

Reflecting on Reflections and The Need for New Methods:
Meandering Through Unlearning in Social Impact in Practice

By:

Marian April Glebes

CPLN6270 | Social Impact in Practice
Maurie Smith & Michael O'Bryan, Professors

18 October 2023

The following all started with *The Velveteen Rabbit* (Bianco 1960) and citizen participation (Lauria and Slotterback 2020). It started with permission to be radically invested in learning on our very first day of class. It started with gratitude and with the assignment to reflect at least five times out of nine.

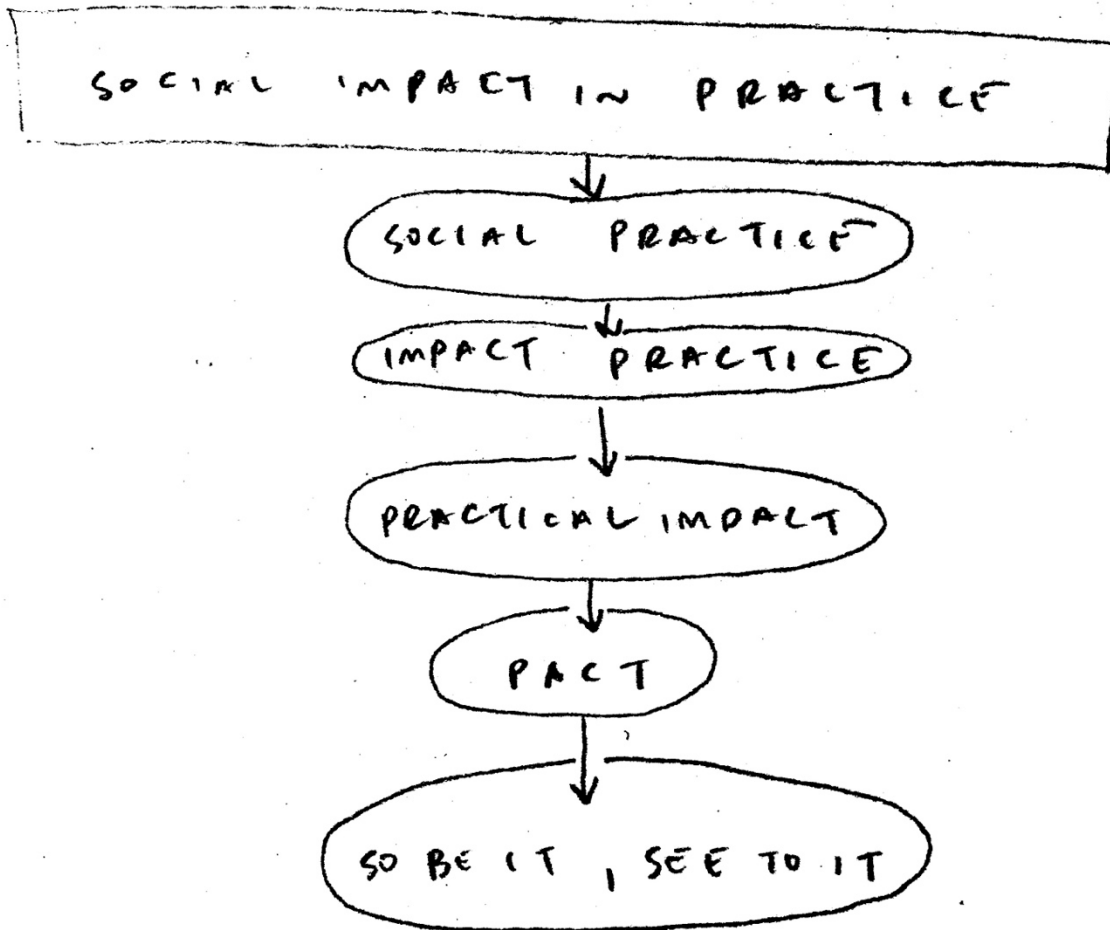


Figure 1: I made this diagram thinking about Social Impact in Practice and its layers of doing and being while developing this reflection paper.

In Social Impact in Practice, we read things and we talk about them. I've been thinking a lot about the things we read and the things we talk about; the things we don't read, and the things we don't talk about. I've been thinking about theft of doormats and flowerpots,¹ about the government shut down,² about trauma,³

¹ Re. Walking tour of Passyunk with SEAMAAC.

² Re. the crisis of leadership and the collapse of civilization as evidenced in the daily headlines that bleed over congress and chaos.

³ Re. Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation and all the stuff that's happening in the world that is traumatic, and bad days.

survival,⁴ and about forgiveness and apologies.⁵ I've been thinking about *Praxis in the Time of Empire*. (Roy 2006) I've been thinking about what I take and what I give away. I've been thinking about being legitimate and about becoming real. This is a reflection paper about reflections. It identifies gaps in learning and unlearning and posits a methodology and further research for addressing those gaps. In conclusion, it asks questions, and begs both forgiveness and permission. This paper is a work plan and an un-work plan, a manifesto and a mea culpa, a poem and a problem.

In December of 2015, a fire at the Ghost Ship – an artist run space in Oakland, CA – killed 36 people and became the deadliest structural fire in the history of the state. The Ghost Ship was the nation's second most deadly fire in an artist run space since the fire at The Station in Rhode Island killed and injured over 100 people in 2005. (Glebes 2023) Two of the artists who ran the Ghost Ship survived and were subsequently charged with and sentenced for the murder of the 36 individuals who perished in the tragedy. (Weil 2018) They are serving consecutive life sentences for being artists, hosting music shows, living below the poverty line in countercultural and underground space in an affordable housing crisis. The lease at the Ghost Ship – written by one of the artists and signed by all the rest who resided there – was the binding contract that outlined their roles and responsibilities to the building and to their publics. This document was one sentence long, and its only clause was: “to be unconditionally awesome.” (Weil 2018)

The syllabus for Social Impact in Practice is a lot longer than the Ghost Ship lease, but it is our binding contract for how to be and what to do, detailing the power relationship, performance factors, and responsibilities and mutual respect between teacher and student. While it doesn't say it outright, our syllabus's most important guiding principle is that of the Ghost Ship: “Be unconditionally awesome.” There are other things missing in the syllabus. There are other things that are not said, not read, not demonstrated; these are latent, not explicit, expected but not detailed, hoped for but not requested. The syllabus is full of reality; it's missing the fantastic, the personal, the poetry, the perspective of naivete and sorrow. It wants to be angry, and

⁴ Re. getting through the bad days. Re. design research methods workshop with Mike.

⁵ See Glebes Reflection Paper 04.

it wants to be lazy, and it wants to invent a new world and smash capitalism and it doesn't want to do its homework or stay til 8:30pm or be hungry. Or maybe that's just me.

This paper proposes further research. This paper proposes that my midterm paper can be a rewriting of the syllabus as a reflective manifesto of the things I would like to learn and how I would like to unlearn thinking about Social Impact in Practice. How I would like to address and acknowledge what is missing. Along this vein, my next two reflection papers will be examples of some proposed methods and gaps inspired by our readings and guest speakers, inspired by my studentness, my positionality, my curiosity, my quest to do better, be better, and get an A+ in awesome. These may include examination of the following methods and open questions:

- How to Forgive/How to Apologize
- How to Learn/How to Teach
- How to Be Legitimate
- How to Not Steal from Artists: Social Practice/Artificial Hells
- How to Do Nothing
- How to Fail Better
- How to Not Be an Asshole
- How to Show Up
- How to Use Affordances/Why Do We Sit in Chairs
- How to Tell Time/How to Listen to Time
- How to Encourage Bodies to Exist in Space
- How to Unmake Completeness/Un-final Projects

In my Historic Site Management class yesterday, Laura Keim – our fearless leader – included a slide with a quote from Ralph Waldo Emerson about the domestic home as a castle of learning and receiving power.

The household is a school of power. There within the door, learn the tragi-comedy of human life. ... Here is poverty and all the wisdom its hated necessities can teach, here labor drudges, here affections glow, here secrets of character are told, the guards of man, the guards of woman, the compensations which, like angels of justice, pay every debt: the opium of custom, whereof all drink and many go mad. -Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1867

I feel at home in this class, and that feeling of home encourages me to question and to complicate the received power structure. What if the classroom and the class was a living experiment of social impact in practice? What if we were the researchers and the research subjects? What if we unmade the king?

Carl Orff wrote *Carmina Burana: Cantiones Profane* in 1936. (Orff 1937) The manuscript collection from which Orff's work is derived dates back to the 13th century. Orff's "O, Fortuna" reminds us in the English translation of the original Latin,

*At the turn of Fortune's wheel,
one is deposed,
another is lifted on high
to enjoy a brief felicity.
Uneasy sits the king –
let him beware his ruin...* (Orff 1937)

Like fortune's wheel, I am the king, seated and unseated, uneasy in power and in play, in purpose, in profession, in practice. Dan Powers – one of my now-graduated MCP peers - wrote an email last year that was much like Orff's *Carmina Burana* in its mastery; an email which un-sat the king. I paraphrase the exchange:

Teacher writes an email to Dan: Dan, I noticed you didn't turn in your deep and lengthy assignment on data analysis. Checking in because it is past due, and it is a significant portion of your grade. When should I expect to receive your assignment?

Dan writes to teacher: I'm sorry I didn't do my assignment. I do not plan on doing the assignment. I have decided to focus on things that are more relevant and impactful to my life and learning, like spending time with my wife and riding my bicycle. I understand that this decision will impact my grade, but it is the best decision for me and my future. I don't really care about data analysis and technical details, and I love this class. Thank you for letting me learn in a way that is best for me.

*Teacher: Gives Dan an A in the class and a C on the assignment he never turned in.*⁶

Pedagogy is the king. Dan Powers is fortune's wheel. Dan's teacher is unconditionally awesome.

In conclusion, this reflection asks questions, and begs both forgiveness and permission. Here I remind the reader and myself that this paper is a work plan and an un-work plan, a manifesto and a mea culpa, a poem and a problem. I am sorry and not sorry that social practice, impact practice, and social impact in practice (See Figure 1) leads me to the following vision for academic research and learning that is based on Mess Hall Chicago's manifesto (Satinsky 2016):

⁶ Dan Powers told me this story encouraging me to live and laugh more. I take school and grades so seriously. Dan always just wanted to take what he needed and give away what he didn't. It's why he was able to get rid of his car; he can carry everything he needs on his bicycle. I just can't seem to downsize, and I feel like a failure if I am not the A+ student. I am trying so hard to learn good enough. Dan Powers is a masterpiece.

I envision pedagogies run by the people who uses them.

A living classroom creates the space to remix categories, experiment, and learn what we do not already know.

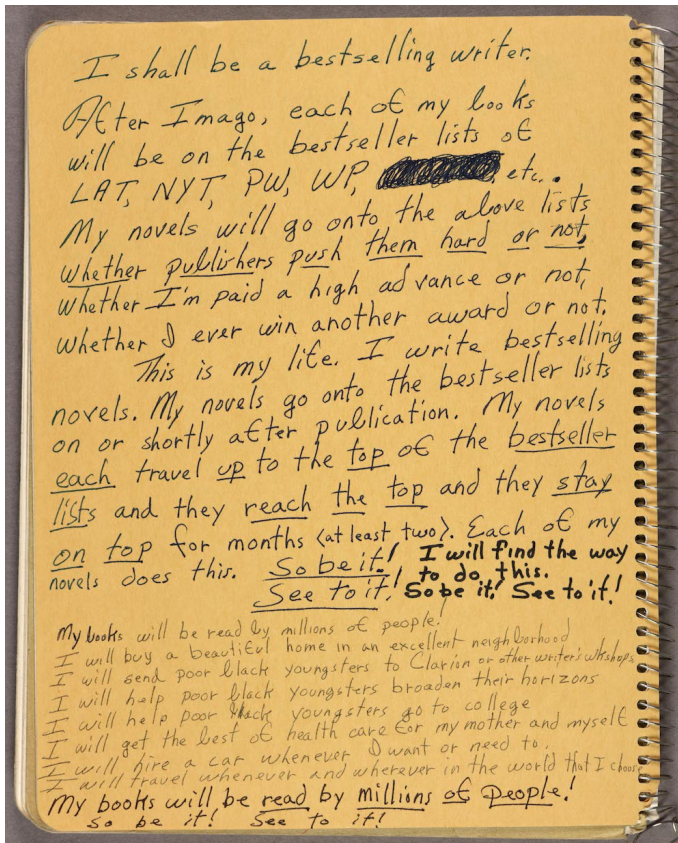
Pedagogy must explode the myth of scarcity. Everyone is capable of sharing something.

The surplus of our societies should be creatively redistributed at every level, especially in the classroom.

Pedagogy embraces creativity as an imperative without thought of profit or of grade.

Classrooms are spaces that promote generosity and curiosity, mutual trust and respect.

I am going to write next about forgiveness and apologies. I apologize in advance, and now, for this and other things being too long. I am going to have a fantasy that for the final assignment I might be both the community client and the researcher. I want to use Social Impact in Practice to unpack and develop the Baltimore Mobile Community Brick Factory and Monument. I am going to ask for space for that fantasy. I am



going to re-read the Arnstein's ladder a twelfth time and continue to wonder if anyone ever said they were sorry. I am going to pretend that a world at war does not affect my scholarship. I am going to be unconditionally awesome. Future research is needed to continue to unlearn, to fund equitably, to restore civility, to do assignments, to reflect, collect, and synthesize. I am going to be the duck's back and the water running off it and the pond. I am going to draw an owl. I am going to make a to do list. As Octavia Butler commands, "So be it! See to it!"

Figure 2: OCTAVIA E. BUTLER, NOTES ON WRITING, "I AM A BESTSELLING WRITER ..." 1988. HUNTINGTON LIBRARY, ART COLLECTIONS, AND BOTANICAL GARDENS. © ESTATE OF OCTAVIA E. BUTLER.

Bibliography

- Bianco, M. W., & Nicholson, W. (196AD). *The velveteen rabbit, or, how toys become real*. Doubleday.
- Bianco, M. W., & Nicholson, W. (196AD). *The velveteen rabbit, or, how toys become real*. Doubleday.
- Glebes, Marian April. 2023. "We're Gonna Do It Anyway: Tensions Between Safety and Creativity in Artist Run Spaces in Baltimore City." *Master Thesis in City and Regional Planning, University of Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia: Weitzman School of Design.
- Lauria, Mickey, and Carissa Slotterback. 2020. *Learning from Arnstein's ladder: from citizen participation to public engagement*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Off, Carl. 1937. *Carmina Burana*. New York: Associated Music Publishers.
- Roy, Ananya. 2006. "Praxis in the Time of Empire." *Planning Theory* 7-29.
- Satinsky, Abigail. 2016. *Temporary Art Review: Movement Building for Beginners*. February 03. Accessed 17 October, 2023. <https://temporaryartreview.com/movement-building-for-beginners/>.
- Weil, Elizabeth. 2018. "In the Ashes of Ghost Ship: He Helped Build an Artists' Utopia. Now He Faces Trial for 36 Deaths There." *The New York Times*, December 12.

How to draw an owl:

How to draw an owl

1.



1. Draw some circles

2.



2. Draw the rest of the fucking owl