

## QUESTIONS ABOUT ART, ECOLOGY AND THE SOCIETY WE EMBODY

The first five questions were generated by the group Temporary Services (Brett Bloom and Marc Fischer). They are about the many unspoken and hidden politics, ethics, power and economic struggles, behind socially engaged art practice. Following them are questions, that I ask of myself and the work of others, about ecological concerns and making art.

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### **#1—Does the work empower more people than just the author(s) of the work?**

Does the authorial voice, or artist, disappear in that empowerment? Do we start to see others who speak for the work, its impacts, its results? Or is the cultural and economic capital absorbed into the career and status of the artist?

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### **#2—Does the work foster egalitarian relationships, access to resources, a shift in thinking, or surpluses for a larger group of people?**

How can we think about an artwork in terms of social justice, movement building, or the redistribution of privilege and wealth?

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### **#3—Does the work abate competition, abusive power and class structures, or other barriers typically found in gallery and museum settings?**

Or does the work mask power relationships and economic interests behind grand spectacles, charisma and fame of artists, or other types of distraction?

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### **#4—Does the work seek broader audiences than just those educated about and familiar with contemporary art?**

What are the shifts in language and approaches to communication that we use and can develop to make art accessible and relevant outside the purview of specialized discourse?

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### **#5—Does the work trigger collective imagination that can dream other possible worlds while with eyes wide open understands the current one?**

How do we work in ways where we can contribute to a greater narratives that are collectively held, as opposed to, for example, a narrative of individual development and achievement?

## **To what extent does an artwork replicate or enact the same types of ecological relationships that it seeks to address?**

Why aren't we talking about this more amongst ourselves? How do we find a way to talk about the power, waste, pollution, resource extraction, colonialism, petroleum-based lifeworld we inhabit, and other concerns amongst ourselves? If we can't do that, then how do we expect to understand how our work is effecting the people we engage and the world around us?

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## **What are the externalities—the social and the environmental costs—of making artwork that concerns itself with ecology?**

Do you fly from one location to another to make your art work? Is your audience in multiple cities instead of where you live? What kinds of materials do you use in your art work? Do you use technology, computers, search engines, power from the socket in the wall? Have you taken the time to enumerate environmental costs of your art work? How does all of this make you feel?

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## **What role does culture (art) have in shifting our society away from one that is fossil-fuel-based towards whatever is emerging?**

I have recently seen several open calls for artists to make work with scientists to help visualize climate change for the general public. This seems like only part of what is needed, and is probably the least effective, as I think we need embodied, empathic, and directly experienced ways of understanding the situation we are in. What are other ways you have found of addressing this issue of communicating these incredibly large, complex problems we face, with others?

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## **What forms of art making can we develop to address the challenges and urgencies of rapid climate breakdown?**

How can we shift the ways in which we are artists or use our work? How can we do things that look more like movement building and generating mass cultural shifts in contradistinction to making art works for galleries, museums, individual careers and development?