

FINDING WATER

THE MACHINE OF AWESOME BRIGHT LIQUID BLUENESS

By

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B.A Studio Art, McMaster University, 2014

A THESIS ESSAY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF APPLIED ARTS

in

Visual Arts

EMILY CARR UNIVERSITY OF ART AND DESIGN

2016

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ABSTRACT

The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness project investigates the ideas of convenience, fashion and entertainment as they relate to a specific community's choice around drinking water. A hybrid of participatory and dialogical art practices incorporating an interactive sculpture along with the artist performing direct community outreach is the foundation of what the artist refers to as a performance sculpture. A performance sculpture utilizes an interactive sculptural apparatus as an activation or focusing point within a larger community engagement project. The process of directly recruiting, consulting, and collaborating with community partners is a key part of a performance sculpture. Projects work to combine both art product and process in order to facilitate a public through emblematic, supportive, and participatory means.

Guided by a migration of educational methods and socially engaged art practices, a performance sculpture is multimodal in its strategy. Its projects operate with five root concerns: examining how art and a communal experience *actually* operate in everyday life; speaking a language that everyday people can understand; existing in a public space; instigating a collective action; and creating ubiquity and embracing popular methods of cultural production. The level and amount of these concerns will vary from project to project and audience to audience.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you Tim, the programmer for The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness, your skills are second to none!

A special thank you to my advisors Patricia Kelly and Justin Langlois for pushing me to own the space I have created.

DEDICATION

To Hali Tsui, for her overwhelming support and encouragement.

And to the boys, Jacob and Bram, reminding me everyday why this is important.

1. Introduction

Research into the history of drinking water informs the text and language used within the project, and the history of bottled water is explored as a method of gaining insight into contemporary drinking water practices. How we conceive of drinking water fundamentally influences our relationship with it. Central to our sense of well-being, through sickness and in health, the understanding and management of drinking water from ancient societies until today has changed dramatically. Today, the sustainable access to and the availability of clean water is a challenge facing all communities. With water becoming a scarce resource, fights over drinking water have begun around the globe. Questions of who owns it, controls it, and monitors it are actually questions establishing power, for as journalist Charles Fishman explains, “Water poverty doesn’t just mean your hands are dirty, or you can’t wash your cloths, or you are often thirsty. Water poverty may mean you never learn how to read, it means you get sick more often than you should, it means you and your children are hungry. Water poverty traps you in a primitive day-to-day struggle. Water poverty is, quite literally, de-civilizing” (198). *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* strives to serve the communities in which it resides by facilitating an opportunity for community members to establish a consciousness of their drinking water and to become part of the discussion on who holds the power in providing citizens with drinking water.

The term “performance sculpture” is used here to describe an interactive sculptural apparatus utilized as an activation or focusing point within a larger community engagement project. The foundation of the term is rooted in a broader dialogue with various contemporary participatory and dialogical art projects such as Joseph Beuys *7000 Oak Trees* (1982), Suzanne Lacy’s *The Roof Is On Fire* (1994), and WochenKlausur’s *Shelter for Drug-Addicted Women* (1994). *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* intertwines these practices through the process of directly recruiting, consulting, and collaborating with community partners and combines both art product and process in order to facilitate a public through emblematic, supportive, and participatory means. *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness*, as a performance sculpture project, investigates the ideas of convenience, fashion and entertainment as it relates to a community’s choice around drinking water.

Performance sculpture projects are multifaceted in their operation and strive to incorporate what Mary Jane Jacob describes in *An Unfashionable Audience* as “art as an instrument of change” (50-59). Performance sculptures operate emblematically as both object and action to interrogate specific environmental and societal issues. *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* aspires to create an opportunity engage and challenge the public and participants on issues around access and control of drinking water in a public space. It operates supportively as the project links public, retail, environmental, and municipal communities to the complicated issues around drinking water. The project is participatory through audience interaction with the sculpture and through collaboration by the aforementioned communities that, in part, determine the final presentation of the project.

2. Performance Sculpture as Methodology

Research and development of these projects are informed by contemporary conceptual practices in art making and are additionally located in sociological contexts related to ecology. *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* exists to investigate and explore environmental behaviours and beliefs while incorporating aesthetic sensibility and satisfying internal necessity.¹ The ecological grounding of the work can, at times, be more explicit than ambiguous, but preserves space for the artistic practice.

Performance sculpture projects are presented, and outreach occurs, in a public space or a space that a general public has access to. As an example, *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* at the Charles H. Scott Gallery on Granville Island, was installed facing the sliding glass doors onto Johnston Street. Access to the work came from the street, *not* from inside the gallery.



Fig 1: Outside the Charles H Scott Gallery.

¹ Internal necessity referring to a need to function as an artist with all the embedded and adored clichés.

Suzanne Lacy, in *Mapping the Terrain*, defines public art as not residing solely in the product, but also in the addressing of a broad audience with ideas relating to interaction and social change. She states that the definition of public art and the criteria used for assessing it should be built on concepts of audience, intent, dialogue, and interactivity, and that these should be equally considered along with the artistic processes and object materials in the evaluation of the work. She argues that the nature of public art does not reside solely in the product, but “in the process of value finding, a set of philosophies, and ethical action, and an aspect of a larger sociocultural agenda” (46). It is for this reason that I spend little time within this paper discussing the making and aesthetics of the sculpture itself. Artistic process and materials are examined and discussed more thoroughly on my website where the project blog has provided ongoing updates on the building of the sculpture itself. The link here:

http://www.christophermcleod.ca/p/the-machine-of-awesome-bright-liquid_9.html

takes you to the space that I have chosen to discuss the choices made in the construction of the sculpture. Here I comment on the process, technology and materials utilized in the building of *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness. Finding Water*, as performance sculpture projects, focus on placing themselves within public spaces and to Lacy’s definition of new genre public art: public art in the public, accessible (not only in the physical sense, but also in content and subject) to the public while simultaneously and equally operating as an ethical action.

That being said, I do not however wish to underplay the importance of the physical object to my practice. Conceptually each project within my practice has manifested a physical object as the focal point within those projects. Dialogue with

potential collaborators has been the starting point, the outcome of those discussions plays an important part in deciding the direction of a project. With *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* project those discussions started with Tim Mills, a programmer/hacker/robot building computer expert. My understanding for how to control and determine the actions of and between 6000 LED's, a series of push buttons, a sound system, and a water bottle refilling unit came through my collaboration with Tim. Continually bouncing ideas, potential problems, goals, and outcomes between one another shapes the sculpture object at its core.

Physically, the sculpture is formed through a discourse with contemporary art considerations, concerns, and debates. Represented organically as a circle, rather than a less complicated right angle based shape, the sculpture speaks to that which comes from nature, the earth, and a cycle that we are all a part of. The face of the sculpture, that is the polycarbonate that covers the LED lights is not flat, but pushes out as a convex shape meant to expand the view for participants operating the sculpture. Standing ready to interact, participants are offered the opportunity to reflect on more than they can normally see as presented in the reflection of that behind them. The angle of the convex polycarbonate was matched to the curve of the human eye thus allowing myself, as represented by the sculpture, to watch over the actions of the audience and participants. Contributing almost two thirds of the optical power, the cornea of the human eye stands in as a convergence and divergence the sculpture can offer to participants. The above details play a crucial part in satisfying that, which I stated at the beginning of this chapter, my aesthetic sensibility and internal necessity.

Specifically for *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* project on Granville Island, the sculpture's physical site is within a gallery space, but one that is visually and physically accessed from a public location. This interstice of public and an art related space is specific to *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* and Granville Island. Each future installation of the sculpture will be unique and tailored to the specific communities it is to engage with. As an example; the larger sociocultural agenda for *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* for Granville Island focuses on access and control to public drinking water. The project recognizes Granville Island as a place heavily visited by international tourists. A man made island centrally located within Vancouver, it is marketed as a tourist site not to be missed when visiting Vancouver. Filled with waterfront restaurants, galleries, theatres, shops, cafes and a large fresh food market, Granville Island draws in some 10.5 million people a year. The issue of bottled water, specifically access and control of drinking water, is not an isolated one. Currently, some communities understand more than others that access to fresh water is vital for the health and growth of a community. The residents of Flint, Michigan, whose public water is contaminated with lead, and perhaps most people living in drought plagued California, help bring into focus the important political and social issue of thinking about water. Realization that access to fresh water dictates a community's success and health needs to be part of a broader public discussion.



Fig 2: *Interacting to get a water bottle filled for water.*

Vancouver's easy access to free, potable, tap water qualifies it as a location suitable for *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness*. Within such locations bottled water is sold at rates higher than gasoline. Purchased and consumed in small plastic bottles, the community and visitors of Granville Island are not only supporting the privatization of water, but also erode the confidence for publically supplied clean water. In the early 1990's there was no such thing as a water isle at a grocery store and public drinking fountains were easy to find. "Some people have chosen to put their money into corporate purity instead of calling on their public officials to use tax dollars

to address the public water supply,” states Andy Opel. Why would a city spend millions to bring water up to such high standards, if so little is used for drinking?

In a media and image-saturated culture, spectacular advertising displays have become an accepted norm that a public can trust to offer noncritical choices in their daily lives. Advertising, so imbedded in the everyday, now holds the greatest power in creating and defining meaning. For as Nato Thompson states in *Seeing Power*, “The intensification of advertising and the rise of TV, film, internet, music, software, and other content-delivery mediums have slowly – yet radically – altered the entire spectrum through which we understand and perform our daily lives” (4). Spectacular in its presentation, *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* operates within this easily accessible and understood space in order to generate its audience. Then, in its own excessive fashion, the sculpture challenges those that come prepared with a reusable bottle to access drinking water. Interacting and responding to the sculpture in the required manner (as determined by the artist) is required in order to activate it and get their bottle filled. Attempts to create new significance within the experience of collecting drinking water, and to produce a desire for that experience, are important in shaping the audience.

For those already converted - that is, those that are already aware of water issues and conservation, refillable water bottle in hand - it will offer them a unique experience filling their water bottles outside of the common strictly functional water fountain experience. Satisfaction comes in not only knowing that refilling their reusable bottle is the better choice, but through a situated and embodied art experience. For the unconverted, uninitiated, and unaware, the sculpture’s ‘bling’ and initial non-

confrontational approach invites them to find, purchase, and hold onto a refillable water bottle in order to join in on an experience that is fun and engaging. By providing the correct feedback, participants will find success in activating the sculpture and receiving their free bright liquid blueness (drinking water). The work inserts the topic of drinking water into an art experience discovered in the everyday.

Within a “performance sculpture” project the interactive sculpture is to be monitored and documented during the exhibition through ongoing and extended artist visits to the installation site, as well as a video camera installed to record public interactions. The documentation will be used to reflect on the actual interactive reaction and participation from the audience. This information will feed and fuel the updates and changes for the sculpture’s next location. The approaches used by the artist for outreach and ‘buy in’ will continuously be reviewed for improvement - improvement measured not only by the number of impressions made, but also by the actual changes documented as a result of the project. As an example, the *Campaign4awesome*, the introduction of *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* project, directly affected the immediate repair of the public water fountain located outside of the Emily Carr University North Campus building. These positive impacts are measured as success within a performance sculpture project.

The *Campaign4Awesome*, was a project that started in March of 2015 with an Indiegogo campaign and an artist studio event that raised almost \$4000 in support of *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness*. It concluded with an exhibition at the entrance of the Concourse Gallery inside Emily Carr University that sat almost uncomfortably between a legitimate kiosk selling refillable water bottles and tee shirts

and a parody of one. Utilizing commercial advertising tactics that include large graphic lettering not only as part of the display but also on the outside doors and windows of the North Building, as well as a street hung banner at the entrance of Granville Island, the *Campaign4awesome* was successful in selling fifty-five water bottles and two shirts.



Fig 3: *Campaign4awesome*.

As part of the *Campaign4awesome* several videos were produced as part of the fundraising campaign and for the exhibition. These have been documented at <http://www.christophermcleod.ca/p/the-machine-of-awesome-bright-liquid.html>

The video displayed as part of the Concourse exhibit can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/qdyodiEKv1s>

The *Campaign4awesome* used business and entertainment models as a cover for injecting furtive interventionist strategies in an attempt to bypass confirmation and

assimilation biases. A confirmation bias is the tendency to ‘Cherry Pick’ the evidence that can support our existing knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs. Assimilation bias is the modification of new information in order to squeeze it into our existing schema. In, *Don’t Even Think About It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change*, George Marshall states, “People’s tendency to avoid costs and act only in self interest can be overruled by a sufficiently strong appeal to group identity and visible social norm (69). The *Campaign4awesome* acts as a starting point in generating that “strong appeal to group identity” for *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* project by announcing itself within community. It was the campaign’s intention to activate an audience through inquiry and participation with the goal of infiltrating the social praxis.


The campaign4awesome referenced the ‘tools’ provided by the collective Superflex. Projects like *Foreigners please don’t leave us alone with the Danes* a mural and print project that publically highlighted and commented on the current public debate around immigration and integration. The campaign4awesome used publicly placed print and banner pieces in a similar fashion, but also included popular crowdfunding and Instagram platforms for further penetration. *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* will continue with the publicly placed print and banner pieces with the production and design of these pieces now being executed by community collaborators.



Fig 4: 4' x 40' Banner suspended from the Granville Street Bridge, 2015.



Fig 5: 4' x 40' Banner suspended from the Granville Street Bridge, 2016.



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The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness

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41

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6

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Awesome Intro



0:00 / 2:42

The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness is more than an interactive sculpture, much more.

\$1,789 CAD

raised in 1 month

22% funded

0 time left

\$8,000 CAD goal

Flexible Funding

CAMPAIGN CLOSED

This campaign ended on April 16, 2015

SELECT A PERK

\$24 CAD

Stainless Steel

Fig. 6: Still from Indiegogo crowd source campaign.

3. The inscription of Meaning

Phenomenologically, the project embraces contemporary modes of spectacle and methods of branding in order to establish easily recognizable processes of engagement around issues of drinking water. The production of meaning through presence (the street level sculpture and community outreach) has the ability to alter a moment in an everyday experience and creates a space to celebrate making better choices when it comes to finding and consuming water in public places. Or, as Patricia C. Phillips states in her essay *Public Construction*, “The point is not just to produce another thing for people to admire, but to create an opportunity- a situation –that enables viewers to look back at the world with renewed perspective” (70).

The development of the interactive process and text presented to participants by *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* flexes between simply playful and ironically stated. The sculpture itself uses the same technology, LED’s, as many contemporary advertising billboards. Flashing and glowing to capture our attention, an advertising billboard’s message is normally very clear and concise, whereas the sculpture offers somewhat of a mixed message based on the duration of viewing. An obvious image of a forest with a river running through it is a chance for beauty to present itself, but at the same time alludes to the imagery used by water bottle companies to infuse ‘nature’ and ‘purity’ into its product. The forest scene is then interrupted with text reading, “Revitalize! Refresh! Survive!” Here I am further enforcing notions of purity while also inserting directly the idea of survival. Advertising makes no such connection as to possibly avoid the link of their product to a resource

that is vital to all living creatures. If the public were to connection the fact that there ability to pay directly effected their access to this resource, then the idea of private control of such a resource becomes a more serious and complex issue. My attempts to make these links subtly present themselves through the text messages displayed by the sculpture.

“ALL YOU CAN TAKE! ALL YOU CAN DRINK!”

These words presented by the sculpture operate to enable participants to look at how they consider drinking water with renewed buffet style perspective. This is my attempt to be provocative with viewers, (I use the word ‘viewers’ here instead of ‘participant’ as I believe the text is taken in prior to participating with the sculpture) and create an opportunity to dwell on who is providing them with drinking water and the lack of ongoing consideration for this service.

The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness plays with the power of the sign as it is connected to commodity, (the commodification of drinking water being one of the issues raises within the project). Sign exchange value, (the site where a commodity produces and maintains its value based on label), as identified by Baudrillard, works in establishing the value of the water collected by participants. This is an attempt by the project to rework the meaning of how we collect and consume water. Andy Opel remarks in the article, *Constructing Purity*, “In the case of bottled water, the inscription of meaning is vital because there is so little difference between the products”(70). As part of the culture industry, branding has reframed the meaning of pure in order to add value to a product that was already publically available for free. By connecting and utilizing pre-established corporate constructions of purity, *The Machine*

of *Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* examines the value of how water is collected and consumed.

Nato Thompson refers to an infrastructure of resonance, “the set of material conditions that produces a form of meaning. It is the collection of structure (newspapers, social networks, academia, churches, etc.) that shape our understanding of any given phenomenon – including ourselves.” (60) By inserting itself seamlessly into this existing structure, a performance sculpture can become a part of that structure shaping meaning.

4. Socially Engaged, Dialogical and Interactive

Performance sculptures draw from socially engaged, dialogical and interactive art practices and utilize these distinct practices as a discursive space in which to discuss the work. Projects operating as performance sculptures will blend and combine aspects of these practices depending on the subject, space, and communities involved in delivery. Pablo Helguera’s *Socially Engaged Art*, provides a lens through which to develop and consider a performance sculpture project and will be applied to *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness*. In *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, Helguera states, “SAE (socially engaged art) functions by attaching itself to subjects and issues that normally belong to other disciplines, moving them temporarily into a space of ambiguity. It is this temporary transposition of subjects into the realm of art that brings new insights to a particular problem and in turn makes them visible to other disciplines.” (4) Research in the arts on water, employing the methods found with a performance sculpture, seek to expand on insights and understandings of why people choose to purchase single use bottled water when it is available for free. Style and

fashion (resurrected in the 1970's by Perrier), perception of quality (the triumph of technology and the creation of chlorinated municipal water having now waned) and how bottled water has been packaged, marketed, and sold are investigated. The project operates to explore a community's understanding of their relationship with drinking water outside of conventional scientific or environmental parameters.

Helguera states, "what characterizes socially engaged art is its dependence on social intercourse as a factor for its existence" (2). Performance sculpture projects generate social intercourse through the installation of an interactive sculpture, as well as the artist's community outreach efforts and the conversations and actions generated from that outreach. Outreach includes the recruiting, consulting, and co-ordination of groups to become part of the project. For *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* on Granville Island, this includes, but is not limited to, local retailers and restaurants, eco and community groups, as well as government. These groups are all engaged beyond the interaction with the sculpture in an attempt to create a dialogue among local stakeholders that will exist beyond the exhibition dates. The objective is for these groups to come together, encourage one another, and continue to deliver actual, not hypothetical, social action.

Invitations to participate in the project were sent to local groups. Within this invitation, a general introduction letter is sent followed by a phone call or email. Each group has been approached openly where the discourse with the group directly determines their involvement in the project. Factors to be considered in each group's involvement include the integration and promotion of their existing programs and initiatives. See Appendix A for example.

Specific examples of participating community partners, in regards to *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* on Granville Island, include the CMHC, the False Creek Watershed Society, and the Still Creek Watershed group. Discussions with these groups resulted unique installation displays being created for display installation installed on fountain site number 1 and 7 on Granville Island. The vernacular approach of the fountain displays now not only pointed to the interactive sculpture installed at the Charles H. Scott, but to the activates and contact information for these two local groups. Sites were provided for these groups to present their work within a space created as part of this performance sculpture project. The social intercourse lays the groundwork for larger discourses to be discovered and documented within the project. Both of these groups have now become part of the project as collaborators by installing their organizations information into the fountain site, promoting the interactive sculpture, and being a part of the discourse around how the project is operating and the issues of concern.

At the same time within this project there were elements of underdeveloped community partnerships. Specific discussions with the Council of Canadians, Vancouver Water, and Vancouver city Councillor Adriane Carr never resulted in collaboration. The Council of Canadians and Vancouver water were approached as advocates and leaders in campaigning on issues of access, policies, and protection of fresh water. Councillor Adriane Carr was contacted regarding the project and we held a phone meeting in May to discuss her possible involvement within the project. Her history and ongoing advocacy around water issues in Vancouver made her an ideal partner candidate. Unfortunately no collaboration with these groups was established for

the project on Granville Island. I believe a combination of factors such as the sculpture not being fully articulated, as well as the timing of contact, lead to the breakdown of possible partnerships. The experienced gained from the Granville Island project will be documented and considered in future performance sculpture projects.



Fig. 7: Site #7. False Creek Watershed Society display and historical map.

Helguera also writes, “SEA (socially engaged art) often expands the depth of the social relationship, at times promoting ideas such as empowerment, criticality, and sustainability among the participants. SEA has an overt agenda, but its emphasis is less

on the act of protest than on becoming a platform or network for the participation of others, so that the effects of the project may outlast its ephemeral presentation” (11). The ideas of empowerment, criticality, and sustainability were the building blocks upon which the False Creek and Still Creek Watershed Societies involvement is based. These groups can now use their connections to the CMHC to further develop a platform for discussions around water access and Granville Island.

Also included in the outreach efforts are the retailers, merchants, and restaurants of Granville Island. These groups were approached and encouraged to become part of the event by promoting and discounting their refillable water bottles. Discourse on drinking water, the effects of the choices made around drinking water, and how their businesses affect those choices, were put forward and documented. Promotional material for the sculpture will be offered to these groups and in exchange for participation in the event, retailers, merchants and restaurants will be offered the opportunity to develop cross promotion. As an example, on Granville Island three retailers who sell refillable water bottles installed displays. I worked with the owners of these businesses and asked them to become involved by displaying a sign promoting Free Water, to offer a sale price on the bottles, and to advertise the location of the sculpture. One owner didn't want to discount the bottles but instead suggested donating 10% to a local water charity.



Fig. 8: Display installed at Indigena.

Grant Kester, in *Conversation Pieces*, discusses a number of contemporary artists whose practice is built around dialogue-based art, or dialogical aesthetics. These artists focus on the conversations or dialogue exchanges as the art form itself which, emancipated from individual or institutional viewpoints, is believed to have the potential to allow for new meaning and understanding to take place. Grant Kester gives artist groups such as WochenKlausur and Superflex, among others, as examples of this type of practice.

WochenKlausur's project, *Shelter for Drug-Addicted Women*, resulted in the establishment of a safe facility for drug-addicted prostitutes to rest during the day. As outlined on WochenKlausur's website, this project operated under the philosophy that WochenKlausur "sees art as an opportunity for achieving long-term improvements in

human coexistence. Artists' competence in finding creative solutions, traditionally utilized in shaping materials, can just as well be applied in all areas of society" (WochenKlausur). In creating a unique space (a boat parked in the middle of a lake), the project brought together experts in drug issues with city councilors, police, and the media to discuss views and exchange ideas. This philosophy of 'art as opportunity' can be linked to Helguera's concept and artistic practice addressing subjects and issues outside of the distinct discipline of 'art'.

The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness, with its focus on the environmental and social issues around drinking water, shares concerns with WochenKlausur's philosophy and Helguera's practice. The engagement of the audience through the interactive sculpture and community outreach - as well as the discussion and exchange of ideas by the community groups participating - serve to improve on the long-term conditions of the communities involved with the project. These aspects are found within the project on Granville Island through the examination of the forms of existing public engagement methods used by the local governing bodies, in this case the CMHC. Specifically for Granville Island, a new public water fountain icon, developed by the CMHC on my request, was added to the free tourist map. This located the spaces where free public water could be had. These spaces already existed, but with very little awareness, they remained quiet and inactivated. Activation of a public space that builds awareness of the availability of free public water is the artist attempt to elevate the significance that free drinking water is available in a public space - and to create new meaning within those sites and the experience associated with. The rhetoric used in the activation of these sites gives the audience a comfortable and recognizable entry point.

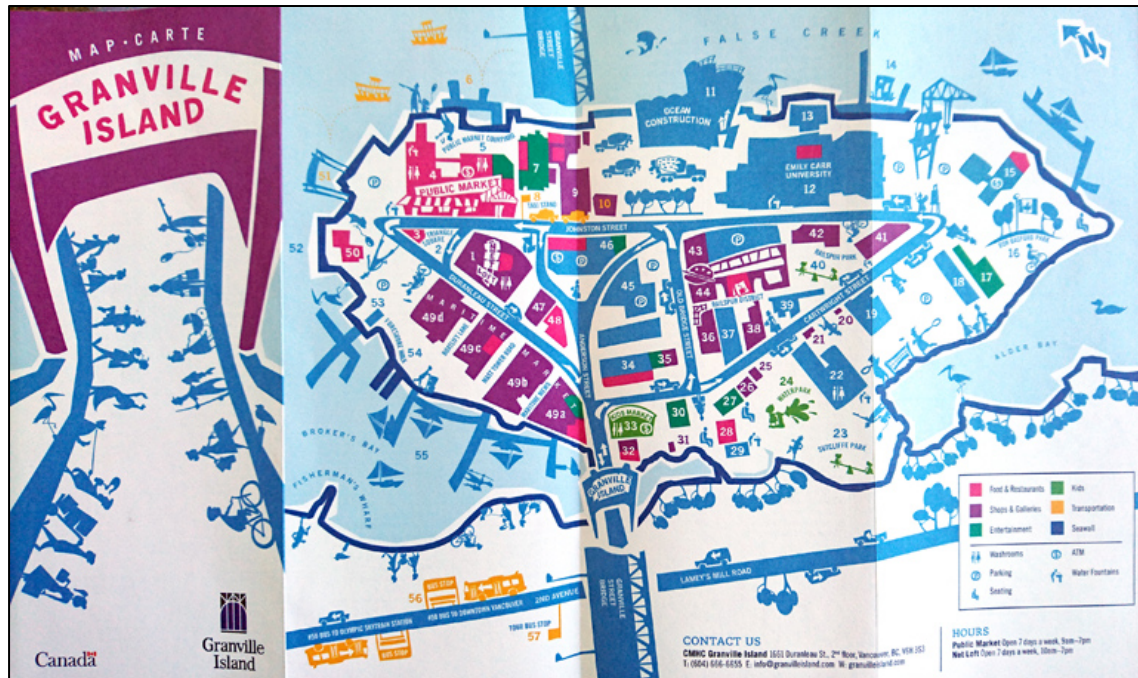


Fig. 9: Updated Granville Island tourist Map.

The conversational aspect of a performance sculpture project is not found in the interactive sculpture primarily, but in the project's outreach. And while the dialogues generated around the interactive sculpture are important, it is not here that the majority of the art form is defined. The art form is more heavily weighted on the conversations experienced and documented during the artist's community outreach efforts. It is at this point more specific and focused acknowledgement and understanding of the projects audience and interlocutors takes place. Kester states, "dialogical aesthetics requires that we strive to acknowledge the specific identity of our interlocutors and conceive them not simply as subjects on whose behalf we might act but as co-participants in the transformation of both self and society" (79). A performance sculpture project requires advance research and knowledge of the communities it is to engage. It is not possible for these projects to be exhibited on Granville Island in Vancouver, then simply be

shipped to another location for exhibition. Each iteration of a performance sculpture will vary depending on its location, as well as on the outcomes of each previous installation. This acknowledgement of specific identities, changing social and political circumstances, as well as geographical conditions, will transform each performance sculpture even though the physical object within the project may retain specific aspects of its previous manifestation. As an example, *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* will always have five thousand eight hundred and twenty seven LED's on its face. It will not though, produce an identical interactive experience from one location to the next.

5. Concerns within a Performance Sculpture

The examination of how art and a communal experience operate in everyday life appears through documentation and evaluation of specific effects of each action within the project. This analysis is to be reviewed and considered and applied to future installation of the project. On Granville Island, I spent time speaking with and documenting the public interacting with the sculpture. This time also extended to the retailers and community groups that became involved in the project. While interacting with the public, I didn't necessarily identify myself as the artist, and simply entered into a dialogue with those engaged and interacting with the sculpture.

For *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* project on Granville Island, community outreach efforts utilized a rubric in documenting the dialogue and level of participation with various groups and audiences. A rubric for the Wickaninnish

Gallery, one of the retailers of refillable water bottles, can be seen in appendix B. The rubric illustrates that overall the owner of Wickaninnish Gallery responded favorably to the project. She was well aware of the issues surrounding bottled water and participated fully by posting multiple displays, tweeting, and posting videos to the company website. Through our discussions she expressed interest in having the CMHC upgrade additional fountains. I was able to give her some contacts within the CMHC in order for her to make that request. I also recommended she work with Indigena Galllery as the owner there had a similar interest.

The rubric will be a tool completed and utilized to facilitate and expand upon each future project. Information gathered through the rubric becomes useful when discussing how a performance sculpture operates in a community with potential financial partners, supporters, and grant reviewers. The rubric also provides me with direct documentation of what worked well, and what did not work as well, in working with various stakeholders within the project. Similarly, an informal rubric was used for the *Campaign4awesome* that helped determine that without sufficient information or peer referral, the public engaged very little with the project through social media. However, through the use of the Indiegogo website and the studio events, an audience was created that not only is followed and waited for *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* project to be exhibited, but also monetarily contributed to its production.

Prioritizing accessibility and inclusiveness, *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* is designed to appeal to a wide audience and general public. A balanced approach to language that is broadly available to the largest audience is utilized and

embraced, as success within a performance sculpture project is partially measured in volume of participation (or engagement). This appears in *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* project through text-based messages displayed on the front of the sculpture. The text is partially instructional, clearly explaining how to participate and engage with the sculpture. Additional text worked to challenge viewers understanding of the sculpture and provide the opportunity to make connections and build meaning into the experience. Further, a consistent motif was used through community outreach and display installations around the island in the form of signs and banners.

A public space also includes the businesses and restaurants found within proximity of the sculpture's location. In the case of Granville Island, the seven water fountain locations are also to be considered as public access points within the project. This will occur as public water fountain installations and performances. Also on Granville Island, there was a banner on the Granville Island bridge announcing the location and dates for the project. The sculpture was installed just inside the open glass door of Charles H Scott Gallery facing (and operated from) Johnston Street.



Fig. 10: Site #2. Icon decal and display panel.

The collective actions look to include, in their most ambitious form, coordination of groups coming together around a theme or idea by creating public murals or street performances both announced and not announced. It is my role within the project to facilitate the approval of these murals and performances with the local municipality and to lead the coordination of the groups involved. The collective or group feeds its own dialogue around the significance of the work, action, or performance to find points of affinity and continually build from there. For the Granville Island installation only a limited level of collective action was achieved. Currently, for the Granville Island installation, the CMHC was involved in the project through their creation of the new icon and tourist map, and as well supporting and

approving the installation of signage at each water fountain location. The CMHC has a very specific process in place for the installation of signage on the island. The CMHC will be keeping my icon decals installed at each water fountain location until they are able to produce more permanent display signs. The False Creek Watershed Society, Still Creek Watershed group, and the Council of Canadians all participated by providing literature for the drinking fountain displays, offering some funding in producing those displays, and by each promoting the event via their websites and social media outlets.

The creation of a higher sense of visibility and presence by embracing popular methods of cultural production takes form through the use of spectacle and integration of advertising strategies into the project. Ultimately, a performance sculpture works to construct a ubiquity within a space with the notion that the more you hear/see an action at different points within the everyday, the more real it seems and is accepted. What becomes real is the idea that a social norm is at work, and that that norm should be adopted. People cannot help but legitimate that which exists.



Fig. 11: Site #3. False Creek Community Centre.

6. My Story of Water

My story of water begins in 2010 when I was offered and accepted a research position with Gail Krantzberg in the Engineering department at McMaster University. My job was to develop a project that used a unique public engagement project to communicate detailed research information to the public and to investigate how ‘art’ was being used to transform communities and bring people together around specific issues. Dr. Krantzberg’s issue was water, specifically the Great Lakes as she is the director of the Regeneration Institute for the Great Lakes. Here are some of the key points discussed: develop a community revitalization program in which art is used as a vehicle to create place, build self-esteem, and engender mutual respect. Work to deliver a series of inter-connected programs, built through an “organic,” grassroots democratic process, serving neighborhood youth and adults. Two projects were developed, with one being implemented. The working title for project one was the ReIGL Speed Dating Event and the second was known as the Urban Snowman Project. Project two was initiated in February of 2011 just after a nice snowstorm involving about a dozen volunteers and attracting the attention of the local newspaper. What I discovered during this research position in engineering was that the development and delivery of an interactive community water project needed to become the focus of my artistic practice. I had, quite by accident, found water.

Urban Snowman Project coverage:



Fig 12: Hamilton Spectator, Urban Snowman Project.

In my final year of my BA in Studio Arts, I was offered an opportunity to work with a group of 4th year mechanical engineering students to create and build a project. This interdisciplinary approach to a project was getting somewhat mixed results from the years previous, but the idea excited me. It was within this collaboration that I could think outside of my own skillset.

Water still on my mind, I put forth this proposal to the art and engineering program leaders:

Abstract

The motivation behind this project was the design of an Interactive Water Filtration Sculpture. The sculpture would serve not only as a water filtration tool, but also an educational tool for the general public. The general public has no sense of the steps and energy required to produce potable water. This sculpture would serve to address that, by clearly illustrating the various steps and energy required in an interactive and user-friendly manner. The first stage of the project was the generation of multiple concepts from which an optimal concept could be selected. To effectively do this a set of clearly defined design criteria based on the specific needs and requirements of the sculpture system were generated. Subsequently, the entire system was broken down into its various constituents, such as the method of filtration, with each component critically analyzed. Based on this analysis and the use of various comparison tools such as performance matrices, the selection of an optimal concept was carried out. To safeguard against potential unforeseeable events during the project, an alternate concept and two alternate plans were also developed. A comprehensive project completion plan was subsequently generated, detailing the various required steps to produce the final tangible sculpture system within the given time period.

This was the abstract written by the engineer students as part of their submission report document. The language required by each department, engineering and art, was distinctively different, and it was here that as an artist, I began to learn a new language.

The Campaign4awesome and The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness continue my pursuit to engage the public around water, and operate in a useful way. In this case, useful can be seen by offering to refill your reusable water bottle with free potable water. This might sound easy because there are taps everywhere in Vancouver that could be used to fill a reusable water bottle. The issue is, they aren't being used for that.

Useful also, in what I consider an early success within The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness project, is the creation and addition of a new icon for Granville Island maps and directories for drinking fountains and water bottle refilling stations. This icon was developed as a result of my written request to add the locations of the seven public water fountains to the maps and directories. After mentioning the icon idea verbally on the phone to the CMHC, I included the following paragraph within my overall project proposal submitted to them:

“I was hoping that the tourist map could be updated before next printing to include an icon identifying the locations of the water fountains on the island. I included a separate PDF illustrating the current fountain locations.”

From this request, and upon management approval, the graphics department within the CMHC developed this new icon:

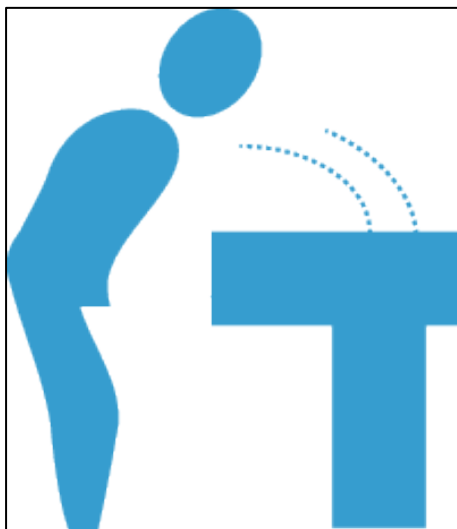


Fig 13: New Granville Island water fountain map icon.

Throughout my practice and the discussions that it has generated, the understanding that there is no life without water takes hold. My time spent with scientists and engineers all working towards sustainable clean water for the people, plants, and creatures of the world has shown me that there are many ways to approach the complicated issues around clean water.

7. Learning.

Transpedagogy is defined by Helguera as “the migration of the discipline and methods of education into art making, resulting in a distinct medium where the artwork is constituted simultaneously of a learning experience or process and a conceptual gesture to interpret” (3). This particular aspect of Transpedagogy is explored within performance sculpture projects through the integration of inquiry-based, experiential learning and stewardship frameworks.

Inquiry based learning builds on our natural curiosity about the world in which we live. The process and delivery of a performance sculpture utilizes an inquiry-based framework in developing the external and sculpturally internal elements of the project. That is, collaborators (those groups that respond to the invitation) questions and ideas will be at the centre of developing the language and interactive experience built into the sculpture. The experiences and discussions with these groups are to be discovered and are indeterminate. Feedback from meeting and discussions with the CMHC and the False Creek Community Centre, as examples, will guide the decisions around programming of the sculpture and the programs and installations happening outside in the community. What this will ultimately look like is currently unknown, and will

manifest differently for each community. The artist is unaware how this interactive placard will operate until they have had some extended experiences with the groups participating. This inquiry-based approach is meant to encourage the artist and collaborators to investigate their roles within the greater subject of water, and to empower their voices within the project.

For participants who rarely choose to carry a refillable bottle, this embodied experience has the potential to transform into newly formed knowledge, knowledge that may or may not be directly connected to the environment, but that is associated more with entertainment and fashion. Helguera states that, “Transpedagogy wishes to change society, while also retaining an essential dose of humour”(9). Humour and the strategy of play as an aspect of the interaction with the sculpture link performance sculpture methods with Transpedagogy.

Operating outside of an environmentally labeled space and action, *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness* creates the possibility of reaching audiences who have no such environmental interests. This audience is given an opportunity to place their own meaning into the action of filling a reusable water bottle, or what it means not to be able to participate lacking a reusable bottle. The immediate experience of interacting with the sculpture and the people around it creates new signifiers in defining what it could mean to carry a reusable water bottle.

Helguera states that the methods of education and art making are ‘constituted simultaneously.’ Whether or not the art making is created simultaneously really depends on when a person considers the art within a performance sculpture to be made? Is it

embedded in the object, an interactive sculpture, or is the art making manufactured and generated at the point of physical and dialogical interaction? This framework set out by Helguera is useful in evaluating some of the qualities informing how a performance sculpture is to operate.

Transpedagogy wishes to ‘change society’, and as stated earlier, performance sculpture projects exist and are grounded by ecological concerns and this includes the drive to modify and change societal behaviours for the betterment of the environment. Transpedagogy remains a space to review and critique a Performance Sculpture while recognizing the inherent deviations from Helguera’s original definition.

8. Outcome and reflections on the multimodal.

As a project that operates as a hybrid of established artistic practices utilizing performance sculpture methods and methodology, what areas require greater attention and consideration? Part new genre public art, socially engaged art, and transpedagogy, does a performance sculpture project serve to satisfy ecological requirements and can it be used to build on a practice that strives to create change within communities? This thesis sets out to describe how through different modes of intentness, on a variety of levels, and through the employment of multiple forms, a performance sculpture project has the capacity to make change through cultural investigations.

Success found within the project can be seen in each of the modes. Firstly, the interactive sculpture acted as a gateway to dialogue with the CMHC, the retailers, and the public on Granville Island. The CMHC, as part of a cultural project was able to

update their map and use the new icon to activate each of the water fountain sites. This attention to the sites, along with greater awareness and use should lead to the CMHC being more proactive in installing, updating, and maintaining their existing public fountains. Access to public water is now part of the discussions being had by the sustainability office of the CMHC, and has become a focus point for attention. Previous to the project, waste management, recycling, and composting were the primary environmental focuses of the CMHC. The artist could see improvements within the project through a greater duration of outreach, working locally rather than remotely as was the case with Granville Island, and an operating budget. Lobbying to the CMHC was limited in this project and staff changes within their office reduced the overall effectiveness of the artist outreach.

The retailers responded very well to the project and were excited to be involved. With an extended project, the retailers could have been encouraged to request additional public fountains as part of a local stakeholders group. With added displays and signs, refillable sales had a noticeable increase, a great success within the project. I have been following up with the retailers for feedback, and to discuss their interest in access to free public water.

The water fountain installation demonstrated to most involved that activating these spaces, promoting the use of the public fountains, is not difficult and needs not be costly. The laminated signs not only drew attention to the fountains themselves, but also pointed to the interactive sculpture as well as informed the public where refillable water bottles could be purchased.

Overall it has been recognized that the introduction of a new interactive sculpture has a direct effect on the amount and the quality of outreach. With the sculpture now physically complete, future iterations will have greater focus on community outreach and expected greater results. In person contact was more effective than email or phone contact. When working in person actions and results came much quicker than if attempting to communicate via email or telephone. This personal contact will be pushed for in future installations of the project. Additionally, greater outreach to include restaurants will be included. The cross promotion concept was well received and functioned to publically promote everyone involved. Outreach will look different working with the sculpture completed in advance with only programming to be finalized.

It is with the above details in mind that a performance sculpture project, operating in a multimodal fashion, can work as a methodology to satisfy the personal and ecological requirements in building a practice that strives to create change within community. In the borrowing and combining of several established disciplines and strategies, performance sculpture projects strive for a deep emersion within a connected set of localized communities. Advertising and branding techniques found within a consumer culture, direct community outreach, socially engaged and contemporary art practices are accessed and utilized within my practice in an attempt, through this hybrid of techniques, to create a space where a varied audience can become accessible. Each audience has its own role to play within the project, from the local government making changes to tourist purchasing a discounted refillable water bottle to use while on their daily travels, to the retailers who discount those water bottles during high season.

Together, through these combined actions and interventions change can happen in a multitude of forms. The experience of being denied water through an interactive water bottle refilling station, to the joy of receiving water from that same station, offers participants the opportunity to interrogate an environmental and societal issue through an artistic project. Being reminded, in their daily lives, participants unaware of being participants, that access to clean drinking water is simple and free for us to enjoy while being informed on how to participate further, works simultaneously within a performance sculpture project to intervene, create dialogue, and provide opportunity to construct meaning.

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Appendix A

The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness Event Invitation

Dear Vancouver Water,

I would like to invite you to a summer water event happening July 2016 that is all about Vancouver's fantastic tap water featuring the interactive water sculpture, *The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness*.

Details:

The Machine of Awesome Bright Liquid Blueness is an interactive, publicly displayed sculpture that functions as a refillable water bottle station. The sculpture communicates directly with the public to act, discuss, and engage with their drinking water utilizing 5800 sequenced LED's. The LED's transform the round face of the sculpture into a pixelated, moving and responding placard. Participants, through touch, will need to respond and interact with the sculpture in order to fill their refillable water bottles with awesome bright liquid blueness. (aka water) Please see www.christophermcleod.com for ongoing details and images.

The sculpture is to be installed just inside the sliding glass doors of the Charles H. Scott Gallery at Emily Carr University with participants accessing the work from the enclave off of Johnston St.

I would like to invite Vancouver Water as part of the event; there is no fee involved. This is an excellent opportunity for community outreach and education on various water initiatives by the city of Vancouver.

Please contact me for addition details and to discuss the event.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Christopher McLeod
mail@christophermcleod.ca

Appendix B

Categories	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Communication	- limited and unclear	- some clarity in correspondence	- responds clearly: Clear and active comm.	- active and initiated communication
Knowledge of issues	- limited	- some knowledge	-considerable knowledge	- thorough and actively seeks knowledge: Was well aware – was interested in banning bottles sales on the island, increasing education on the issues around bottled water, improving public water access and knowledge of access.
Pre-existing community engagement	- no community engagement: No pre-existing engagement on the part of the retailer. In fact, initial response to the 25% sale was concern for loss of profit in high season. Upon reflection, did offer sale.	- some community engagement	- stable level of community engagement	- stable level community engagement - actively seeking new modes of community engagement
Level of Participation	- did not participate	- partially participated at levels requested	- participated at all levels requested: Yes. Also offered feedback on sales and verbally informed customers of the sculpture.	- participated at all levels requested - initiated their own actions
Time and Effort	- lack of commitment to the goals of the	- some time & effort, but did not achieve complete	- excellent amount of time with general	- diligent worked to exceed goals of the project

	project	success.	goals of the project completed: Yes, was involved in a timely manner.	
Presentation	- careless and hurried	- somewhat careless and hurried. - legible and somewhat effective	- clear and attractive - effective use of presentation materials	- evidence of pride and commitment to project and issues: Yes, multiple displays installed and promoted.
Community engagement through project	- no community engagement	- some community engagement: increase in discourse with the public around issues of bottled water.	- stable level of community engagement	- stable level community engagement - actively seeking new modes of community engagement
Constructed valid relationship to the concept	- no evidence of constructing relationship	- established simple relationship to concept: Concept was embraced. Follow up by artist to encourage further action by the retailer.	- constructed clear relationship with concept	- constructed complex relationship with concept