Chicago
Meeting at Flood storefront garden. Flood provided bi-weekly meals, educational activities, meeting space, public events, and information on alternative therapies, HIV/AIDS services in Chicago, nutrition and horticulture, as well as a place to garden.

For you must know that it is by one and the same ladder that nature descends to the production of things and the intellect ascends to the knowledge of them, and that the one and the other proceeds from unity and returns to unity, passing through the multitude of things in the middle.

—Giordano Bruno¹

I think that any reasonably long memory (like every collection) is more structured than it seems at first sight. For example, in some images apparently taken at random, on postcards bought without thinking, we can recognize the first steps of a road on which we can draw a map of that particular imaginary landscape. I am sure that if I study my documents systematically, I shall find, hidden in that disorder, a secret map, like the treasure map in a tale of pirates.

—Chris Marker²

SPACES OF INCLUSION

Why is working to design spaces of inclusion and participation so beautiful? When in 1996 Haha decided to make a work of art from speculative conversations with the residents of a retirement home, they were dealing with the spatial presentation of democracy on a number of levels. Perhaps the project's most impressive aspect is the granting of space for its participants to be themselves. Like *La Jolie Mai*, also collectively produced, and the more psychic documents of the Maysles brothers, Haha's *Hotel Sports* positions the objects of housing policy as active respondents in making their own history. These discursive art practices are concerned with describing a form of social life in which isolated consciousness opens itself to wider and wider physical areas of influence and in which the representation and classification of social status become more inclusive. In Haha's project, the conversation between tenants is brought to the city council, literally extending the space of the retirement home into the political sphere.

Social practices of all kinds make use of imaginary and architectural space upon which models of interaction and cohesion can be projected. Such spaces often juxtapose and visually organize disparate images and ideas, producing differentiated, flexible, and democratic amalgams of a sort that has long been regarded as a metaphor for the discursive exchange proposed by the Enlightenment. That liberation from absolutist doctrine was derived in part from the constructive conversations of Montaigne, the definitional discourse of Diderot's encyclopedia, and the representative forum of participatory parliament—all examples of democratic social presentation that defined spaces of inclusion visually and conceptually before they actually delegated dialogic

experience. Even eighteenth-century painting salons, as depicted at the time, seem arranged as much for the dialogue between spectators on the floor as for the visual competition on the walls. In this way the allegiances and identifications suggested by art could be, and still may be, acted out socially by art's readers and viewers: its interpreters. To continue the spatial metaphor, art brings forth a transformable area of social presentation, open to multiple occupations and positions, and therefore able to hold, physically, seemingly contradictory beliefs in public juxtaposition. The use of juxtapositional tools in visual and spatial design and organization have allowed the modern subject to read more than two things at once, to see collage as forming new meaning, each comparison of parts creating new understanding and effecting new meanings of every component.

Like the dialectical method itself, the old tool of visual juxtaposition is increasingly hard to find—replaced by an assortment of fundamentalisms that reduce the shock of discursive practices to a kind of wounding. As critical language comes to be described and heard as a form of violence, the sites of verbal negotiation of categories become softened. Artists are deftly inculcated by neoliberal economies into subscribing to limited and singular notions of artistic practice; collective definitions of public life are few and far between. Indeed, collaborative practice is, in this increasingly bureaucratized world, commonly denigrated as authoritarian by those who wish to control culture for profit. Cultural institutions' understandings of the complexities of participation suffer due to their conflation of interaction with presence. Inclusion has been desecrated by the idea that a reader's only voice is as a purchaser or part of an attendance statistic. Collaborative art making demonstrates, however, that it is possible to question the role of the artist as a solitary entity locked in an unquestioning relation to ideas and audiences dictated by our peculiar and ever-present economic nightmare of deprivation. By using its already multiple artistic voices to act as a carrier for the voices of many others, Haha has sought over its years of interaction with institutions to address the unreality that overtakes culture when so many are excluded from participation in its creation. Haha, then, exemplifies how collective practices embody more than social ethics and activist affect; they reflect how changes in aesthetics—the creation of spaces between audiences and producers—create new possibilities for ethics.

SPACES FOR MEMORY / EMPTY SPACES

Almost one hundred years of Freudian allusion reminds us that a key aspect of humanity can best be seen in the things we don't say to each other—that the gaps between our conscious utterances are descriptive of another truth. Without delving too deeply into the psychic process of collective art practice, we can observe that in working together artists tend to spend a lot of time on the character and design of places and contexts for participation in order to insure that people actually can contribute. Because this concern with creating capacity for inclusion is so central, spaces designed by artists are often as empty as the gaps left open in analysis: far more than psychic inventions, they are spaces for *not saying* things, determinedly empty spaces ready to take the impress of collective experience. Inclusive products of collaboration thus look and act a lot like our depictions of spaces for memory: there are many projects and images, separated by gaps across which they are aligned and

compared, and, like memory, are changed, enlarged, or erased. Maybe that is why collective aesthetic moments seem to stop official historical time.

Groups and networks remember things together and in doing so can create a context in which the course of surrounding time is suspended. This suspension of time and its power over experience is crucial to the creation of memory. In its working process, Haha proposes a rethinking of how collective memory is constructed. If juxtaposition is dialectical comparison made publicly physical—a conversation in the room—what happens to the subjective conditions of comparison and value when they are made public? Or, to put the question differently: Are there understandings of intimate subjectivity that will help us understand the aesthetics of group practices? Why does collective working to design spaces of inclusion and participation so often produce beauty? Memories can call official history to task. When these acts of remembrance are defined and performed in the shared emotional setting of collaborative work, social intervention and change may result.

The arrangement of images and experience can be redesigned through creative collaborative practices in order to engage collaboration on a larger social field and mirror those social projects already archived in memory. The work invested by Haha in designing a garden to grow food for people with HIV and to act as a center for discussion and activism grew beyond the associations of its initial participants. In a sense the lasting value of this art is not dependent on its physical persistence. The experiences of the people who engaged with its sustenance are shared in a collective memory that reaches beyond the work's practical sensibility. Within the reminiscences there is another, not quite physical space, a space made simultaneously social and intimate by the juxtaposing of ideas with experiences. This is the space of collective memory.

SPACES OF INVENTION

The art of cultivating memory was perfected by ancient Greek philosophers as an aid to oral argument and was refined over the Middle Ages as an aspect of critical thinking. How thinkers advanced from the mnemonic athletics of antiquity to the structured, comparative rhetoric of medieval alchemists is not entirely known. What is known is the tool itself. To practice the "art of memory" the ancients would imagine their brains as a complex of architectural spaces, buildings made up of rooms connected by hallways and related by floors and streets. Such an exercise entailed juxtaposition and visual portrayal at almost every moment: in every room there was an image referring symbolically to an idea and in every building an allegorical conglomeration of rooms adding up to an argument, a philosophy, and an attitude. Through this practice, the philosopher became an archival master of memory, with ideas placed in relation to each other in a particular spatial arrangement. The comparative positioning of ideas provided these thinkers with intellectual strength in recall but also gave them an imagination: juxtaposed ideas created skeptical dialogue and its wonderful sister, disobedience.

All of this implies that for the alchemist philosopher, reminiscence was always linked to invention. As such, it was a foundation of the art of rhetoric, a way to create knowledge from nature and in doing so, as the Renaissance mnemonic philosopher Giordano Bruno put it, actually to *add* to nature. These mental structures were theaters, with recent memories near

the proscenium, complex associations nested in deep balconies, and an all-encompassing hierarchy of experience articulated within its semicircular plan. Ideas were impressed on figures, principles represented by deities and animals; philosophical conflicts, then, could be understood as allegorical interactions between these figures. As one category of thinking was permitted to rub against another, the notion of untouchable knowledge or sacred texts was eroded. Now the wheels of memory began turning out private encyclopedias: a machine for reading—or, in the context of participatory practices, for reading with *many* sets of eyes. The lists of definitions and the collections of allegories were a shared vocabulary after all, impressing upon the mnemonic individual a collection of subjectivities and personae.

This discipline allowed Renaissance philosophers to remake the world through comparison with other images (from nature) and other imaginations (in rhetorical conversation). If there is a similar architecture of "memory" in the contemporary world, it is no longer based in systems of public confabulation and the *tableaux vivants* but in the social contract of the archive, the museum, and the database. These institutions, then, are objects of deeply subjective investment. As has been clear in the genealogies of knowledge and governance developed since Foucault, we participate in our own understanding of this world. Today, power itself is obscure and meteoric, often applying its system of knowledge well before anyone has a chance to address its formation. In a real sense, the moderns replaced memory grounded in ornamental systems of allegory and myth with technology—the purity of applied science. The loss of associational reading is perhaps the price we pay for modern skepticism. The price paid by Bruno for interrupting official doctrine with collective memory was excommunication and death. He, and other Renaissance scholars, believed that the nightmare of any purism could be deposed when collective form is brought into collision with our expectations.

Like many other artists' collaboratives in the 1980s and 1990s, Haha often found itself traversing the discourses of museum display and urban planning—economies that artists have all too often regarded as beyond their control. Numerous groups, however, have sought to comment on the collusion between the industry of art and the displacement of citizens by expanding the social space of museums and public places to include those who have been officially excluded. Artists Meeting for Cultural Change, WAC, PADD, and Artist Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America have all, in different ways, embodied one of the significant purposes of collective practice in modernity: to make



MONUMENT TO GIORDANO BRUNO, 1889
Ettore Ferrari, Campo dei Fiori, Rome, Italy
The site of Bruno's burning in 1600.

immediate, imaginative, and meaningful social spaces of aesthetic comparison. Such spaces must be designed as part of larger political struggles for meaning. Haha too has made art that, through its insistence that aesthetic values are part of a larger social conversation of the city and essential to the happiness of its inhabitants, presents the possibilities of such collective form. In part, such artistic representations of democratic process imply a sort of *emptiness*. By wiring a building with explosives in anticipation of development, cutting the exhibition space off from the source of music produced in an adjoining space, and documenting displacement on so many other levels, Haha's members have taken responsibility as artists for the implications of recent history. By spatializing the production of collective memory, they have insisted that the artistic terrain of comparison and critique can replicate itself in the so-called public sphere.

ALTERNATIVE HISTORIES OF AESTHETIC PRACTICE / SPACES FOR LEARNING

Haha's work reminds historical institutions like museums of how the parameters of memory are part of the intimate forces that can protect art from the deterministic and relentless myth of progress. For young artists in the 1970s, the idea that art school training would lead to relationships in the art world was a false promise. Many artists responded by forming reading groups, small groups that organized study around texts of their choosing. The official reading lists of graduate schools and study programs were, however, only part of the impetus behind this trend; reading groups were also a spatial proposal for those seeking alternative histories of artistic practice. An autonomous practice of collective learning was also part and parcel of the "consciousness raising" of the 1960s, in particular of feminism.

In the 1980s, because of the overwhelmingly narrow market definition of art, new practices were born from the reading group. Artists moved from the classroom to the clubs and then to each others' kitchens and bedrooms to read. By reading together, artists could establish a context that was independent from all institutions, scholarship, and culture, but they could also create a sanctuary from an art world that was dominated by neo-expressionism and the cult of artistic male genius. It was no accident that the tools of feminism, the personalization of the political, and the need for collective sanctuary were formative tools in the development of artistic collaboration. As the nature of questioning mandated that they be taken public, sometimes the best thing to do was to invite others in for a visit. Collaborative Projects opened a shuttered building with the "Real Estate Show" on the Lower East Side of New York in 1980. One early work of Haha was an "open house" in 1988, in which an unoccupied building was filled with works by the group's individual members. Today, 16 Beaver Street asks audiences to join them in their collective "home"—a reading group as a work of art.

One of the nightmares associated with participatory art practices in the 1990s was the notion that art performed in association with redefined audiences and larger social networks was good for you, that it was socially therapeutic. Among the many reasons that this medical analogy became so popular was that it allowed institutions to respond to the demands of the new audiences for art and growing constituencies for museums that were produced in the 1980s and 1990s. Ironically, both the critical art world practitioners interested in new audiences and traditional funding elites of museums and foundations accepted the most essentializing and limiting definition of the word "community" that was available in that time—a group defined by trauma. As Grant Kester has articulated, the rhetoric of art's evangelistic potential for

"social healing" was an implicit point of origin for public funding in the United States.³ But it is important to remember that the utilitarian desires for art came from national policy and rarely from the artistic collaborations interested in changing distribution and presentation. It may have been that artist collaborators were already making a new kind of cultural politics by directly working together, but their desire was to challenge accepted notions of social activism, identity, and the symbolic languages of inclusion and exclusion that make social institutions work through fear. Indeed the transgression of accepted terms of social debate was often the result of collective work, the national conversation started by the work of ACT UP being a premier example.

Artists at the end of the millennium were faced with the possibility that the audiences for art would continue to fragment according to the nefarious working of our government's deprivational economy. As the privatization of all elements of the public sphere progressed through changes in government, it became more and more clear that we were being dispossessed of the very cultural ground we invented: self-initiated social practice. One result of the instrumentalization of collective practice was its reduction to a form of partial social work. Alongside this deteriorating scene came a desire on the part of sponsors to essentialize the audiences for public art into communities of trauma and suffering; a reduction with which artists had already been asked to identify themselves. The successful interaction between site and audience, one that avoids the stereotyping of audiences and artists is in many ways still a project that institutions need to understand. There are also many examples of overcoming the contradictions for the instrumentalization of collective practices to learn from. Haha's work with the La Follette Park water polo team in Chicago embodied the contradictions of therapeutic community representation. By embracing the display of bodies of some for the eyes of others, it replicated the ethnographic impulse so often at work in "community-based" art projects. But by stretching that frame across the entire institutional context of La Follette's social programs, the object of the anthropologist's gaze is confused with its subject. Entitled *Marmor*, it showed that the definition of public audiences still had to catch up to the associational and hybrid definitions of culture. It showed that collective memories can design their own arrangements of subjective experiences—in spite of the oppressive histories that may condition them.



KEEP OUR LOVE ALIVE, 1989
La Follette Park Swim and Water Polo Teams, Chicago
Brochure for a multimedia spectacle. Haha provided
media for the event, which was organized by
Edward Motherhead and Christine Rogers.



Page 18:
PLAYLIST, 1996
 Haha, Capp Street Project, San Francisco
 A sound-proof wall separated the piano keyboard and musician from the music they produced.

Top:
MEMORY ATLAS, 1929
 Aby Warburg, the Warburg Archives, London
 Excerpt.

Bottom:
TIMELINE, 1984
 Artists Call Against US Intervention in
 Central America, PSL, New York
 Group Material.

SPACES OF INCLUSION / COLLECTIVE HISTORIES

Did Sigmund Freud ever see Warburg's *Memory Atlas*? Freud told us that if we are to engage with memory we have two choices: repression or externalization. One can internalize or do the social work of representation and discussion. In a way, the former encases the latter in its logic: what I have made is always what I describe to others, what I say and represent. The beauty of memory, then, is like the beauty of art as understood in light of the eighteenth-century idea of "social trust"—the aesthetic is always already containing and suggesting the social, the aesthetic is always a break with repression. The psychoanalytic project—to restore continuity in the face of modern purity—is welcome but seems a mere Band-Aid, doomed to failure. Even with the "history of sanity," those who mix memory and perception, experience and sensuality will continue to be seen as outside normalcy. In some ways, the practical effect of collaboration is that it allows artists to be crazy and still to produce in an increasingly repressive psychoeconomic context. It seems so difficult when alone.

Artists have had a particularly complex relationship to these ideas concerning forms of forgetting. It's terrifying how little evidence of the history of past participatory practices can be found in the commercial nexus that now constitutes the visual industry. Artists' groups, though, stand as representational histories through their own work. They *move* time through the invention of ritual-like objects and experiences to which others can return, again and again, to reinforce ideas of consistency on time's passage. They *mark* time for others, creating a system of referent images that collect themselves around citizens and readers, or as Jefferson would have it: citizen/readers. Even more emphatically perhaps, artists make their memories into history, constructing inclusive realities that stand up against the accepted forms of the past and unchanging models of the future that surround us. In contrast, in a world at war that increasingly demands illiterate subservience to the traditional separations between owners and owned, there are arts that make us forget. Nostalgic battlegrounds, colorful bar charts, and confessional TV shows all help us forget. And so they are endlessly repeated, from the spectacle of political campaigns to the drone of mall arcades.

The work of artistic collaboration that Haha performed for so many years is part of an effort to deny mass marketing's instrumentalization. In gallery and the street, Haha's audience is asked to imagine others as Immanuel Kant proposed—as ends in themselves and not as means to ends. By insisting on aesthetic

memories as inclusive of socially practical moments we are asking our artworks to be more than diagrams for social revolution, we are saying our experiences are more than facts. We are rejecting the preoccupation with linear history. It is a cliché to say that memory changes as we get older, that it takes up a different place in our daily lives—that what we resisted in our twenties we search for in our fifties. If we lived forever, would we drown in reminiscences? The qualities of memory that lent it a permanent place in the constant remaking of subjectivities seem to have diminished lately, not just because the size of the subject—the scale of the personal—is so totally out of proportion to the public—but because those things that we are allowed to make private or keep to ourselves have become so publicly eroded that they no longer seem to hold power.

We are never alone if we can look at our memories as built with others. Even though memories have been asked by modernity to live elsewhere, through collaboration and conviviality we can insist they return. Haha, Giordano Bruno, Aby Warburg, and Raymond Williams remind us that the museum, parks, libraries, schools, monasteries, and streets around us were never really neutral anyway. And, to repeat an epigraph:

I think that any reasonably long memory (like every collection) is more structured than it seems at first sight. For example, in some images apparently taken at random, on postcards bought without thinking, we can recognize the first steps of a road on which we can draw a map of that particular imaginary landscape. I am sure that if I study my documents systematically, I shall find, hidden in that disorder, a secret map, like the treasure map in a tale of pirates.

— Chris Marker, 1998

1 Giordano Bruno, quoted in Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) 228.
 2 Chris Marker, quoted in Nora M. Alter, *Chris Marker* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 150.
 3 Grant Kester, "Aesthetic Evangelism" *Afterimage*, January 1995.

MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE / REMAKING THE CATEGORY OF THE ARTIST

In these days of war economy, it is difficult to believe that the weight of historical oppression can be deposed by memory and collective imagination. But during an epoch of perhaps even greater cruelty and horror, ancient assertions about the power of our minds to rearrange the world were made into institutions. Alchemists like Giordano Bruno were burned at the stake for insisting that, if nature produces us, it is our destiny to embody nature, and its divinity, by organizing memory toward critical thought. Seen through modernity's twin nightmares of efficiency and surplus, the Renaissance dream of memory as a tool for the creative reassembly of reality may seem quaint, but only if we ignore the present epidemic of social amnesia. Today we forget things before we know them, wandering from the spectacle fiction of news to the official monument of historical memorial, our cities and minds littered with things we can't remember, like a post-Fordist machine effect delivered just in time and only when needed.



The inclusion of multiple viewpoints and perspectives would diversify modern art's monumentalizing character and undermine its distance from life. The juxtaposition of experiences of a group would confront the limitation of the universal. Haha reminds artists of the importance of social collaboration as a tool in the remaking of artistic identity. Many artists are interested in being a member of the audience. In collaboration lies a chance to avoid specialization and the division of labor; this is no accident because in collectives artists serve also as each other's audience. Back in the 1950s, Raymond Williams asked readers to address the question "Who makes culture and for whom?," but it was the action of artists working together that presented these words to the larger institutions of art. Artists reproduced this inquiry throughout the 1980s in questions asked in press releases and academic lecture halls. Their public language was one of inclusion and debate. Privately they asked: How much can we question the role of the artist while still accepting the fact that we are becoming artists? In a world of skepticism inherited from the end-game position of 1960s radicalism, the possibility of remaking the category of the artist was as important as revolutionary methods of production. Affecting consumption was a kind of production for

Haha, Group Material, General Idea, and many others. For those turning the exhibition hall into an artistic medium, the question from the status quo was always the same: "But where is your work?" Artists using the public conversation of curatorial selection and display are asked this a little less these days.

Taxonomy is always in transition for those involved in the museum as a site of collective memory. Five hundred years ago, scholars worked to remake memory as an unending taxonomic resource. By setting experience into images, images into rooms or other settings, and rooms into mansions, castles, and cities, scholars could remember anything. The beauty and the alchemy of this was that once set into metaphorical space, ideas could be held in dynamic relation to each other, could be set into conflict, and could undo hierarchy. The cities of memory devised by Renaissance philosophers bear an uncanny resemblance to the potential relativity of history as we experience it today in the museum. Indeed, for us moderns, the archive and the reaction to the archive is the definition of the critical capacity of our work. But these taxonomies also build a kind of imagined insurance against the inevitable character of oblivion: if enough people witness something happening and describe it to each other later, then it is surely saved. What would we do without witnesses? Who could bear the future?

MEMORY ATLAS

In 1934, The Warburg Institute brought its immense library to London to escape from fascism. Among the holdings was Aby Warburg's *Memory Atlas*. Consisting of almost one thousand photographs, the atlas documents an alternative use for art history—one committed to juxtaposition and inclusion. To construct its pages, Warburg clipped images to strings hung horizontally across the shelves of his library. He then photographed them, constructing associations that rejected the traditional museum taxonomy of genre and nation, relying instead on relations between forms and the ways they are remembered. On one page, crowds are grouped alongside crucifixions and forests; another features orbital models with dirigibles and overflowing barrels. Ostensibly an antihistory, this is a modern individual's effort to engage the premodern understanding of memory's social sense for collective identification and dialogue.

These examples demonstrate that the psychic space of recollection has real effect in the social spaces of cultural production. The collaborative artist sees both the museum and the street as reflections of memory's comparative architecture, and therein sees the possibilities for the aesthetic modeling of conversation: the same dialogue that serves to produce visual mood may also propose social models of happiness. These visual experiences offer an invention built from both a page from Warburg's atlas and the conversation at an eighteenth-century salon exhibition—their dialogue looks like the action of an inclusive memory. As it fills, it adds in the necessary gaps between images and ideas, its empty spaces of negotiation reflected in the participatory dialogues' even greater democratic imagination. In Haha's juxtaposition of social space and museum, an exhibition informs a town meeting, which creates a protest that demands visual representations that are modeled by artworks. Warburg advanced chains of visual referents as a new map of the brain that reflects social practice. Years later the historian Francis Yates would conduct her original research on Giordano Bruno's architecture of memory in Warburg's library.