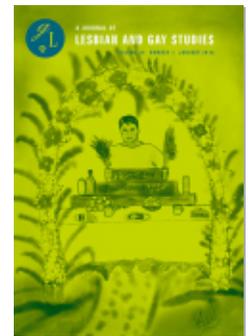To Punk, Yield, and Flail: Julie Tolentino's Etiolations and the Strong Performative Impulse

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TO PUNK, YIELD, AND FLAIL

Julie Tolentino's Etiolations
and the Strong Performative Impulse

Hentyle Yapp

𝒯he Hammer Museum's 2015 symposium on social art practices deployed the title "ENGAGE MORE NOW!" to hyperbolically highlight the logic of success within performance, the social, and engagement. According to this slogan, "engagement" represents the success-oriented goal of witnessing and experiencing social practice art. In light of queer theory's investments in failure, though, one might expect an imperative to "FAIL MORE NOW!" In fact, a 2015 festival on queer failure, sponsored by Radar Productions and the Luggage Store Project in San Francisco, took on this tone with its celebration of failure in its success in "queer anti-assimilation's" ability to become a "FAILURE to be polite, to be a tool, to be on time." In these two events, failure and success come to operate as opposite sides of the same conceptual coin. Both sides pulsate with force, possibility, and change.

What are the contours of such an impulse that situate success and failure in relation to the drive to not simply perform but to perform well? Regardless of whether such a performance succeeds or fails, it must do so through a logic of possibility. Even when one fails, one must presumably do so spectacularly. This impulse can be tracked in the phrase "perform or else," the title of Jon McKenzie's (2001) key performance studies text, whereby performed success and performed failure become invested with the possibility to alter worlds. "Succeed or else" plays into neoliberal mantras, whereas "fail or else" satisfies a queer politics of failure that "offer[s] *more* creative, *more* cooperative, *more* surprising ways of being in the world" (Halberstam 2011: 2–3, emphasis mine).

This article explores what happens to our understandings of performance and performativity when performative failure embodies a force similar to perfor-

mative success. More important, I question the impulse that invests full possibility into art and culture as a way to respond to the political. Rather than rehash a deconstruction of this binary, I foreground queer possibilities in the concept of *lesser*, which can nuance our political investments in failure and the social beyond the logic of more. This article contends with the strong impulses of success and failure we often invest in queer objects and subjects. Instead of asking for more, I ask: what might happen if we asked for lesser failure, lesser success, lesser performance, *and* lesser engagement? To be more precise, I do not mean to deploy lesser as the negation of more or the construction of limits. Rather, lesser involves the weakening or, in the words of J. L. Austin (1975: 22), the etiolation of this force within performance and performativity. Within Austin's normative scheme, performatives exist when statements are made through proper norms, context, participants, and intentions. An infelicity arises when misfires (an incorrect perlocutionary norm or context) or abuses (lack of illocutionary intent and feeling) occur. Insincerities emerge when one does not possess the correct intention associated with a performative statement (e.g., one states "I pronounce you husband and wife" without the requisite intentions in stating the phrase).

Such etiolations of failure, along with success, allow us to parse different qualitative degrees of performance and behavior, opening up space to rethink the tendency of a performative force inherent in our discourses on the social and queer failure. Throughout this article, I highlight weak performative forces, which can be defined as the varying amounts of investment embedded in conceptual frames like failure, success, performance, or the social. By taking stock of discourses around both social practice and failure, we bring to light other dispositions and degrees of being and doing. Rather than further examine the import of failure, I contribute to this discourse by tracking the queer function of lesser *within* failure to highlight the pulse and expectations around performative possibility. I call the tendency toward failure a strong performative impulse to direct us to the pattern of rendering failure within a logic of more and to trace the deflating nuances of failure's less. I do so by analyzing a set of lesser actions that emerge in the work of Julie Tolentino, a dancer and multidisciplinary artist, and her engagement with social practice. She not only brings to the fore the performative impulse within models of success in social practice and the nonprofit industrial complex but also surveys such an impulse within queer failure. In a community engagement project, *The Magical Order* (2014), Tolentino puts into constellation performance, success, and failure. I locate how she produces a queer, minor method that highlights the dominance of a strong performative impulse that structures expectations across discourses. Tolentino's artistic approach nuances and massages queer theory, performance

discourse, and social practice art by renegotiating, instead of rejecting, the tendencies that undergird such bodies of work. In other words, she explores the function of lesser.

The Magical Order was a series of art gallery presentations and performances over two weeks in San Francisco during the fall of 2014. Commissioned by the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA) and supported by a grant from the James Irvine Foundation, Tolentino worked with the nonprofit Larkin Street Youth Services, an organization that offers transitional support to homeless youth, to produce a multimodal work that included the creation of installations and art objects as well as live performance. Larkin Street offers support to homeless youth between the ages of twelve and twenty-four, providing transition-based services through medical assistance, education, permanent housing, and employment. It serves around three thousand youth per year in San Francisco.

Although YBCA has worked with many visual artists, filmmakers, and writers, Tolentino is one of the few artists who emphasized performance. Tolentino and her artistic team, Ryan Tacata and Kadet Kuhne, met with participants for about a month to produce *The Magical Order.* Tolentino introduced aspects of her training, from meditation to improvisation, in different spaces throughout San Francisco, including the outdoors, dance studios, offices, and galleries. They explored poetry, performance, movement, and meditation, among other practices. After weeks of training and before showings, the collaboration took up residences at two art organizations: the first at the Luggage Store Annex as part of the Haight Street Art Walk and the second at the gallery Alter Space. In addition to performance, some participants designed installations that disclosed a sense of their respective meditation processes. These installations measured about seven by five feet; they were constructed out of yarn and found objects, like mirrors and frames. Tolentino assisted her participants with not only performing but also developing a zine and guiding individual artists to embark on ephemeral drawing practices, all of which I describe in detail below. Lastly, Kuhne and Tolentino presented a video they cocreated of the collaboration and offered the film as a gift to Larkin Street participants.

As a consultant and participant-observer of the project, I attended to Tolentino's process throughout its development, interviewed participants and organizational actors, and theorized the larger approach. This article arises from these interactions; I make note of this relationship, since my observations around the queer functions of lesser emerge directly out of my entwined role in this project. I focus on a broad array of practices to translate Tolentino's methods around performance art as a way to rethink social practice, considering that her history with

and approach to dance and performance art are not usually aligned with dominant expectations around community engagement. In particular, the genre of social practice normally centers audience participation or introduces art practices to those considered nonpractitioners. However, Tolentino deploys the queer modality of lesser informed by minoritarian engagements with institutions to renegotiate the genre of social practice. I specifically analyze Tolentino's training process with community participants, the final presentations of performance and art objects, and the ways participants negotiated the institutional expectations of the museum and larger nonprofit complex.

I thus organize this article around three verbs that emerge directly out of Tolentino's methods. I track and develop her modes of etiolated and weaker approaches that emphasize the gradations within force.[1] To *punk*, to *yield*, and to *flail* parse out lesser modes of performativity. Together, these verbs highlight etiolated sensibilities that reformulate our frameworks around social practice and queer failure and centralize the logic of lesser. More important, however, these verbs direct us to a somatic-based vocabulary that emphasizes instability over the body's full control in order to foreground the possibility of stumbling within and against performance, institutions, and failure. Such a body-based vocabulary emphasizes the physical toll impressed on subjects living within precarity. José Muñoz (2013: 106) ascribes this physicality to "the punk who staggers forth in a mosh pit, hurling herself against another body, not to do harm, but instead to touch in a way not predicated on mastery and control, signaling a salient desire for an encounter, an engaged participation, an invigorating melee." Following this kinesthetic model, I offer the first verb, *to punk*, as it draws from Tolentino's own practices that depart from genealogies of performance beyond dominant notions of theater and performance art. Punking additionally offers insights into how the precariat negotiates institutions and how Tolentino's larger queer method emphasizes affective impressions over clear narrative legibility. I then turn to Tolentino's encouragement of her community participants *to yield* to institutions, as a way to reimagine the dominant queer frame that situates successful social practice through an anti-institutional relation. Yielding counters overdetermined models of institutional critique that limit the possibility of giving in to institutions without losing oneself. Building on punk survival and yielding negotiations with institutions, the last verb, *to flail*, returns to failure to render it with an etiolated force: flailing is, we might say, failing even to fail properly. Tolentino attends to the many valences around failure by emphasizing the dominance of an understanding of failure as oppositional virtuosity and directing us toward flailing in necessity, survival, and unbecomingness.

These etiolated modes are not less important than their stronger counterparts. Rather than reproduce a hierarchical structure for performativity, these weaker verbs question the normative sense of force structuring performative action and change that circulates within the economies surrounding intermedial art practice, museums, and performance art. Thus I pair discourses surrounding antisociality in queer theory with social practice in art in order to query and attend to the pulse of performativity. I contribute to this body of work by tracking the valences of deflation and etiolation embedded in Tolentino's project and as demonstrated by the precariat as they navigate institutions: punking loosens theatrical genealogies around the category of performance, while yielding and flailing etiolate how precarious populations negotiate the social turn and queer failure. Tolentino's process shifts a critical focus to those living under precarity, which I define, drawing from Judith Butler (2009), as those who generally fall out of or are not fully captured by the social security net (if one exists at all). In other words, these verbs collectively offer a lexicon that limits investments in performative possibility, with weaker verbs that attend to negotiations by the precariat. The portrait that Larkin Street's statistics paint—the racial breakdown of those served is 32 percent African American, 27 percent white, 16 percent Latino/a, 10 percent multiracial, 6 percent Asian American, and 2 percent American Indian; the gender breakdown is 63 percent male, 32 percent female, and 3 percent transgender; in terms of sexual orientation, 69 percent are heterosexual, 14 percent gay, 9 percent bisexual, 3 percent lesbian, and 4 percent other—reveals the difficulty in relying on specific identities to consider how homelessness operates in the United States and contributes to precarity. However, the framework of precarity captures not only the diversity of those included in homelessness but also the complex and differential relations articulated across populations that are affected by late capital. Precarity clarifies the modes of political solidarity necessary to not erase identity from the work done by organizations like Larkin Street. Rather, these statistics offer a glimpse of the allegiances that emerge when precarity is theorized alongside race and other identity-conscious means, akin to the ways Tavia Nyong'o (2014) reminds us to account for race, rather than simply universalizing the notion of precarity to encompass all those living within capitalism's underbelly.

By pairing the work on art practice with queer theorizations on survival in late capitalism, I bring to the fore those directly affected by community engagement to better understand the possibilities and problems with the social turn, as well as the antisocial one (Berlant 2011; Halberstam 2011; Muñoz 1999; Povinelli 2011). Using the site of the museum and community engagement projects, I examine what it means to attend to capital for many of these communities through

modes of minimally performative and weak existences that are optimistic without being future oriented or optimizing; filled with possibility without being the only possibility; yielding to institutions without losing a sense of self; and failing without a deep investment in radical change. In other words, Tolentino's participants question expectations of successful strong performativity that require "full participation" in order to become legible, proper subjects within social practice discourse. Through an analytics of the weak, I not only recalibrate how performativity functions for the discourse on social art but also closely examine insincere performatives as they nuance queer failure. In this vein, I accept and work through *The Magical Order*'s own intelligibility and operations, rather than compare this project to how others have succeeded in social practice or failed in virtuosic queerness. I emphasize the terms and aesthetics that the participants produce to allow a sense of their survival to loosen success, failure, and the performative impulse.

Turning toward the precariat as they negotiate social practice is important in light of the development of social practice discourse, which has demanded sincere forms of active participation that privilege a positivistic sense of performance over weaker and less enthusiastic modes of engagement. Before working through Tolentino's three etiolated verbs, then, I provide some background on social practice art, since Tolentino revises many of its tendencies. In recent years, theorists and artists have grappled with the rapid institutionalization of socially engaged art that negotiates visual art with other media, particularly performance (with its presumed dematerialization of the object). From large organizations like the Museum of Modern Art in New York to smaller entities like the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, opportunities for community engagement projects have increased since the mid-twentieth century. Furthermore, these approaches have proliferated to a point where there are now academic training programs in social practice, with faculty specializing in the genre. This range of institutions situates social engagement as a funding priority, with practices expanding from audience participation to the deployment of artists in communities. In my invocation of social practice, I refer to the longer history of approaches that have shifted from public art toward participatory involvement and community engagement. Miwon Kwon (2002: 100–137) has historicized this turn in art practice, tracking the development of such modes through four categories of engagement: (1) a community loosely associated through identity; (2) "sited communities" that target specific groups, like a union; (3) temporary "invented communities" that are group-based projects existing for a limited period; and (4) ongoing "invented communities" that work with insiders within a community over a long duration. Kwon's path-breaking work provides a landscape to the larger social turn.[2]

Tolentino's project is embedded in this history that encompasses the intermixing of media and that shifts away from a privatized museum space toward producing relations with larger publics like sculpture in public spaces and projects engaging broad museum-going publics. Tolentino works within Kwon's second and third forms of communal formations: sited and temporary invented communities. She focuses on a particular locale (homeless youth who are part of Larkin Street) and produces a temporally limited project.

Tolentino and Larkin Street's collaboration could be framed within the dominant discourses surrounding social practice. For instance, relational aesthetics is a key concept that emphasizes the construction of communities across social practice art's participants and audience (see Bourriaud 1998). Using this model, we could frame *The Magical Order* as radically "changing" the lives of Larkin Street participants and its viewers because of the supposed empathic bonds forged through participation and spectatorship. But some critics complicate this frame by exploring the limits around community formation, as they debate how artists essentialize or expand the very understanding of community (Kwon 2002; Kester 2013). As such, questions surrounding the artist's relation to community offer a second approach to theorizing Tolentino, in which case a study of the artist's engagement with Larkin Street participants would be initiated. The third option follows debates that have shifted the focus away from the relational by discussing aesthetic value. Some judge the work based on the degree that the art successfully challenges its viewers (Bishop 2004, 2012), while others move away from antagonism as an aesthetic barometer and stress the need to contextualize projects vis-à-vis institutions and multiple artistic media (Jackson 2011). Here we might explore the efficacy of *The Magical Order* based on how Tolentino questions institutional norms. This schematic overview of the primary options for theorizing her collaboration reveals a range of concerns. These conversations have engaged the efficacy of social art practice, its aesthetics, and social conditions, focusing on the art itself—its value, lead artists, and processes. There has been more of an evaluation of the successes and failures of such art projects and their creators, and less of an emphasis on how members of the targeted communities for these projects themselves have negotiated the social turn. The frames of success or failure limit how we theorize the relationship between those existing within precarity, the diverse constituencies presumed to be the centerpiece of engagement projects, and the work they make within those projects.

Although there have certainly been queer artists involved with community engagement, social practice and queer failure discourses are often not discussed together. Scholars like Shannon Jackson (2011) have focused on queer artists in

social practice; however, queer studies has yet to fully consider the social turn and its implications for renegotiating failure and performativity (two central concepts for queer theory). In addition, social practice has yet to engage queer studies in ways that rework many of the expectations surrounding efficacy, change, and possibility that the field and its institutional supporters often presume. It is precisely through Tolentino's process that we begin to develop such possible field intersections, allowing us to track and sense a strong performative force. By attending to the ways communities exist in social practice and limiting (not negating) the focus on the artist, I propose not only a retooling of the discourse on social practice but also a deeper examination of how artists and participants negotiate these programs. More specifically, by ignoring the strong pulsation of performativity, social practice discourse reproduces expectations around full success within their projects, while queer failure obscures how queer projects are invested with possibility and the logic of more.

To Punk—a Method

Tolentino is most known for her work as a performance artist, circulating among figures like Ron Athey and William Pope. L. Her work engages lines between boredom and entertainment, confusion and presence, and titillation and banality. However, she is also trained and has worked in dance. As a former dancer and stage manager for David Roussève's company REALITY, she has deep connections to contemporary dance. As a body-based performer drawing from meditation, movement, and performance art, she has produced a punk, or do-it-yourself (DIY), aesthetic. This approach draws from her earlier participation in Gran Fury, where political urgency and aesthetic concerns converged in a moment that demanded rapid response to the AIDS crisis. Similarly, this DIY approach has informed her work as a promoter for Clit Club and other endeavors related to sex, popular culture, and avant-garde aesthetics.[3] Tolentino has not typically been understood as part of the larger social turn, as her projects are often associated with avant-garde performance art. Her collaboration with Larkin Street draws directly from her past aesthetics, which produce different understandings and possibilities for the social. For those familiar with Tolentino, *The Magical Order* appears almost disjointed from her larger oeuvre. However, I place this project within her broader practice to emphasize the different aesthetic and political approach she brings to the social practice phenomenon.

This overview offers a sense of her relation to a punk aesthetic. To punk embodies not only a DIY approach but also a weak sense of performativity that

emphasizes survival. Punking produces modes of existence that push against the repeated institutional and legal erasure of those often not acknowledged by the juridical, like the precariat and homeless. To punk directs us to the paradox by which individuals must demand recognition of their existences, when there are no or few laws and procedures that produce their social legibility. In relation to performativity, to punk lingers in the territory outside the norms and laws that establish language with performative force. Nyong'o outlines how punk has a genealogy involving trickery, sexual abandonment, and black queer life while privileging the possibilities of punk as a weaker performative mode. Nyong'o (2005: 30, 31) theorizes punk as what connects precarious groups to "preserve a portion of the mobility they had prior to enclosure," since such groups "transformed by law . . . nevertheless exist[] nowhere in it." To punk underscores sheer existence over positive flourishing—an existence weak in its valence, since it is not fully capable of "changing" the very legal and institutional structures that obscure legibility. Punking privileges existence over active resistance—surviving over thriving. To achieve survival, punking plays with the limits of signification and legibility, since full transparency often structures how participants and artists are expected to experience social practice. Punking places full legibility into question, as Larkin Street participants produced either a surfeit of signs or their erasure to minimize expectations around sincere self-exposure. Punk, as a subculture, cannot be understood as "a simple opposition" to the dominant one, since, according to Stuart Hall et al. (2006: 6), subcultures "coexist with [the dominant], negotiate the spaces and gaps in it, [and] make inroads in it." This relationship to dominant culture involves an etiolated and weaker engagement that constantly negotiates rather than purely resists. Punk's sensibilities involve a weaker relationship to visibility that is neither about full disclosure nor about complete opacity.

Rather than replicate a social practice model that measures success through increasing the precariat's public visibility, Tolentino deflates visibility and prosperity through a punk aesthetic that emphasizes survival and partiality. Larkin Street is in the Tenderloin, which has a historical relation to punk cultures. The neighborhood is undergoing rapid gentrification, a process that erases the role the neighborhood played for the punk music scene and for those seeking a space for survival. Tolentino draws from this history to inform her punk aesthetic through the production of a zine and a DIY sensibility to many of the performances and installations. Most important, however, she enables a punk ethic to arise by renegotiating social practice's demands for legibility. It is within punking's DIY spirit and its push for existence that Tolentino initiated her project with five core participants who presented collective and individual work under the title *The Magical*

Order: Isabella Black, Joshua Cortez, Yossi Halperin, Kevin Hardesty, and Angel Morales.

During the final performances, the group presented raps, songs, and poetry, under the full title *The Magical Order of Spiritual Warriors Misunderstood Youth The Free Spirits Nature's Children Unbreakable Hearts Open Doors Twisted Paths Life Within the Light Way Collided Paths Points of Light The Brightest Stars Hardened Eyes God's Guardians The Energy That Flows Unbreakable Earth Down Low Mystical Princesses Mermaids Fairies The Random Butterflies Xi The Confused Minded World Urban Learner One Round Table the Genies OG's Intelligence The Enlightened* (referred to as *The Magical Order*). This title reveals an investment in illegibility; the group is not devoted to communicating the exact "meaning" of its work. In other words, the participants' collaboration refuses to reproduce conventions surrounding manageable and citable titles in order to avoid offering a direct narrative about their work. Their punk refusal of clarity enables them to critique and bring to the fore the nonprofit fantasy of becoming visible and exposing their life to others. They offer too much detail and language in order to eschew the lure of visibility and proper representation.

Rather than operate with an oppositional logic that challenges opacity, Tolentino's performers incompletely and weakly reveal only parts of themselves and their process. When performing and sharing details about their lives, the participants offer only limited parts of their daily existence. In Black's final performance, for example, she created a question and answer session for the audience. She entrusted those who had undergone the project with her, along with strangers, to ask whatever might come to mind. This open format could be read as a bid to reveal Black's own struggles to produce a participatory empathy or relational aesthetic, particularly in the context of communal engagement. Some audience members asked how she changed her life circumstances and came to San Francisco. Such questions would have allowed Black to disclose her life history. Instead, she referred only obliquely to her past, focusing on the joy of her present moment, and refused to reveal truths about her life. Rather than recount an explicit narrative about her past as "homeless," which one might expect from a community engagement project, she presented mere facts and short answers. Black punked the crowd by refusing to comply with the norms of performance and expectations around self-exposure. Furthermore, similar to the full title of the collaboration, her narrative approach privileged partial over full meaning. Rather than clearly represent her life, she offered only parts and fragments, affectively communicating mere impressions. Black's performance of minimal disclosure thus privileges her own healing and learning to trust others over an exposure that benefits and edifies the audi-

ence. Her performance becomes less about her being legible through narratives of how she became homeless, a stance that enables her to exist in a space with others on her own terms.

In addition, some participants built installations that emerged from meditation practice and individualized explorations surrounding improvisation. Hardesty, for example, constructed a space demarcated by many yards of brightly colored yarn, evoking the work of Judith Scott. Similar to Black's minimal legibility in her performance, Hardesty's design became less about showing his full inner self to others than about highlighting how the self survives. The audience could experience his installation only one at a time, as the yarn demarcated an opening wide enough for one person. Inside, there were no narratives about his life or objects that symbolized his past. Rather, Hardesty's design, comprising one chair surrounded by brightly colored yarn, produced a sense of comfort that affectively communicated the ways he has attempted to nurture his internal life. Hardesty, like Black, shifted away from expectations around the narrative about his "experience" and toward feeling, sensation, and momentary being. Although acknowledging an inner self with the title "Who Am Eye?," his installation emphasized the affective over the narrative to share a small glimpse of his process. As such, his installation displayed a form of vulnerability that did not offer a performative force of relationality with others; instead, his vulnerability arose from revealing a minimal part of himself. Both Black's and Hardesty's projects demonstrate strategies of survival that are more about minimally showing as opposed to exposing the self. This lesser strategy entails sharing to produce self-healing, without the goal of an audience's full comprehension and empathy. One's life is not on complete display for others to consume.

In addition to these final performances and installations, the participants designed a forty-five-page zine that was primarily distributed to those directly engaged with the project. The zine's history has a deep relation to punk cultures in not only its aesthetic but also its mode of survival, where self-publishing emerges as a way to find minoritized communities across space and time (Nguyen 2015; Darms 2014). Drawing from such a history, Tolentino assisted participants in assembling their poetry, images, and stories within this format. The zine's content emphasized survival and existence, with separate sections documenting each individual Larkin Street artist. Hardesty's contributions offer lyrics written under his pseudonym Buddharose; he expresses a sense of acknowledging his precarious life in his rap "Keep on Pushing": "It coming to a time / Come on open your eyes / Or you might die / Just look at the signs / Come on take a look / Open up that book." In these lyrics, the choppy rhythm amplifies the sense of urgency in the artist's plea to simply exist.

The format and aesthetic of the punk-inspired zine underscore modes of survival that are not about thriving but about sheer existence. The zine draws from a longer punk history; however, punk also offers an aesthetic approach that privileges an affective communication that emphasizes partiality over full narrative representation. In this vein, the performances, text, and installations in *The Magical Order* draw from punk aesthetics to refuse capitulating to the demand that minoritarian communities reveal truths about their lives. Collectively, these disparate projects present weakly performative modes of punking through partial legibility, as participants invest in an illegibility that is defined on their own terms. They use their status as punk, unacknowledged by law, to find a community with others and to imagine what it means to survive under such common conditions. Tolentino nuances the dominant reliance on success as a barometer for social practice by tracing other modes of existence that do not possess a strong force and investment in possibility.

Affect thus provides a methodological approach that enables the reworking of legibility through lesser over more, weak over strong. Eve Sedgwick relies on Silvan Tomkins's notions of affect to offer such an understanding of a weak analytic or method. Sedgwick (2003: 134) cites Tomkins's definition of weak theory that is a "little better than a description of the phenomena which it purports to explain." Such a weak method emphasizes minor details that attend closely to interactions and sensations across bodies. These weaker modes of engagement with space, time, and other bodies enable what Anne-Lise François (2007: 10–11) describes as open, meaning "all of the following: awaiting enclosure—undetermined and open to change—a site of potentiality; exposed—vulnerable—defenseless; public—held in common—known to all or to some." This queer methodological exploration in *The Magical Order* encouraged participants not to capitulate to the nonprofit demands of exposing themselves. Instead, Tolentino attempted to train Larkin Street participants in this open approach that became about them finding ways to exist in between multiple states "to all or to some." The method and approach from *The Magical Order* center punking's emphasis on sheer existence over resistance and thriving.

To emphasize mere punk survival over thriving, Tolentino shifted her ideas around concrete engagement and legible understandings of time toward their lesser valences. Her training process examined what it means to be present with and open to other bodies. Rather than try to force her participants into a schedule that would operate during regular business hours, she made herself available whenever possible to her participants. She would often show up in a rehearsal space and wait to see who might arrive. At first, her participants did not seem to believe her and

would show up late or test whether they could not show up. This different sense of being present with and responding to others allowed her and the Larkin Street participants to engage in a primary concern of dance and performance: what does it mean to be present and to allow a process to quickly unfold according to the specific bodies in space. In essence, Tolentino became an intuitive dance partner, listening and feeling what each moment might bring rather than forcefully enact and make a partner submit to her own desires. In this vein, this weaker mode of performativity became less about administering a project (measuring success based on accumulated hours) and more about merely existing in the present. Tolentino directly responded to the community's needs. This renegotiated sense of time follows what Halberstam (2005) identifies as queer time, whereby non-normative populations operate beyond the bourgeois pace set by institutions. In addition to the shortened lives of those who existed at the height of the HIV crisis, "those lives lived in 'the shadow of an epidemic'" additionally direct us to temporal rhythms beyond "bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance" (ibid.: 3, 6). These reconfigured notions of time, relationality, and legibility do not fully exist within the structure of nonprofit or administrative demands. Although Tolentino offered a meta-structure to the process, she shifted directions to include those who have most likely never been part of an artistic, improvisatory exchange. Tolentino thus produced a sense of dance and punk time to weakly engage performance and the Larkin Street community outside the chrononormative expectations that surround many other areas of their lives. She pinpointed a different disposition for social practice where the illegible and open are privileged over the successfully administered and achieved.

To work outside a legible idea around administrative time challenges how some community engagement projects are understood as an "aesthetics of administration" (Kwon 2002: 51). Kwon traces how such a sense of administration arises from the way community engagement "empower(s) the audience by directly involving them in the making of the art work, either as subjects or, better, as producers themselves" (ibid.: 107). Although Tolentino involves Larkin Street participants, she shifts away from this aesthetic by producing a different temporal sensibility of being present with others. Such an expansive idea of time emerges from the demands of punk survival. Thus Tolentino's process enacts a lesser sense of performativity that becomes less about force. Tolentino and Larkin Street participants partner in ways that do not operate within traditional measures of schedules and outcomes.

Through my invocation of method as it relates to Tolentino's punk aesthetics, I direct us to how the artist deploys etiolations to systematically highlight the

dominance of the strong performative impulse. The conditions surrounding pre-carity, indeterminate labor, and institutional reliance require an account of etio-lated interaction over performative possibilities, since precarity itself is more about limits (the logic of lesser) than possibilities (the logic of more). Through punk's attention to negative and weaker performatives beyond the usual notions of action and change, the social becomes a space less for "transformation" than for tracking how the precariat functions through modes of survival and sheer existence. The precariat produces institutional relations that move beyond narratives of success-ful resistant antagonism or failing submission, with strong performativity becom-ing a driving force for the former and an oppositional counterpoint for the latter. Such strategies, privileged within Tolentino's process, enact Austin's weaker per-formative modes. These performative insincerities methodologically rework social practice by centralizing the complex institutional negotiations that those living in precarity must execute for punk survival.[4]

In this vein, *The Magical Order* is in conversation with debates captured in the inaugural issue of *GLQ*. Both Sedgwick and Butler warn against invest-ing performativity with an extreme of "subversive" possibility (Sedgwick 1993: 15) and insist on understanding gender as "under constraint" (Butler 1993: 21). However, performativity continues to possess a pulsating force that subtends our understanding of the social and aesthetic within the binary of success and failure. This force often takes on a future and hopeful orientation. As Elizabeth Freeman (2010: 62) has revealed, Butler's use of performativity and its continual deploy-ment within queer studies often invest in a "progressive" narrative that enacts the possibility for teleological change. Freeman's critique enables me to track these shifts in Tolentino's work that question the forward tendency, force, and pulse of performativity in order to discover its drags, regressions, and etiolations. In fact, Tolentino's etiolations through punking compel us to think across categories of difference, toward a relational minoritarian ethic. As Susan Schweik (2009: 126) emphasizes by building on Sedgwick and Andrew Parker's (Sedgwick and Parker 2007) critical work on etiolations, "Disability and illness, sexual artifice and per-version, and race dovetail in etiolations." The etiolating dimensions of punking and precarity provide a method that contends with multiple identities, along with their excesses. In other words, *The Magical Order* offers a minor method informed by etiolation through not only the term's weak and pallid valences but also its contention with minoritarian politics that are directly informed by and also mov-ing beyond overdetermined renderings of identity. Etiolation offers a minor method akin to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1986), who develop the minor as a tactic that reconfigures the presumptions and operations of dominant categories. This

queer, weak, and minor method emerges through the way Tolentino highlights the dominance of more within performativity, success, and failure while foregrounding the need for etiolations and the lesser gradations within force. Her work has two resonances with the minor: as minoritarian in terms of identity and by pushing us beyond categories to think about the minor as method. Such minor methods examine the sense of directionality, force, and effort that shape dominant theorizations of performativity, particularly with its connotations of acting on and doing. In this vein, Tolentino's punk method reminds us of Jacques Derrida's (1992) emphasis on attending to the qualitative gradations within performativity. He calls such lesser qualities the "differential character of force" and a "performative force" (ibid.: 7). By tracing "lesser" and differentiated impulses, Derrida encourages us to question our investments in how we do things with words and objects.

To Yield—Institutional Relations and Performing Insincerities

In addition to punking, Tolentino's project enacts yielding, which highlights the way community participants relate to institutions through weak and less successful modes of negotiation. Yielding nuances how precarious populations function in institutions beyond naive acceptance or a nihilistic submission to power. To yield involves two meanings: to produce financially or agriculturally *and* to give in to and succumb. Yield embodies both a sense of capital accumulation and a relational position of being under. This section intermingles these two connotations to situate yielding as a submissive and dependent mode of performance that nevertheless allows the precariat to obtain needed monetary resources. For the precariat, yielding to an institution produces financial means that enable survival. The precariat yields to institutional power to access funds, demonstrating not a sense of uncritical submission but a weak act that acknowledges the impossibility of fully changing an institution. When one yields, one does not successfully or performatively challenge an institutional body. In both its productive sense (to yield goods) and its surrendering sense (to yield to a person or politic), yielding possesses a lesser valence where one gives in to a system of production with which one might disagree. One yields with a weak agency to avoid resistance from above. The etymology of yield reveals that Old English uses of the word (*gieldan* or *geldan*) invoked a sense of payment and sacrifice done in the service of a larger goal. Similarly, yielding in not only its financial sense but also position is not simply about giving in to and relinquishing; yielding has a larger purpose that benefits a (punk) survival.

I sensed this institutional relation during interviews I conducted with each

participant. After every discussion, each interviewee lingered to inquire about compensation for spending time with me, expressed with a sense of embarrassment. I directed them to follow up with the managing organization, YBCA, and immediately reassured each person that I would do the same and not to worry about asking. Rather than possess the fantasy that these participants were so changed by the artistic process that they would altruistically meet with a reviewer regardless of monetary compensation, I felt that payment was the least any institution could do for their time. This moment made me question how we conceptualize a participant's relation to institutions and how we measure success through idealized notions of a "changed" community participant. Larkin Street participants engaged in an interview by yielding to institutional demands in order to access monetary support. Their compliance with institutional requests offers the opportunity to think through the many frames that their asking for compensation could be understood: greed, naive submission, or a cynical playing into the system. However, these options are too deterministic in understanding how the precariat relate to institutional power.

Discussions about money in social practice primarily surround budgets and the exchange between artist and institution. The moment when funds are allocated to participants is rarely considered, yet it offers critical insights on how institutions demand specific (success-based) behaviors in order for participants to obtain financial support. The notion of yielding acknowledges that those living in precarity need the resources that are available through the very institutions of which they might be most critical. Larkin Street participants understand how they are operating in a larger economy of social practice and the nonprofit industrial complex. They yield (adjust) to institutional power to yield (produce) the means for survival. At the moment, they cannot completely radicalize the structural formations that create homelessness and financial disparities. However, the conditions they live in do not effectuate a blind submission to nor relinquish the precariat from systemic power. A participant performatively operates with a weaker valence, through a giving in to institutional demands without a giving up of the self. Rather than dismiss the Larkin Street community for not operating with purposeful intent and respect for art, I understand their asking for resources as producing a different and less successful valence around institutional relations. Participants from *The Magical Order* work within a mode of lesser by yielding and questioning the logic of more embedded in what Randy Martin (2002: 9) calls the "financialization of daily life." Rather than default to a paradigm that relies on capital as "a way to develop the self" (ibid.), Larkin Street participants ask for compensation from institutions to simply survive.

Some critics privilege an anti-institutional stance as the only or most progressive way to engage power, where a strong performative force is enabled through a negative relation to institutions. For example, the Critical Art Ensemble (1996: 45), a collective of media practitioners formed in 1987, emphasizes such a position: "Artworks which depend on bureaucracy in order to come to fruition (i.e., institutionally sanctioned public art including community-based art) are too well managed to have any *contestational power*" (emphasis mine). Accordingly, "successful" projects exhibit antagonism, a combative attitude to institutions. Resistance is presumed to emerge from contestation. However, Larkin Street participants engage with institutional resources to obtain compensation that would help enable a punk survival. Yielding to institutional demands might be dismissed through the Critical Art Ensemble's framework. Similarly, Claire Bishop (2004) might consider Tolentino's collaboration ineffective. Bishop's construction of aesthetic value relies on an audience being challenged. As Shannon Jackson (2011: 55) notes, Bishop is often weary of government or institutionally sanctioned projects. Jackson questions the privileging of strong counterinstitutional critique by asking us to let go of "the sense that a radically antagonistic art exists *either* in an extra-aesthetic space of community action *or* in an aesthetically protected space of ambiguous discomfort" (ibid.: 60). Instead, she explores what it means to "qualif[y] critical impulses to equate radicality and progressivism with 'anti-state' or 'anti-institutional' resistance" (ibid.: 9).

Within the framework of strong performativity, an all-or-nothing attitude dominates, whereby one is either resisting or submitting to power. Yielding enables a lesser sense of performativity (informed by punk genealogies), along with an institutional relation that is neither resistantly challenging nor fully submissive. To yield is to weakly perform, without nihilistically giving up. Yielding engages institutions to survive. Within Austin's framework, yielding enacts insincerity: when speakers do not believe what they say, a statement does not function as a performative; they do not possess the appropriate illocutionary force and thus seemingly yield to power. Similarly, when Larkin Street participants agree to meet with an interviewer, they demonstrate a weaker negotiation with power compared with what has been previously theorized in social practice discourse. But yielding and the lie redistribute resources. The performative force of the yield operates in a minor way by which needed capital is distributed from funding institutions to those in need. By allowing her participants to "misfire," Tolentino acts as a redistributive mechanism, rather than an administrative body or emotional life-changing opportunity, for Larkin Street participants. In other words, Tolentino's queer method of the yield reconfigures institutional models of redistribution. Institutions and artists

might approach their work not as ways to change society but as ways to redistribute resources to those needing temporary (and long-term) relief. This mode has other residual effects: creating alliances and producing momentary spaces to rest and be in common with others similarly situated. As such, Tolentino asks us to question what it might mean for institutions, not simply individual contract artists, to privilege yielding as a way to operate. Tolentino explores yielding as a method that queries how social practice functions: redistribution over active participation and social change as how we measure a project's success.

Yielding's dual senses of giving in to a force and of institutional compliance reveal a subordinate position. To be under and to give in to the pressures from the top of an institution produce weaker forms of agency. If we rely on a strong sense of performativity and agency, then one might dismiss this institutional relation as politically limited. James Scott (1975) unpacks the possibility of such a lesser agency. In his ethnography of Malay peasants, Scott questions the dominant ways in which a strong sense of resistance has been established. He questions "*real* resistance," as it often privileges a strong sense of performativity, with an emphasis on institutional antagonism (ibid.: 292). Scott's minor forms of resistance are "(a) unorganized, unsystematic, and individual, (b) opportunistic and self-indulgent, (c) have no revolutionary consequences, and/or (d) imply, in their intention or meaning, an accommodation with the system of domination" (ibid.). Yielding produces such weak modes of resistance, as Larkin Street participants act individually (a) and in opportunistic (b) ways, asking for compensation for their participation. Such institutional relations possess no revolutionary consequences (c) and reveal a consenting and *submissive* relation to institutions (d).

Scott provides a sense of yielding through the "everyday forms of peasant resistance—the prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them" (ibid.: xvi). Larkin Street participants' yielding similarly questions the limits of resistance by "follow[ing] the line of least resistance" (ibid.: 35). In so doing, they do not rely on "revolts, and let alone legal political pressure" (ibid.: 36); rather, participants construct a political presence through minor means.

To Flail—the Queer Art of F(l)ailure

Throughout this article, I have drawn from queer theory to inform my insights on social practice. During the research process, I presumed that Tolentino's project and her participants were enacting queer failure, particularly when considering how the submissive position of yielding could be situated within recent discourses

on submission or bottomhood (Musser 2014; Nguyen 2014; Scott 2010). However, lingering in the way failure operates in *The Magical Order* offers space to track some qualitative differentiations within this productive concept. Similar to success in social practice discourse, failure in queer studies oftentimes possesses a strong performative impulse with an emphasis on possibility and change. Rather than reproduce a logic within failure that circumvents success in order to contest, critique, and rupture, Tolentino offers flailing. This particular verb arising out of *The Magical Order* highlights the strong impulse embedded in failure. Those in the precariat often cannot afford to fail, as they are seeking (a punk) survival. Flailing is thus meant to capture modes of existence without full purpose.

Flailing encapsulates the "wild" struggle of precarity, with flailing's sense of "wav[ing] and swing[ing] wildly" that attends more closely to the ways the precariat engage power.[5] Lauren Berlant (2017; 2011: 104) uses the term to describe our reactions to institutionally produced crisis. I, however, focus on the literal aesthetic quality of flailing to track not only Berlant's sense of chaotic response but also a limited understanding of performativity. In other words, I frame flailing outside institutional negotiations to examine how individuals gesture and flail to merely exist, instead of failing in order to performatively do more. Although flailing is certainly related to recent theorizations of gesture by Juana María Rodríguez (2014: 4), I build on the gestural to minimize its sense of purpose by positing flailing as an act that does not attempt to form relations with others as gesture often does (ibid.). Although Berlant (2017) states that "flail isn't fail," I ascribe her differentiation as a difference in degree rather than a complete opposition. Flailing, as an aesthetic quality, functions by blurring across figure and ground, subject and environment, and amateur and professional. The missteps and blur of flailing track a minimally performative sense of failure. Flailing directs us to what arises before the moment we try to do things with failure. By shifting away from a success and failure model, flailing describes how those in precarity cannot necessarily afford being oppositional or even to fail. Failing in precarity, especially in relation to homelessness, could lead to premature death or a loss of opportunities to survive. Failing in precarity can mean the difference between life and death. However, to flail is to weakly fail in order to exist and momentarily avoid the brush of death. Scott's ethnography amplifies this understanding of precarious survival. He argues that his subjects do not possess some "false-consciousness here but just the necessary daily pose of a poor man" (Scott 1975: 279). According to Scott, the precariat recognizes its own exploitation and directs its efforts toward the suppression of anger for the benefit of survival (ibid.). Flailing is the lesser performative for failure. To fail opposes success or involves a purposeful neglect. To

flail shifts away from oppositionality, where one helplessly flounders and struggles uselessly.

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, one of the most influential texts on failure, Jack Halberstam reveals how the strong performative impulse undergirds this concept. Halberstam (2011: 11–12) threads possibility into failure: "We might read failure, for example, as a *refusal* of mastery, a *critique* of the intuitive connections within capitalism between success and profit, and as a counterhegemonic discourse of losing" (emphasis mine). Halberstam's (2011: 19) failure operates with a valence similar to Bishop's antagonism or Brechtian modes of alienation: "The history of alternative political formations is important because it contests social relations as given and allows us to access traditions of political action that, while not necessarily successful in the sense of becoming dominant, do offer models of *contestation*, *rupture*, and *discontinuity* for the political present" (emphasis mine). José Muñoz (2009: 173) has tempered failure by arguing that it possesses "a *kernel* of potential" (emphasis mine) that enables "a certain mode of virtuosity that helps the spectator exit from the scale and static lifeworld dominated by the alienation, exploitation, and drudgery associated with capitalism and landlordism." Muñoz places limits on failure while situating the concept within virtuosity because the concept "offer[s] the potential for a certain escape or, as Virno puts it, an *exit*. . . . Virtuosity debunks production-based systems of value that make work and even cultural production drudgery" (ibid.: 178).

Both of these authors have been influential to my readings of *The Magical Order*. In thinking alongside failure, I highlight the tendency to focus on one particular quality of failure that privileges more. Tolentino's project offers a sense of lesser that supplements both Halberstam's and Muñoz's collective work, whereby failure simply whimpers and etiolates rather than possesses a virtuosity or purpose. Tolentino and the art projects from *The Magical Order* direct us to an aesthetics of the flail. *The Magical Order* engages failure without a sense of Brechtian force. Yossi Halperin's drawing project, for example, amplifies such a flailing beyond failure. "The Elders" is Halperin's long-term, ephemeral practice that consists of replicated images of an imagined deity. With red and black pastels, Halperin sketches the face of a deity on many pieces of paper that are about the size of an average adult hand. Halperin does not methodically replicate these images; rather, he has a general template or idea of the deity's face, which he then develops through improvisation and repetition. The images possess a blurry quality that outlines details without rendering them defined. The broad lines from pastels offer only a fleeting and indefinite glimpse or grasp of the image. Halperin placed these images throughout San Francisco and displayed them in art spaces during the run

of *The Magical Order*. When I asked him about his goals for his specific drawing project, he told me that he never wanted his work to change a viewer. He invested in a nonattachment to his objects and released personal gain from them. In other words, he allowed the drawings to flail into the wind, unacknowledged, or possibly to be taken to someone's home. His lack of attachment emphasizes how one might engage with failure beyond narratives of potential, as "The Elders" is not fully embedded in change. Rather, the flailing of his images deflates potential. Both the quality of his sketches, which provide the outline of shapes without much definition, and his relation to his own objects disinvest from possibility. Halperin's aesthetics qualitatively involve a blur of details and flails toward mere existence.

The video cocreated by Tolentino and Kuhne similarly flails. This final video was presented as a gift to the Larkin Street participants and displayed in Alter Space. The overall goal of the video was to find a weak and open way to document the process without producing a narrative documentary. Rather than reveal truths about their time together, Kuhne and Tolentino wanted to capture moments of vulnerability and the minute interactions that shaped their collective work. Tolentino instructed Kuhne to follow and record Larkin Street participants, but with an emphasis on affective partiality over narrative capture that queered the genre of documentary film. Thus the video became a collage of interviews, rehearsals, and individual moments in nature and in meditation. Its goal became to grasp the "essence" of the participants. Rather than privilege their life stories, the video produces an affective sense of how each person relates to space and to others. In one evocative scene, Kuhne explores Isabella Black's essence. Her body sways on top of a cliff, as Kuhne's aesthetic depicts Black's body as a hazy blur that melts and melds into the blue sky. Kuhne's light and dissonant sonic landscape further amplifies this aesthetic of molecular disintegration across human body and air. In these moments, the flail arises through the aesthetic indistinction between figure and environment, along with amateur and professional. Black moves without abandon or purpose; her amateur movements juxtaposed against the video's professional quality offer a flailing aesthetic that cannot be understood in predefined categories surrounding novice, avant-garde, or disciplined. This quality of flailing directs us to take notice and be present with the performances in the video. We pause and do not rush to try to provide meaning to the performance.

The video's aesthetic operates outside a potential to produce a counterhegemonic narrative for homeless youth. The film allows each individual to flail or, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term, "to wave and swing wildly." For example, the camera's focus lingers on the minute gestures of hands and bodies. Although the camera documents the various training exercises Tolentino offered,

the recordings provide only a hazy and flickering quality that blends the environment with Larkin Street participants' bodies. The film's aesthetic presents a sense of what participants felt like internally. Rather than track each individual in daily life and time with Tolentino, the video details how each body swung in syncopated ways within the nature trails and galleries that their process inhabited. This lighter sense of aesthetic capture with a privileging of incomplete narratives produces a flailing that momentarily allows the participants to exist in space outside determined discourses around their life experiences. This video becomes difficult to describe because of its lack of narrative structure and overt documentation. I have thus privileged the film's aesthetic effects over direct description in order to offer a sense of this flailing aesthetic.

These examples flail rather than fail, in that the former involves the difficulty of simply existing without having such existence become embedded with full meaning, challenge, or virtuosity. Rather than try to rationalize one's failures with intents and purpose, flailing engages how one exists in the present. Flailing is unbecoming and wild, while failure often takes on a sense of neat closure, as the strong performative impulse declares purpose or "doing something" with failing. In addition, the unbecomingness of flailing can be traced in the varying degrees of aesthetics in the larger project. Much of the art that I have described throughout this article would not be considered worthy of attention from an art world–sanctioned sense of aesthetics. In an example of "unworthy" and amateur performance, some participants sang pop songs in a nonironic way during the final show. Some of the lyrics and poetry of participants' raps and writings might be considered obvious or untrained. However, I attend to these works without an aesthetic judgment of success, or even its opposite of recuperative failure, in order to track how these participants engage in not only an aesthetics of the flail but also an ethics of flailing—the unbecoming sense of simply doing that is not pregnant with purpose or possibility. Operating at this level of analysis requires that we allow the components of *The Magical Order* to exist in multiple registers, rather than try to recuperate them under the banner of productive or more failure.

Austin's framework similarly nuances this subtle distinction between flailing and failing. Austinian etiolations require a lack of intent. Failure is often about a purposeful intent to not succeed (to fail miserably). However, flailing lacks the intent of doing anything; it is about momentary survival that cannot have the privilege of failing. Flailing sidesteps the implied intent of performativity, producing insincerities, lying, and any other means to permit survival. I return to and close with Austin's framework to reimagine the possibilities of renegotiating the performative impulse within queer theory. Although helpful debates have been arising

with regard to queer optimism, futurity, and nonfuturity (Edelman 2004; Muñoz 2009; Halberstam 2011; Snediker 2008), these debates are often premised around extremes that privilege nihilism or possibility. Flailing nuances such extremes by making transparent the strong force that dictates the terms of these debates. *The Magical Order* methodologically highlights the tendency to default into extremes (all or nothing) and directs us to the need to examine the lesser gradations within force. Tolentino's project thus offers an avenue to reconsider the strong performative impulse beyond being within or against the notions of optimism, hope, futurity, and negativity. Tracking this force not only rethinks our investments in hope or negativity but also refines how we do things with queerness.

Conclusion

Considering the *longue durée* for systemic change, to punk, to yield, and to flail offer momentary modes to exist. To punk engages survival that is less about successful resistance than about existence, offers a different performance genealogy for social practice discourse, and refuses either legibility or avant-garde unrepresentability. To yield tempers how one imagines relations to institutions beyond complete submission or antagonism. To flail shifts away from clean distinctions between subject and environment, directing us beyond our attachments to purpose and change.

Collectively, these verbs, when culled from Tolentino's work and those in the communities that negotiate social practice projects, direct us to the strong performative impulse in not only social practice but also queer discourses. These verbs produce a lexicon by which to trace the lesser, weaker, and minor contours of performativity, shifting away from a strong sense that arises from a focus on either successful social practice or failing queer aesthetics. In addition, from the visceral reactions from punk to the corporeal gesture of the wild flail, these verbs hail a somatic-based vocabulary by which to think through weakness, etiolations, and the strong performative impulse. It is only through dance and performance with their attention to the awkwardness and limits of the body that one can contend with the normalizing sense of force underpinning performativity. The aim of this article has been to temper claims around the "possibilities" of performance and even failure. Much social practice discourse relies on a sense of performativity that invests in the "potential" to enact change. However, in deflating possibility, we begin to find other genealogies by which to theorize the relation of culture and the political. More generally, beyond these theoretical frameworks, I have attempted to question the tendency to make objects "applicable" or legible to our political

landscape. We tend to invest and render art and culture with possibility rather than explore their etiolations and limits.

Notes

1. I use the word *weak* to privilege a mode of performativity that is not meant to replace strong possibility and forces. I draw this relational sense of weak, strong, and force from Nancy Fraser's (1990) work on public spheres, Scott 1975, and Sedgwick 2003. I also complicate the notion of community art by emphasizing weak modes that have roots in the etymology of participation. Participation's etymology arises from *partir*, meaning to divide, and *capere*, meaning to take. The two roots of participation de-emphasize holistic integration and involve sectioning off and partiality (less the whole). Participation is never complete. This focus on minimal possibilities is akin to Miwon Kwon's (2002) articulation of public art practices that create inoperative communities, as opposed to a unified community.

2. I have slipped between my uses of community engagement and social practice, although the former is often included as a subset of the latter.

3. Tolentino was an independent model for Madonna's infamous sex book.

4. Jackson (2011) reveals the need to attend to (and not distance oneself from) institutions in the name of "progressive" art. I would add to this that progressive art must attend not only to institutions but also to how exactly those communities that social practice is seeking to serve navigate such institutions.

5. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "flail," www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition /american_english/flail (accessed May 27, 2015). I use the term *wild* to mark how flailing is not merely countering discourses on failure. In fact, flailing extends the critical work on failure by Halberstam (2014) and Muñoz (1999), as my use of flailing directly connects to Halberstam's, Muñoz's, and Tavia Nyong'o's (2015) collective interest and development of wildness. Halberstam (2014) acknowledges the intersection of all three of their interests in this key term, which followed the development of failure. Of note, wildness possesses a connotation that might exotify native, indigenous populations. Although this essay does not unpack this term and critiques of it, I invoke the concept as an aesthetic quality usually associated with flailing.

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