

National College of Art and Design

Print, School of Fine Art

# Virtuous Exploitation?

*A critical discussion of collaborative works between  
artists and people experiencing homelessness*

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## School Of Visual Culture

I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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## Introduction

“Well, the way of paradoxes is the way of truth. To test reality we must see it on the tightrope. When the verities become acrobats, we can judge them.”

— Oscar Wilde

The primary concern of this research project is to examine whether participatory art can be both virtuous and exploitative simultaneously. I will draw upon three separate case studies to highlight the moral implications facing socially engaged art where people experiencing homelessness are at the forefront. By examining critical commentary surrounding the works, I will make the argument that, in socially engaged art, it is rarely possible to say an artwork is virtuous or exploitative. Rather, just like the social issues themselves, there is a complex and multi-faceted interplay of many moral considerations.

The aim of this essay is to question this paradox by asking if participatory art can be both virtuous and exploitative. This paper uses a philosophical method of inquiry to critically assess the ethical implications of three separate case studies, to determine if the works can be both exploitative and virtuous. This paradoxical approach of looking for the exploitative elements as well as the virtuous ones, allows for the exploration of both sides of the ethical argument. This paper has been informed by the work of Claire Bishop, particularly her books *Participation* and *Artificial Hells*, as well as Anthony Julius’ *Transgressions: The Offences of Art*. Research for this paper was also collated through gathering articles from artists’ files in the National Irish Visual Arts Library.

Chapter One will briefly outline the definitions of both exploitation and virtue as well as discussing ethics in relation to art commentary. Chapter Two will examine the local context of Dublin by focusing on the exhibition by Irish artist Mick O’Kelly entitled *An Artwork For An Imperfect World* which was exhibited at the Temple Bar Gallery in 2005. Chapter Three will look at *Group of people facing the wall and a person facing into a corner*, by Spanish artist Santiago Sierra. Sierra’s controversial work was performed at Tate in 2008 and is particularly relevant to this discussion as it is famously known for “addressing situations of exploitation and marginalisation” (LissonGallery, 2012). Finally, Chapter Four will discuss the video piece *Drunk* by British artist Gillian Wearing. Similarly to Sierra, Wearing’s performance relies entirely on the participation of people experiencing homelessness, however in the case of Wearing’s artwork, all participants also suffer from alcoholism.

## **Chapter One**

### **Ethics Surrounding Participatory Art**

The term ‘exploitation,’ ‘the action or act of treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work’, is often used during discussions surrounding unethical practices. It is a term used to describe manipulation, utilization and capitalisation. On the contrary, the adjective ‘virtuous’ which is used to describe ‘having or showing high moral standards’ is often used during discussions surrounding ethical practices. It is a term used to describe moral correctness, honorability and humaneness. As the two are directly opposed, it is difficult to imagine that exploitation could ever be used in reference to something that is also described as being virtuous. Art objects which do not include performance or participation, cannot be deemed either ethical or unethical, for to suggest otherwise would be to personify an object (Winkleman, 2010). It is only when art moves away from object-based work and relies on the collaboration or participation of individuals that the ‘ethics’, as well as the artwork itself, can be subject to scrutiny.

“Recently, the goal of art has shifted from beauty to social issues, as evidenced by the numerous art grants and foundations that support artists involved with social change. However, when art moves into social activism, it might exchange traditional mediums of painting, drawing, and such for the medium of living beings — human or nonhuman. When it does, exploitation is a potential outcome.”

(Zeigler, T. 2016)

In an article entitled *Exploitation and Social activism in modern art*, Tracey Zeigler discusses this and expresses concerns in relation to socially engaged art that is created by artists who have no training in social work.

“Keeping personal agendas in check is not easy, and the foundation of field training for social workers is supervision. In this supervisory relationship, social change is developed through accountability, compassion, and empathy for the *other*. What similar structure is provided within the arts to keep the artist accountable to participants, who may already be vulnerable to exploitation? Ethics, compassion, and empathy are not taught in art school. Are these even valued in the arts? Does accountability stand in opposition to individual artistic self-expression? And if the artist is not accountable to something beyond him- or herself, can it be considered social change art? In social activism art, the question is not “Is it art?” The more important question is, “Is it really social change?”

(Zeigler, T. 2016)

Artists are known to create work that reflects the social issues of their time, and with today's housing crisis in Ireland, I believe we are set to see an increase of artworks dealing with this topic. I believe this to be the case as I am one of them. This research project has been inspired by my own ongoing collaborative project, focused on dream interpretation, psychoanalysis and the current housing crisis in Dublin. I position myself as an artist with a social justice agenda, firmly declaring my belief that the housing crisis needs to be dealt with in a more humane way by focusing directly on the people who are affected by it. Informed by Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, it is my intention to invite my audience to find a common ground with the homeless of Dublin and secret a dialogue surrounding the depersonalisation of homeless individuals, and the ethics inextricably wound around it.



The research surrounding this project has brought up a number of interesting questions relating to ethics and integrity. Is it ethical to benefit from the work of marginalized people while raising awareness of the issue? Am I stealing from the homeless by taking their drawings and using them in my work? How can I continue to work with these vulnerable people while avoiding allegations of self-glorifying behaviour or virtue signalling? Perhaps the questionable ethics of the project are key aspects to the work as they shine a light on the vulnerability of people experiencing homelessness and their susceptibility to exploitation? For these reasons, I will focus on the question of virtuous exploitation in relation to participatory artworks that collaborate specifically with people experiencing homelessness.

## Chapter Two

### **Mick O’Kelly – *Artwork For An Imperfect World***

In this chapter, I will be discussing Mick O’Kelly’s exhibition, *Artwork For An Imperfect World*, held at the Temple Bar Gallery, Dublin, in 2005. The work will be analyzed in relation to virtuous exploitation and the moral implications raised. O’Kelly, born in 1954, has produced a range of works that rely on collaboration with communities and participation of the public.

The exhibition was composed of a food van that was purchased by the artist and installed in the Temple Bar Gallery. The purpose of this exhibition was to invite a specific social demographic into the gallery – specifically, people experiencing homelessness – who would not usually participate in the art world, and offer them food in the gallery context. Although food was only offered to those who were homeless, the exhibition was also open to privileged gallery audience members, allowing them to engage in the work via spectatorship. This created dual participation, with each group – those with and those without a home – having a separate role in the work. Not only were the two groups differentiated in the way in which they could engage with the work, but the gallery space itself was also physically divided into two sections, with “the inner section only open to those hoping to get fed at the catering van” (Folan, 2022).



Fig 1: Mick O'Kelly, *Artwork For An Imperfect World*, 2005, Installation of the food truck into Temple Bar Gallery, Nival archives.

The exhibition raises multiple issues of morality. The first aspect of the exhibition that raises issues is the location of the food truck in a gallery space. The second aspect is the awareness of the participants of their performative role, and the third is the intention behind O'Kelly's work. The final aspect is the way in which the work implies that food is the main issue facing people experiencing homelessness, when it is housing that is the primary concern. However, while these issues imply exploitation, there is an argument to be made for the virtue of these aspects. The immoral aspects are integral to the work as it represents an 'imperfect world' which is necessary in order to highlight the issues of homelessness effectively. The following paragraph elaborates upon the first aspect mentioned: the location of the food truck.



Fig 2: Mick O'Kelly, *Artwork For An Imperfect World*, 2005, Food van on the street, Nival archives.

### 1.1: The gallery space as a site of moral implication

Offering free food to people living on the streets of Dublin would be described by most as an act of kindness. A charitable act with the intention of helping those in need. But when the 'charitable act' is set in a gallery space and becomes a performance piece, does the intention and thus, the morality of the work change? If O'Kelly's food van had been located on the streets of Dublin, where its target audience – those experiencing homelessness – would find it, there would be little debate surrounding ethics and morals. However, the food van was instead situated in The Temple

Bar Gallery, a location in which the target audience would never be associated with. This makes me question if ‘the homeless’ are the target audience. Perhaps O’Kelly did this intentionally, using the gallery as a platform to attract the attention of the upper-class gallery-goers and art critics.

“The exhibition can act as a template, the ideal platform for new and untried ideas. Often reflecting attitudes or concerns of society at a given time, whether challenging them or simply reflecting them, exhibitions make themselves vulnerable to criticism and even public attack. Ultimately it is the attention, good or bad, warranted or not, that brings notice to the exhibition and its parent institution and promotes dialogue, which is a primary goal of any exhibition”

(Cline, 2012, p56)

Here Cline is claiming that the goal of all exhibitions is to attract attention and promote dialogue. This claim would suggest that the primary goal of O’Kelly’s exhibition was not to feed people experiencing homelessness, but to instead promote a dialogue surrounding the issue of homelessness. From this claim, it becomes apparent that O’Kelly’s decision to locate the food truck in the gallery was for the purpose of attracting criticism and attention, for if the food truck was located on the streets of Dublin, the work would not be in a context that promotes criticism or public attack. Additionally, the location of the food truck in the gallery space could be recognised as an attempt to legitimise the work as a piece of art.

According to Claire Bishop “the mere fact of being collaborative, or participatory, or interactive, is not enough to legitimise a work or guarantee its significance” (Artforum, 2006). The location of the food truck in the gallery space is the central aspect of the work that raises a moral debate.

The context of the gallery proposes a sense of performativity, which the subsequent paragraph will expand on.

## 1.2: Participants awareness of performative role

By inviting those experiencing homelessness into the gallery space, O’Kelly is altering the work from something charitable and arguably sculptural (the food van) into something performative. O’Kelly recognises this performative element in an interview with *Absolute arts*, stating that he is “engaging with a conceptual performative model”. When the offering of food becomes something more than what it appears to be on the surface, the identity of the people being fed is also altered and conceptualised. It is unclear whether O’Kelly articulated to the participants that their role in this artwork was one of performance. My concern here is whether the participants of this performance were aware that by contributing to this exhibition, they themselves would become a representation of social issues.

In objection to this statement of representation, O’Kelly believes his work “resists notions of representation but rather directly integrates art and societal issues”, as the gallery space “temporarily extends its purpose to become an altered territory where the nature of citizenship is examined” (Absolutearts, 2022). However, I question the legitimacy of this statement, as I argue an artwork cannot ‘resist notions of representation’ while simultaneously dictating which social demographic was allowed to be fed. The participants are labeled as ‘homeless’ as soon as they

make their way from the spectators side of the gallery to the food van. The choice of supplying food rather than accommodation is another aspect of the exhibition that raises issues of morality.

The main problem facing people experiencing homelessness is the lack of housing, not the lack of food. Director of The Homeless Agency, Mary Higgins expressed her dissatisfaction with the exhibition as she believed it ‘seemed to indicate that the solution to homeless people’s needs was to give them food’, while also adding that she had ‘profound difficulties’ with the fact that the people being served would be on exhibition (Andrews, 2004).

As stated on the Absolute Arts website, the Temple Bar Gallery and Studios ‘worked closely with project partners Merchants Quay Ireland, a non-governmental organisation, to ensure active participation in the project (2005) and to endeavour to provide expected standards of discretion and sensitivity in its operation’. The website also reveals that “at the close of the exhibition the artwork will pass to Merchants Quay Ireland for use thereafter as part of its out-reach programme.” This implies that although elements of the exhibition are exploitative, the exhibition is simultaneously virtuous as it directly benefits charities helping people experiencing homelessness. The following chapter will clarify this statement further by exploring O’Kelly’s intention behind the work.

### 1.3: Artist's intentions

To discuss the ethical implications of an artwork, one should examine the initial intentions of the artist when preparing for the project. O'Kelly had known about the implications this project posed on his reputation years before the opening of the exhibition in 2005, as preparations for *Artwork For An Imperfect World* began three to four years before the exhibition went on display at the Temple Bar Gallery. An article written by Rachel Andrews in *The Sunday Times* in February 2004 shows that O'Kelly had already "been accused of wanting to put the homeless on display". This shows that Kelly was well aware of the ethical and moral debates that would be aroused by the exhibition, yet he continued to put the project together exactly as he had initially intended. Alison Pilkington mentions this in her review of O'Kellys work, written for 'contexts – the political issue' in 2005,

"Collaborative art projects happen through a process of change and dialogue, and there have been lengthy discussions leading up to this show in the last two years during which time O'Kelly's vision of the show hasn't actually changed or addressed some of the valid points raised in that time. Reading 'the civil arts enquiry' I was surprised to see how the drawings and installation plans are exactly how the installed piece looks, with no deviations or alterations."

(Pilkington, 2005)

Here Pilkington is saying that O'Kelly should have changed his approach to the exhibition because of the ethical concerns that were brought up in discussions years before the project's opening date. In contradiction to this statment, I claim that by O'Kelly sticking with his intentions and not altering his original plans, despite the large volume of criticism the project faced, he is maintaining the authenticity of the work and standing by the 'immoral' aspects which



confirms that although they are exploitative, they are intentional. The following paragraph explores the reasoning behind this intention.

In her critique of the work, Alison Pilkington refers *Art for an imperfect world* as 'flawed'. I argue that an artwork cannot accurately represent a flawed society without the work itself being 'flawed'. In her article "The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents," Bishop emphasizes that she believes socially engaged art has fallen prey to circumscribed critical examinations. The discourse, she argues, has focused mainly on the artist's process and intentions, or the project's socially ameliorative effects, to the neglect of the work's aesthetic impact.

"There can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of collaborative art because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond," she continues. "While I am broadly sympathetic to that ambition, I would argue that it is also crucial to discuss, analyze, and compare such work critically as art."

(Bishop, 2006)

O'Kelly is creating a work that does not intend to heal, but instead points out flaws in society. Perhaps any artwork that shines a spotlight on social flaws, must in itself, be a flawed piece of work. For how can a morally good piece be a metaphor for a very immoral social problem? The title of the work plays on this thought with O'Kellys use of *imperfect*. This work is made for our world, an imperfect one. Meaning it is not deserving of an artwork that is perfect.

## Chapter Three

### **Santiago Sierra – *Group of people facing the wall and person facing into a corner***

In 2008, Santiago Sierra orchestrated a performance to take place at Tate Modern which relied entirely on the participation of women experiencing homelessness. This was a remake of his earlier performance, *Group of persons facing the wall and person facing into the corner* which was performed at the Lisson Gallery in London in October 2002. The women were ordered to stand in a line facing a blank wall for one hour. They were not allowed to move or speak while people visiting the gallery stopped and stared. Sierra paid each woman the price of a night in a hostel to stand there for the duration. In order to discuss this artwork in relation to virtuous exploitation, I will discuss the grounds under which the participants consented and whether this ‘consent’ alleviates acts of exploitation. The main topic that will be discussed in relation to this, is the wage that Sierra offered the women for their participation in the performance.



Fig 3: Santiago Sierra, Remake of '*Group of persons facing the wall and person facing into a corner*', 2008, online at [www.Tate.org.uk](http://www.Tate.org.uk).

## 2.1: Conditions for Consent

As previously mentioned, Sierra offered the women the price of a night in a hostel for their participation. This value is clearly intentional and is used as a way of addressing how desperate these women are for shelter. They are willing to endure an act of humiliation and punishment for one night of refuge. Sierra is deliberately offering participants a wage at a value that has direct currency with their needs in furtherance of elevating the significance of his work. This is a tool that Sierra uses in many of his works, including *169 cm line Tattooed on 4 People*, where the participants – sex workers addicted to heroin – consented to be tattooed in exchange for a payment equivalent to the street value of a shot of heroin. What Sierra does here is undoubtedly exploitative, as he is unfairly taking advantage of their need for shelter (and in the case of *169cm line tattooed on 4 people*, their need for substance as a result of addiction). Outside of the art world there are many protocols in place to prevent similar abuses of power and exploitation of vulnerable people. The Irish Law Reform Commission's report "sexual offences and capacity to consent", outlines some of the protocols in place in Ireland to protect those that are vulnerable to exploitation. Although this report deals specifically with sexual activity, I believe the report can also be used to examine one's capacity to consent to any activity. The report concludes:

"The Commission is satisfied that capacity to consent involves an ability to form a decision about whether or not to engage in the act. The decision-making process entails weighing relevant information that has been acquired and understood in order to arrive at a choice in the context of available choices at the time the decision is to be made. The Commission considers that in addition to the right to choose to engage, autonomy includes a right to refuse".

(Law Reform Commission, 2013)

According to the report, to have the capacity to consent, one must also have the ability to refuse. The women in Sierra's performance come from a social demographic subject to vulnerability and at the time of the performance could not afford to meet their physiological human need of shelter, 'the bare necessity for anyone's survival' (Conway, n.d.). My interpretation is that although the women consented to their own objectification during the performance, they did not have the liberty to refuse. The women had two options presented to them due to their situation. Either take part in the performance or spend another night sleeping on the streets. This changes the act of participation from voluntary to imperative, concluding that the performance is in fact exploitative.

## 2.2: Artist's intention

On the other side of this argument lies the matter that the intent of Sierra's work is to be exploitative. Sierra is intentionally constructing work that will shock the audience. Work that will cause debate and controversy. As this is Sierra's objective, it could be said that this moral defect of the work is, in some ways, an aesthetic virtue benefiting the overall impact of the work: "While transgressive artworks can outrage, they are outrages that can liberate" (Jullius, 2002). The line of homeless women positioned in the gallery context tests the efficacy of Sierra's motivations and amplifies the ethical uneasiness apparent in the work. Audience members who witnessed the performance speak of it being 'a disquieting experience, recalling the school punishment of standing in the corner' (Tate, 2008). This sense of discomfort has been deliberately manufactured by Sierra. If Sierra's intention for the work is to reveal how society views these women, does the work in turn become virtuous by validating the women's

experiences, humansing them and allowing them to be seen? This suggests to me, that Sierra elevates the women as alive and worthy of attention. Although Sierra is exploiting the women's need for shelter and making a spectacle of the women, by poising the women in a gallery, he is also suggesting that these women are worthy of admiration and positions the women as subjects of interest. The discomfort this generates is a key aspect of the work that plays on the psychology of represented pain, as the pain itself becomes an object of interest (Elkins, 2013, p6).

## Chapter Four

### Gillian Wearing – *Drunk*

This chapter will discuss the morals of Gillian Wearing's *Drunk* by exploring the relationship Wearing built with the participants, the participants' capacity to consent, the long term effects of taking part, and Wearing's construction of a safe space. I will draw a comparison between Wearing's work and Penny Woolcock's documentary *The Wet House*.

Gillian Wearing is known for blurring the line between reality and fiction by exploring social issues through her documentary-style videos and photographs. Her three-screen video work *Drunk*, was produced over a duration of two years and first shown in New York in 1999 (D, Hopkins. 2003).



Fig 4: Gillian Wearing, *Drunk*, 1999, online at Moma.org

For this artwork, Wearing invited a group of homeless people suffering from alcoholism into her studio and offered them alcohol, in exchange for permission to film them. The video lasted for a duration of twenty minutes, through which time 'a gaggle of sloshed, sozzled, pissed, wrecked, steaming, rat-arsed alcoholics stumbled and swayed through' the screens (D, Hopkins. 2003). During the video, the participants enter and exit through all three screens which creates a sense of performativity, mimicking actors entering and exiting the stage, however, in this case, nobody is acting. The participants in this film are all real alcoholics and are all heavily intoxicated.



Fig 5: Gillian Wearing, *Drunk*, 1999, Artists studio.

### 3.1: Wearing's relationship with the participants

All the participants filmed during the making of *Drunk* were all alcoholics living on the streets of London between 1997 and 1999. Wearing befriended the participants in this video over a two year period by inviting them into her studio and gaining their trust (D, Hopkins. 2003). This section will discuss Wearing's relationship with the participants and her intentions when befriending them. Was Wearing genuinely interested in friendship, and motivated by her concern for these people, or did she see them as a medium she could manipulate for her own practice?

In an interview, Wearing speaks about an earlier work which relied on the participation of the public. These participants were composed of varying classes and status. When speaking about this public work, Wearing expressed that 'Homeless people were the most generous', adding that 'business people or people out shopping' contributed the least. (Ferguson, 1999). Wearing chooses to use this to her advantage by creating socially engaged art with those that have the most time to offer.

'Wearing is disarmingly direct about what she is doing. She openly admits to the unequal starting position from which she pursued her drunken quarry. She talks candidly of being attracted to people who have 'very low defences'. Yet presumably the low defences of her drunks were lowered further by the alcohol with which she rewarded them. Wearing's frank admission of a kind of amoral curiosity is striking, and distinctive to her'

(Ferguson, 1999)

Wearing admits to collaborating with vulnerable people with low defences. From this I conclude that this is an act of exploitation. However, regardless of Wearing's intention when befriending



the individuals, the implications faced by the participants remain the same, which will be discussed in the consecutive section.

### 3.2: Participant's consent and the effects of participation

This section will discuss the many effects on the individuals, such as: the exacerbation of their disease and becoming a spectacle. These are factors affecting the overall morality of the work.



Fig 6: Gillian Wearing, *Drunk*, 1999, Moma.

In direct opposition to O'Kelly's *An Artwork For An Imperfect World*, which provided a basic human need (food) and allowed the individuals to immediately benefit from their participation, *Drunk* exacerbates the disease (alcoholism) the participants are suffering from and prolongs their

struggle. The participants of *Drunk* were offered something they thought they needed, something that would benefit them in the short term, by providing escapism and satisfaction, but which would inevitably harm them further. The performance of this video exacerbated the participants' alcoholism to such extent where participants were recorded stumbling over, drooling and blacking out. They were struggling with such a severe case of alcoholism that one of the participants died during the project.

“At a certain point in the filming for the piece, one of the alcoholics, Lindsey, had died, Wearing recalled, ‘Originally I’d thought the film would show something more raucous and carnivalesque, but it became much more melancholic.’

(De Salvo, 1999)

Is Wearing partially responsible for the death of Lindsey? As previously mentioned, Wearing spent two years ‘befriending’ these people who were struggling with homelessness and alcoholism. Would a friend really put you in a position that would cause you harm and even death? This proves that the work is exploitative as the participants were treated unfairly for Wearing’s reputational gain.

### 3.2: Safe space

In contradiction to this, the people who collaborated with Wearing consented to do so and they would have found a way to consume alcohol regardless of whether Wearing provided it or not. Wearing allowed them to consume alcohol in a safe space. Looking out for the participants' physical safety and inviting them into her studio; a virtuous act. Their participation leads to a

symbiotic relationship between participant and artist. They get a safe space to drink without spending the little money they had on their addiction while Wearing gets the opportunity to film them and create an artwork that would show the public the stark reality of alcoholism on the streets, and what these people are struggling with.

A similar documentary film, 'The Wet House' by Penny Woolcock, documents the lives of people living in a British 'Wet House': a homeless shelter that allows their residents to consume alcohol on the premises, offering safe accommodation and meals to those who can't or won't stop drinking. Although the film was not necessarily an 'artwork', it was well regarded by artists with Damien Hirst purchasing 100 dvds of the film to give to friends (Woolcock, 2000). In a description of her work woolcock describes the struggle and 'lengthy process' to gain 'official permission to film' and 'informed consent' from her participants as they were always 'partially drunk' (Woolcock, 2000). Woolcock also reveals that although there is a need for wethouses; "there is a school of thought that by allowing the residents to drink all day they will die sooner than if they are on the streets. I don't know what the answer is." This relates seamlessly to Wearing's work. Wearing is allowing the participants to consume alcohol in a safe environment and provides them with this freedom, but is she also shortening their life expectancy? Similarly to Lindsey, who died during the duration of Wearing's work, Woolcock divulges on her website that many of the residents "turned bright yellow and died while we were still filming" (Woolcock, 2000). In her discussion of the film, Woolcock confesses her grief surrounding the death of one of the residents who died as a result of watching the film:

"Uncle Tony, the Brickie, Belfast Tommy and Carpark George all live on inside me and in the film. They are all dead now. We left Annette on a high note, sober and shiny but years

later I was told that when she watched the film she fell off the wagon, went back to the booze and died. I had made a special extra filming trip to film Annette clean when the film was almost edited so she could be proud of seeing the change she had achieved. If it was the film that destroyed her, what was it about seeing herself as chaotic as she had been that drew her back? There is a stone in my heart. And Annette is dead. I don't know. I don't know. I thought I had been careful and fair"

(Woolcock, 2000)

To conclude, this work is exploitative yet is simultaneously virtuous. Wearing is taking unfair advantage of the participants need for alcohol and making a spectacle of them, but she is also providing them with a safe space to drink and raising awareness for the both the issues of homelessness and alcoholism.

## Conclusion

From the outset, I posed the question of whether an artwork that collaborates with people experiencing homelessness could be deemed virtuous and simultaneously exploitative. Throughout this research project, I have discussed three artworks that rely on the participation of people experiencing homelessness. Each artwork collaborates with those experiencing homelessness in a very different manner, yet their similarities greatly outweigh their differences. Each artist collaborates with these people in a way that prompts the spectator to question the ethics and morals of the work, while provoking dialogue and attention from critics.

From the research, it is clear to see that all of the artists mentioned – although offering the participants different means of payment for their collaboration – are making a virtue of the participants' needs. O'Kelly provides food, Sierra provides a night in a hostel and Wearing provides alcohol. Gaining consent from participants by offering them something they can't afford to turn down, as their survival may depend on it, is an act of exploitation. All three artists are using this as a means to benefit their artistic practice and add metaphorical significance to the work. Despite concluding that this is exploitative, it is this exploitative nature of the work that is also contributing to the impact that these pieces have on society. This in turn, benefits those being exploited by raising awareness and concern for their situation. Bishop mentions this need for an added significance to participatory art in *The Social Turn*:

“The best collaborative practices of the past ten years address this contradictory pull between autonomy and social intervention, and reflect on this antinomy both in the structure of the work and in the conditions of its reception. It is to this art — however uncomfortable, exploitative, or confusing it may first appear — that we must turn for an

alternative to the well-intentioned homilies that today pass for critical discourse on social collaboration."

(Bishop,  
2006)

People experiencing homelessness are exploited by society on a daily basis. They are taken advantage of, ignored and mistreated. By using exploitative means to collaborate with these individuals, artists replicate this sense of destitution in their work. They are intentionally constructing an atmosphere of unease and provoking emotions in the audience. Generally, the audience members' initial response to this discomfort is to accuse the artist of misconduct. However, the misconduct is not performed by the artist, but by society itself. The artists are simply putting it on display; exposing the lengths people experiencing homelessness must go to in order to reach their needs.

'The transgressive is the utopian aspect of every artwork, the one that offers us glimpses of an existence unconfirmed by rules of restaurants. It is this raw, honest and uncensored nature of transgressive art that i think vindicates its importance'

(Jullius, 2002)

Some people are harmed in the making of the work, however this level of honesty is necessary to show society the severity of the problems on our streets. Artists who produce work that does not shock the audience, will fail to represent a shocking situation accurately. This concludes that despite elements of the collaborations being exploitative, they are also simultaneously virtuous, with the exploitative nature being a key and unavoidable aspect of the work. Audiences and critics are shocked, their emotions disturbed. But how often would they allow themselves to feel

these emotions in everyday life? These artists create a space to bring the suppressed to the surface, evoking our humanity, revealing the pertinent issues society so often ignores.

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