



Socially Engaged Practice in Contemporary Art

'Home' as a Case Study

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ABSTRACT

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Socially engaged practice is a relatively young artform compared to other practices in contemporary art, evolved from avant-garde movements in the early 20th century to the 1960s, 1970s performance and conceptual art. In spite of its late presence, the gravitation of contemporary art towards social framework has been rapidly increasing around the world to almost a global phenomenon during the last decades. Although collaboration and participation in art are not exceptionally innovative, they bring a new trend of redefining art's role in modern life. The objective of this study was to assess the artistic process, approach, experience as well as acquire general knowledge and explore possible challenges of working with people experiencing homelessness in the artmaking context.

This thesis provides an overview of the socially engaged practice from the 1990's and explores various prevalent arguments about social practice art in criticism: how should it be considered art, its aesthetic elements, participatory artists interchangeable roles with activists and ethical evaluation. The research was conducted by analyzing a collection of various literature sources, in which an analysis of the art historian and critic Claire Bishop's *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* played an essential part. An interview with the artist Willie Baronet was also organized to study his working process in his decade-long project 'We Are All Homeless'. Several artworks of contemporary artists in the US and Europe using participatory art to raise political issues such as homelessness and poverty were also examined.

Lastly, the author's socially engaged artwork *Home* was carefully analyzed and self-reflected upon. *Home* is a participatory artwork exhibited in the graduation show Kaleidoscopers 2021 which explores the theme of relationships and home to the subjects of homelessness.

Key words: participatory art, socially engaged art, home, homelessness

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1 INTRODUCTION

Socially engaged practice plays an integral part in contemporary art history as it emerged from the avant-garde movements in the early 20th century and returned in the 1990s as an evolution of pre-existing artform that preoccupied with artist's participation and collaboration (Bishop 2012, 3). This social orientation causes enduring debates over the practice's foundations about how it should be read as art, artists' authorship and collaboration with the audience, its activism, and especially art criticism for participatory work.

The written part of my thesis consists of research and art analyses on socially engaged art from the period of 1990s to the present, as well as a report on the process of *Home* as a participatory artwork, which is the artistic part of the thesis. The structure of the third chapter in this thesis was significantly influenced by art historian Claire Bishop's 2006 essay *The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents*. Moreover, her 2012 book *Artificial hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* provided a comprehensive view of the participatory art picture throughout contemporary art history that contributes a great amount of historical and critical knowledge for the theoretical section. Important tropes and additional examination were also gathered from other materials such as a curator and writer Michael G. Birchall's essay *Socially engaged art in the 1990s and beyond*, analyses of social practice arts from contemporary artists like Michael Rakowitz, Santiago Sierra and an interview with the artist, activist, and university professor Willie Baronet. The majority of the artworks studied in the research can be considered as participatory art about homelessness and poverty, as it is the theme of my thesis artistic part.

The empirical part comprises my ideas, approach, and experience in participatory work *Home*, which explores the theme of home through the subjects of homelessness. During the course of the artwork, I came to a daycare center in Helsinki to work as a volunteer, communicated and built relationships with my subjects. With the aim of people and collaboration being the central theme, the artwork results in a photobook and a documentary. The photobook portrays the subjects during my voluntary time while the documentary tells the story of Allan, a Cuban

who is experiencing homelessness as he was invited to a rented apartment in Tampere. The only request for Allan was to make the place his own home. Not only in-depth discussion will be raised about the creative process but also critical thinking and self-criticism will be employed by applying Bishop's critical theory.

2 SOCIALLY ENGAGED PRACTICE

In this chapter, the various concepts of socially engaged art practice will be studied and introduced in detail. While the theoretical ideas are mostly influenced by Claire Bishop's *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012), I will present a variety of artworks of different artists to highlight the common themes in this form of art.

2.1 Definition

Socially engaged practice can also be mentioned by different names: social practice, community-based art, socially engaged art, participatory art, collaborative art, contextual art (Bishop 2012, 1). According to Tate's online glossary, this practice can be referred to as any art form that takes human interaction, collaboration, and debate as the main medium for the artistic process.

There have been critics questioning the terms of 'participation', 'engagement', or 'interactivity' since every artwork requires a level of interaction in some way, physically or mentally. For example, a diverse selection of work from interventionist acts in media or digital art to environment-responsive art can all provoke empathy, imaginary engagement, interpretation from the viewers as some kind of interaction. (Bishop 2012, 1; Heinrich 2014, 1.) Installation artist and professor Falk Heinrich in his 2014 published book 'Performing Beauty in Participatory Art and Culture' uses the term 'participatory art' interchangeably with 'interactive art' to refer to a form of one-to-one interaction between audience and artwork in the field of media art, digital or electronic art. By contrast, art historian Claire Bishop employs the term 'participatory art' as the connotation of art that involves numerous people in the making process.

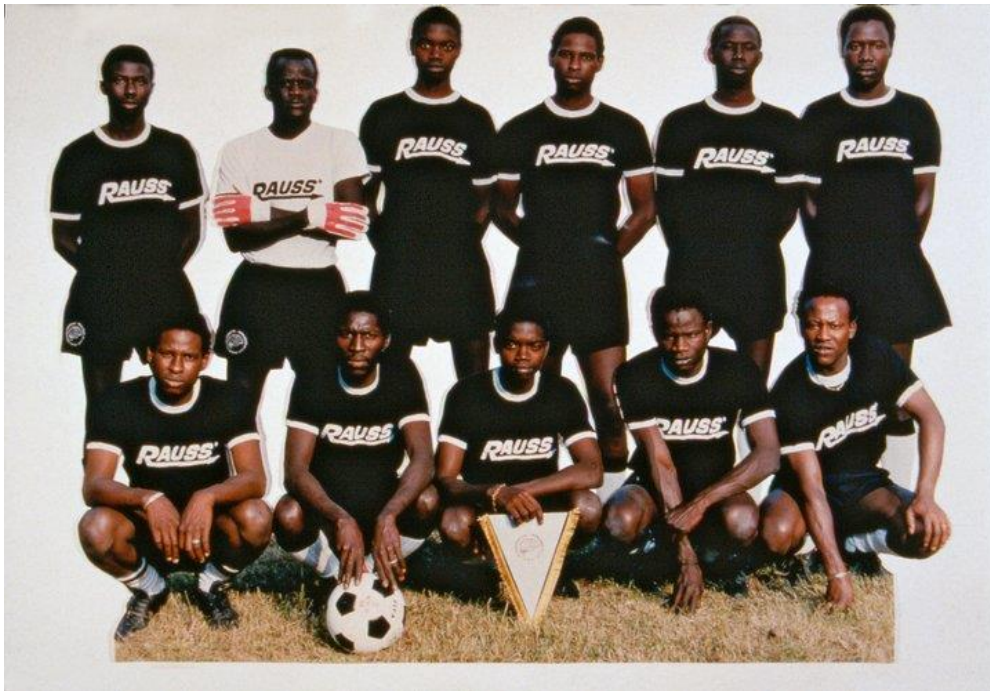
For the course of this thesis, I will be discussing this topic under the names of social practice and participatory work, as well as socially engaged art. It demands artist involvement with subjects who are the audiences or a community, to work towards a collective goal in the context of living condition, socioeconomic status, or in the manner of theater and performance.

There are two predominant approaches in participatory art which are categorized by Claire Bishop (2012, 4, 5) as delegated performances and pedagogic projects. These two approaches go hand in hand with the context of the artwork: in the framework of documentation or exhibiting in a gallery and within a community.

2.2 Delegated performances

Delegated performance is the tendency of hiring non-professionals or specialists in the non-art fields to perform a task instructed by the artists in a specific time and locations. These works maintain a relationship with the exhibition space as they usually acquire the place as a frame or as a display of artifacts in the form of photography and video works. (Bishop 2012, 219.) Artists known for this direction are Santiago Sierras, Tino Sehgal, Gillian Wearing, Phil Collins, and many more.

There are several approaches to this method. The first kind of delegated performance is outsourcing actions to non-professionals with the aim of performing characteristics of their identities. Bishop (2012, 222) noted that these people were presenting their own socioeconomic status categorized by class, race, age, gender, ethnicity. The second strand of delegated performance is a profession-based performance that concerns the performers from a non-art background and their professional identity, rather than representing class or race. The third category is performances that are situated and constructed especially for film and video work.



PICTURE 1: Southern Supplies FC 1991 (Maurizio Cattelan)

One of the earliest work of this kind is the 1991 *Southern Suppliers FC* by Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan where the artist assembled a real football team with North African immigrants, who were then dispatched to play local matches across Italy (all of which they lost) (The Art Story, n.d). Their shirts were emblazoned with the name of a fictional transport company called Rauss which means ‘Get out’ in German (derived from a Nazi slogan). The artwork was considered “a social sculpture as cynical performance” (Bishop 2012, 221) which revealed the contemporary racial conflicts and xenophobic attitude towards immigrants. Moreover, the artist exposed the irony and contradiction in two types of imported labor at two ends of the economy: cheap immigrant labor and celebrity sports stars, which was at the time the controversy in the Italian football league. (Bishop 2012, 220, 221; Perrotin, n.d.)

Delegated performance has a transgression characteristic based on the view that artists are exhibiting and exploiting their subjects. Consequently, these works often spark intense debates about the element of ethics and representation (Bishop 2012, 223). Artists like Santiago Sierra uses perversity and exploitation as a tool to expose the contradictory reality of capitalism. According to Bishop (2012, 236), the French curator Pierre Bal-Blanc pointed out the differences between exploi-

tation in art and capitalism was artists appropriating perverted power for themselves, in order to generate reoriented and numerous roles in contrast to the singular role of industrialization. I will discuss more this phenomenon in the next chapters and in Santiago Sierra's subchapter.

2.3 Pedagogic projects

Over the history of art, artists have always attempted to bring art closer to life. Aiming to touch upon the educational aspect, artists conduct pedagogic projects while trying to seek the method to bring a classroom to participants or audiences as if it were an artwork. Bishop (2012, 241) argues that artwork should be speculated and to be seen, whilst there is no image for education. Moreover, although there is an overlapping demographic between art audiences and students, viewers are not exactly students and vice versa. Pedagogic projects, therefore, eliminate the role of audiences and replace it with a more active role: participants who can co-create and produce within the artwork.

A prime and early example of a pedagogical project that deemed art itself as one type of education is Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Published in 1795, twenty-eight letters of Fredrick Schiller advocated against the barbarisms of the French Revolution and the violent terrors it created. Schiller (1795) argues that the humankind needs to be educated aesthetically in order to achieve political freedom.

Not until the 2000s was the rise of pedagogic projects started and they were diverse in forms and in methods, such as lectures, seminars, publications, as well as workshops, or as large-scaled as an entire school. Together with it, there was a great range of epistemological issues raised among critics and art historians raised concerning pedagogic art. For example, the definition of education as art, along with the assessment methods to pedagogical art's experiences were questioned. (Bishop, 2012, 241, 245)

Nonetheless, Clair Bishop (2012, 274) comes to the conclusion that there is a great potential for the continuous reinvention of education and art thanks to their

experimental coexistence. It is because artists, curators, educators, and other art-enthusiasts must consider both disciplines as interconnected when developing the appropriate lexicons and standards to communicate these two deeply intertwined practices.



PICTURE 2: *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans 2007* (Paul Chan)

There is another instance of a recent pedagogical artwork that may have achieved this harmony, which is the *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans* project by Paul Chan (2007). Struck by the silence of New Orleans in his first visit in 2006, Chan staged a production of the *Waiting for Godot* play by Samuel Beckett on the city's streets, which were damaged by Hurricane Katrina. This led to the second part of the project, the "DIY residency" in New Orleans in which Chan and his cocreators engaged in various community organizing activities including seminars, workshops, and Chan's teachings at the universities of the city. During the realizing of his *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans* pedagogical project, Chan's and the project collaborator's shared goal was to create a social production of the public, which is organically local to New Orleans. (Chan, 2007).

2.4 Foundations

The emergence of social practice art stems from the historic avant-garde period in Europe (as early as Italian Futurism, Russian culture evolution after 1917, the Dada movement), to the 1960s, 1970s performance, and conceptual art. During those art movements, visuality remains an essential factor no matter how idiosyncratic or incompetent the artworks may seem. However, with participation being the crucial element of every participatory work from the '90s, there is an obvious tendency of valuing process over a substantial product, concept, or object in socially engaged practice. The invisibility now becomes significant and recognized: community dynamic, socio-economic circumstances, a transformation of power, increased awareness. (Bishop 2012, 6,41.)

One of the distinctiveness of participatory art is the twofold, interchangeable dimension of the relation between the artists and the viewers, which can be presented as singular-collective authorship and active-passive spectatorship. When the audiences' role shifts from uninvolved spectators to enthusiastic participants and co-producers, they become an inseparable part of an artwork that may also alter the artists' position from an authorial role to merely a facilitator. This phenomenon motivates a transition in the sensitivity of aesthetics in social practice: from visual analyses to ethical concerns. Collaboration is taken into consideration by critics on how it is taken, whether the subjects are represented 'fully' or there are any traces of exploitation. (Bishop 2012, 19; Birchall 2015.)

The development of participatory art, as 'a social return' in the late 20th century, constitutes what can be considered neo-avant-garde nowadays. Social situations are contrived by artists in an anti-market, de-materialized approach to producing politically engaged projects. Artist's orientation towards social context is largely considered activism as they try to raise, reveal, improve a social problem or tackle a political issue. As a result, participatory art depends on artists' first-hand experience integrating into a specific community of the subjects that they want to work with over a long duration of time (days, months, or years). (Bishop 2012, 7-13; Tate.) A methodological approach to evaluate socially engaged art, therefore, requires sociology and social sciences (Bishop 2012, 7) that will be discussed in the next chapter.

3 THE SOCIAL TURN

Art historian, critic, and professor of Art History Claire Bishop in her 2006 essay 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents' published in *Artforum* - an international monthly magazine specializing in contemporary art - points out the notion of participatory art from the 90s. By calling it 'social turn', the author emphasizes the turn of contemporary art to the social context with two major tendencies of delegated performances and pedagogic projects. Later, this term was described more accurately as a 'return', as the socially engaged practice continues its endeavors to reconsider art collectively progression from the antecedent movements (Bishop 2012, 3).

3.1 Art, creativity, and cultural policies

If a participatory work takes the form of community-based activities, how should it be different from any other forms of social activism, such as ones promoted by political agendas? This subchapter aims to demonstrate a common misconception of creativity and art in the mainstream media and how it was exploited by policymakers as a political agenda.

It is noteworthy that social participation and art were included and promoted in European governments' policies and programs as a tool to advocate a society of authority-respected and submissive citizens as well as good creative moneymakers. Claire Bishop mentions two cultural policies of this tendency: one came from the New Labour period (1997-2010) in the UK and one was an inaugurated program by the Dutch government in 2006. (Bishop 2012, 12–18.)

New Labour had rhetoric deployed to promote what was considered art's benefits to the community which sounds identical to the foundations of socially engaged practice. Politicians considered many social problems like unemployment, crime, apathy can be minimized by participation in art, thus art should be *socially inclusive* to the *excluded minority*. This means people in the working class who have less access to the education system and labor market should be allowed to be included in the self-contained consumerism: adapting full employment, having an

income, being self-sufficient. The role of creativity and culture in commerce were also accentuated as the motivator of the 'knowledge economy' which leads to some policies alternating from traditional industries to 'creative industry', reconstruction of museums as well as releasing human's creative potential. (Bishop 2012, 13–15.)

The Dutch government took this strategy as a role model in their 2006 'Culture and economy' program which included rebranding the city of Amsterdam as a 'Creative City' and profiting from creativity as an exclusive Dutch export. They planned to boost the economic capacity of the creative force by providing the insight benefits of the creative sector to business communities and encouraging the cultural sector to awake their business potential. (Bishop 2012, 15, 16.)

These cultural policies above visualized the benefits of socially engaged art solely via political perspective with the figures of the audience, marketing statistic to support public funding (Bishop 2012, 13). In the case of New Labour, participation was taken as a fundamental in social inclusion, but instead of embracing self-recognition and communal actions, they essentially discussed the riddance of disruptive individuals to diminish the pressure on public service and government's budgetary reduction. According to Bishop (2012, 14), the cultural theorist Paola Merli (2002) insisted that the outcome would not improve the daily existence of participants or raise awareness but would just help them easily accept their living condition. Comparatively, the 2006 'Culture and economy' program's turn to creativity boost was not designed for increasing social happiness in general but to simply create an upcoming generation of diverse creative skills for economic purposes. (Bishop 2012, 15). Findings by Bishop showed that policymakers of those programs used the terms "art", "culture industry", "creative industry" and "entertainment" interchangeably as they saw no differences between these ideas.

There is an undeniable confusion in the mainstream understanding of art and creativity. On the one hand, some artist's approaches in participatory art projects can be identical to the cultural policies of governments towards social inclusion and creative cities. On the other hand, art and creativity have their distinction in the discourses of complexity, application, and approachability. Sociologically, the notion of creativity can be accommodated with the economic measure that utilizes

profiteering. By contrast, artistic practice is capable of maintaining contradiction and generate an element of critical negation which is not quantifiable economically. However, Bishop admits that without nuanced language, one can only discuss socially engaged practice with obvious influences. (Bishop 2012, 16–18.)

3.2 Ethics, exploitation, and criticism

There were questions concerning the artistic value of socially engaged art: how should a project be assessed as a work of art if it is simply facilitating the social engagement of a community? What kind of aesthetic value does it generate? To answer these questions, it is necessary to compare a participatory artwork with other works in the field that maintain the basis of the collaboration model.

Critiques in participatory art focus on the artist's collaborative manner with their subject as it looks for potential hints of exploitation that fails to represent the subjects and whether a good or bad collaboration model was established. This means artists are judged by their process, which is even more superior than the end product, or in other words, the process is the product.

There are two co-existing and contradicting approaches to the relationships or power structure between the artists and their collaborators in socially engaged art. On the one hand, artists can value democratic collaborative practices such as the *ethical* social process while scarify and dematerialize the aesthetics of art. This participatory art method, therefore, has exempted itself from art criticisms and shifted the focus onto the generalized set of moral principles. On the other hand, the disruptive artistic strategies of intervention and overvaluation of individual authorship are instantaneously regarded as *unethical* or even *exploitative* approaches. Nonetheless, some literature claims that unethicity can play a significant role in the artistic impact of any artwork. In short, "*ethical*" is not everything. This is because ethics should not always be proactively declared and then performed directly and righteously and that collaborators actually prefer to participate with an artist who can provide an uncensored and complicated social truth. (Bishop, 22-26, 2012)

It is impossible to use visual as analyzing tool for participatory art as it tells nothing about the concept and context of the artwork. Social practice art needs to be evaluated under the currency of social sciences: community, society, empowerment, agency. (Bishop, 7, 2012)

3.3 Artist and activist

Even the purest intention of art practice that seeks its ways out of the binaries of good - bad, ethical - exploitative, individual - collective, active and passive (like the way politicized art projects rely on) stays within the discourse social and political issues. Participatory projects especially with the pedagogic approaches have a tendency of aiming for strengthening the social bond between communities. Therefore, socially engaged artists share an overlapping territory with social activism, and even some artists consider themselves activists while others ponder the real connotation of their practice.

When practicing an artwork that the core values revolve around humanist ethics, artists' connection with the community becomes tight-knit so that a strong form of social engagement is made and the artists will naturally acknowledge their new social responsibilities even they are out of the art-making context. Most of the artists practicing socially engaged art within a community has a tendency of extending their projects to a long term or an indefinite duration.

Aastha Chauhan is an Indian artist and art researcher who spent 10 years in Khirkee Extension - a small unauthorized neighborhood in India to develop a community art project with the aim of improving the living condition of the residents. After years of opening workshops, art events, she found herself in the situations of intervening social injustices in the area. Chauhan admits that the line between art and social discourse became blurred that left her wondering about her work being too developmental or too activist. (Chauhan 2015)

The same phenomenon happens to other artists in the collaboration art field like Willie Baronet, Michael Rakwitz (whose works are analyzed in the next chapters) and also myself during the course of making socially engaged work.

4 SOCIAL PRACTICE ABOUT HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY

In this chapter, I would examine and analyze the different projects on homelessness and poverty from renowned artists worldwide. More specifically, the chosen artworks to study include Willie Baronet's *We Are All Homeless*, Michael Rakowitz's paraSITE, and the delegated performances from Santiago Sierra.

4.1 We Are All Homeless by Willie Baronet

We Are All Homeless is a long-term art project started in 1993 when Willie Baronet, an American artist and Creative Advertising professor started buying signs of the people experiencing homelessness that he encountered on the streets. Before, the artist struggled with his moral obligations of interacting or ignoring the people he met and whether his decisions contributed to the social inequality he was witnessing. Since then, he decided to purchase signs of every homeless person he met. Almost 2000 signs were collected and exhibited by Willie Baronet in various museums, exhibition spaces and universities across the U.S and U.K. In his exhibitions, the artist would ask the audience to share their thoughts on home and homelessness, in addition to displaying his collection of signs. In 2014, Willie Baronet traveled from the west to the east coast of the U.S, crossing 24 cities in 31 days to meet people living on the street, asked them their ideals of home and bought 292 signs. The journey was documented in his 2016 documentary *Signs of Humanities*.

activism point of view. From an ambiguous starting point, what he did best was to create a brand that is highly recognizable which is beneficial for the aim of raising awareness about homelessness. Not only the quantifiable impacts were demonstrated openly on his website but also his activities are visible in the media coverage and easy to follow up via multiple media platforms. As discussed previously art and creativity, some participatory artists may find themselves articulating the values of their practices similar to the way policymakers promoting their creative cultural policies with direct measurable effects, which was the case of *We Are All Homeless*.

Claire Bishop mentioned the tendency of mixing up between ethicality and aesthetic value which makes it hard to criticize a 'good moral' participatory project. *We Are All Homeless* can be recognized as a type of "direct ethical" participatory project as ethical criteria are clearly one of the core value in the project, which was reflected by the artist constant attempts to tell stories of the people experiencing homelessness, to make their voice heard and their existence visible. Baronet's artistic identity was also manifested by his willingness to open up, respectful approaches to his subjects and his endeavor to connect with them. The artist's intention was not just displayed by the signs but also by the process of reaching out and maintaining a relationship with some of his subjects.

However, the artistic value of *We Are All Homeless* should also be analyzed by other factors rather than the simple matter of ethics. By broadening the approaches from interacting with the people on the street to communicating with the visitors of the exhibition to marching and public speaking, Willie Baronet successfully makes social dialogue a medium of his work for the goal of increasing awareness about homelessness in his community. On the other hand, it is impossible for the subjects of *We Are All Homeless* to evolve to a more symbolic status than the way they present themselves, and the response from the audience will likely be accepting and sympathizing rather than questioning, criticizing, and reflecting upon the artwork.

4.2 *paraSITE* by Michael Rakowitz

Michael Rakowitz is an Iraqi-American artist based in Chicago and a Professor of Art Theory and Practice at Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, Northwestern University who works in both community and gallery-based contexts. His works deal with political and humanitarian crises like homelessness, hunger, community conflicts, and cultural preservation. The artist's mediums are diverse from sculpture, moving images, participatory performance and conceptual work which are materialized by deep architectural, historical, and cultural backgrounds. One of the artist's earliest works from the late 1990s was *paraSITE* where Rakowitz engineered and built inflatable shelters for the people living on the street. The shelters were constructed and customized so that they can be attached to exterior ventilation ports of a building and use the air discharged to inflate and warm the person inside. Cheap and durable materials were used to build the structures including Ziploc bags, packing tape, and, for his later prototypes, sheets of polyethylene, a popular plastic known for its durability, lightweight, and flexibility (MoMA, n.d).



PICTURE 4. a *paraSITE* shelter (Rakowitz 2000)

The project began in 1998 with the artist engineering and constructing 30 shelters based on the wishes of the people experiencing homelessness in several cities in the US. Since then, *paraSITE* shelters have been created and distributed in

Chicago every year, inspired by the Palestinian refugee camps in Israel and Jordan which were built by the emigrants each night in response to the direction of the wind. Rakowitz migrated this idea of nomadism to urban space to reflect on the never-ending nomadic state of homeless people who were also the subjects of social and economic refugees. (Ingalls, Rakowitz 2016.)

The title of the work layered in multifarious derivations. It related to the creatures (animal, plants) existing in nature by absorbing resources from the body of other organisms, while the prefix *para* borrowed its meanings from the French definition (which means "guard against"), and the suffix *site* referred to "a location, a place" in English. Parasitism is a relationship in which the host involuntarily provides energy to the parasite while endeavoring to get rid of it, and the parasite adapts by utilizing new ways to attach to the host. This relationship of antagonism is well reflected by the way many city councils in the US dealing with homelessness. According to Rakowitz, Mike Davis in his book *City of Quartz* described the war on homelessness in Los Angeles of the authorities by deploying "homeless-proof" interventions and anti-homeless hostile designs. Some of them were barrel-shaped bus benches, overhead sprinkler systems in public space or simply tilting the metal grates on vents to make it impossible for people experiencing homelessness to sleep on. (Rakowitz 1998, 17,18.)

One of the main objectives of the artwork that worth mentioned was the artist's process of collaboration with the unhoused people. Instead of designing one prototype that functions in multiple environments like a tent, Rakowitz indeed went to all the potential *paraSITE* owners beforehand, asked them their shelter's preferences and tried to customize the *paraSITE* following their wishes. The results were always varied according to personal likings and elaborated to a level of collective authorship where the artist constructs the shelter and more elements were added by the homeless residents later to make them very particular and unique. There were *paraSITE* shelters made with a lot of windows as the owner requested to see potential attackers and be visible to the public, while another occupant who was a keen science-fiction fan asks for a *paraSITE* that shaped like Jabba the Hutt. Throughout the course of building the shelters, the artist learned about incorporating the occupants' needs and desires into the design while humanizing

the subject of homelessness as distinctive individuals that transformed the art-work from architecture to portraiture. (Ingalls, Rakowitz 2016.)



PICTURE 5. Design concepts for a couple's *paraSITE* shelter (Rakowitz 2000)

While Michael Rakowitz's work for the unhoused people is a practical attempt to help them survive on the street, the artistic intention was to instigate and protest the condition of homelessness and municipality by providing an unacceptable approach to the problem. To the people living on the street, *paraSITE* shelters was not only a place of temporary retreatment but also a sign of empowerment, a refusal to giving up and a device to expose the intolerable living condition on the street. To the artist, it mirrored his interaction with unhoused people in the role of a citizen and an artist. Therefore, *paraSITE* remains a powerful work that functions as a problem solver and troublemaker simultaneously while symbolizing the problematic relationship between those who live with and without a home. (Rakowitz 2016, Marc 2008.)

4.3 Santiago Sierra delegated performances

Santiago Sierra is a Spanish artist who is known for hiring disadvantaged people whose status are economically and socially precarious, such as illegal immigrants, drug addicts, homeless people, low-paid workers, etc. They are hired to perform painful, humiliating, labor-demanding and other kinds of menial tasks for a minimum wage. His work encompassed a combination of minimalism and urban intervention which highlights the issue of social inequities by accentuating the economic transaction made in order to create the installations (Bishop 2012, 222; Tate 2008).



PICTURE 6: 12 workers paid to remain inside cardboard boxes (Santiago Sierra, 2000)

From early installations produced by the low-paid workers, Sierra's path shifted to displaying the workers themselves. Described by Tate museum as a "a provocateur whose art raise headlines", Santiago Sierra demonstrated the inequities of capitalism and globalization directly in his working process. Using people who were under financial pressure as the medium in his delegated artwork, Sierra asked them to perform repetitive, absurd, and degrading tasks such as: sitting in a cardboard box, constantly moving concrete blocks around aimlessly, cleaning people's shoes without their consent, blocking museum, standing still in a line facing a wall, masturbating on video, etc. Understandably, Santiago Sierra's work has been heavily criticized for being exploitative and immoral. (Bishop 2012, 222, 223.)

Sierra's work titles are always a literal description of his working process stripped down to minimum information of the number of participants and what they were hired for. Unlike many other artists, he strives to bring the economical exchange into his core materials by emphasizing the payment details as a part of his work description. In *160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People*, he paid 4 prostitutes in Spain who were heroin-addicted to have their back tattooed for the price of a heroin shot. One thin line runs continuously along the backs of four women leaving permanent marks on their bodies in exchange for a passing and instant effect in a heroin shot.



PICTURE 7: 160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People (Santiago Sierra, 2000)

Like other installations, this work of Sierra is undeniably exploitative and unsympathetic to the audience. His ways of demonstrating the work in a cold-hearted, dehumanizing manner were also disturbingly alienated comparing to the ways artists like Willie Baronet and Michael Rakowitz treated their subjects. However, it is an obvious artistic strategy of Sierra as he used vagueness and coldness in his approach to generating the audience's own attitude toward the work. Artist, writer Benjamin Murphy (2008) argues that this intention was to force the viewer into independently judging on the ethical or philosophical undercurrents to the work. The problem now lies in the fact that these unfortunate people were so desperate to make this decision for such compensation.

The tattoo is not the problem. The problem is the existence of social conditions that allow me to make this work. (Sierra, n.d)

Sierra's work underscores the conflict between the conscience of the participants (to permanently mark their bodies with the price of one shot) and any other choices that they did not have due to their addiction and socioeconomic situation. By bringing the process of exploitation into the environments of galleries and museums (which were described as places for "high class" people by Sierra), the

artist exposes relations of power and economics, hence stressing the omnipresence and inescapability of such relations and raising various ethical questions. (Art exchange 2018; Manchester 2006.)

What made works like *160 cm Line Tattooed on 4 People* so powerful was the fact that the viewers were pushed to reflect upon themselves and their powerful position compared to the cheap labor deployed in these projects. To make this happen, the artist had to successfully manage the matter of representation in his work. The utterly exploitative depiction of his participants was corresponding to their social class and their invisibility which is the interminable happening in society. This was such a crucial element that affects the viewer's point of view to the degree that it creates conscious and subconscious changes about the subjects no matter how negative their reaction towards the work be.

Losing the quality of rawness and truthfulness in representation, the effect would be reversed. This happened recently with Sierra's 2021 project *Union Flag* for Tasmania's Dark Mofo festival where he invited people from countries and territories colonized by the British Empire to donate a small amount of blood with the intention of soaking the British flag in. The artist and the creative director received a backlash against the work so intensively that they had to cancel the artwork before the festival. Those who criticized the works including indigenous people and art professors pointed out the problematic approach of Sierra being a Spanish artist - a colonizer country and wanted to speak for colonized people in a re-traumatizing act. (Carmody 2021.) It is noteworthy that in his previous works, Sierra's standpoint was being the exploiters and therefore he can utilize the viewers' equal caste who are socially equal to him. By contrast, this piece of Sierra failed because it was nothing more than a mere act of false representation.

5 “HOME” as a case study

Home is a multisensory artwork, originally created for the *Kaleidoscoper 2021* exhibition and is a combination of photography, video, sound, and space installation. The work consists of two main pieces, which are a photobook as well as a documentary sharing the common theme of exploring homelessness and the definition of home.



PICTURE 8: The mockup layout of the *Home* exhibition 2020 (Minh Pham)

The photobook - *At The Other End*, is a collection of photos and stories told by the people who were experiencing homelessness in Finland. With *At The Other End*, I aim to re-label the stereotypes of being homeless by connecting to the subjects and telling their tales humanely. In addition, the video part of the artwork not only portrays a similar subject with a different approach, but it also seeks for the alternative definition of ‘home’ from the artwork participant.

The subchapters below further discuss the ideation process, along with analyzing the different elements that embody the two integral parts of *Home*.

5.1 Ideas

Hauser (2012) points out that the definition of 'inspiration' is depicted differently in art. On the one hand, inspiration can be understood as the mysterious origin of an idea that appears to have no external cause. On the other hand, inspiration is described as the result of an entirely external and coincidental happening via spontaneity. Whichever way it is defined, the artist often considers or relates inspiration to the genesis of his artwork in a causal way.

The inspiration behind the artwork *Home* can be explained as the second definition offered by Hauser (2012). In short, the idea of the work stems spontaneously from the different, mostly uneventful encounters of myself with the people who were experiencing homelessness in front of the Mäkelänkatu 50 building in Vallila, Helsinki.

At first, I did not have a well-defined plan about how the process would take place, as well as a clear idea of who will participate in the artwork as the main subjects. There were a lot of uncertainties and obscurities at the start of the art project, both in terms of the logistic details and the theoretical domains. To be specific, the author had modest knowledge about participatory art in general, as well as its aesthetic regime. However, from the beginning of this art project, I have decided that the core values of it would be two-way collaboration and mutual respect.

5.2 At The Other End

At The Other End is a photo book that explores the unique stories of people experiencing homelessness who were often labeled as alcoholics, drug users, or mentally ill people in Illusia - a daycare center in Helsinki, Finland. The center lies at the other end of Mäkelänkatu street, where the author resides, which explains the title of the book.

5.2.1 Form

Comprises of four chapters and over a hundred pages of images, *At The Other End* tells the life stories and reflects on the thoughts of unique individuals I met at Illusia both verbally and visually. The preface of the book briefly explains the origin behind the creation of the book, which is my journey to answer the question: “How is it like, life at the other end of the street?”.

The first chapter of *At The Other End* is called “men at the door”, as the subjects from this chapter represent the earliest impressions of me when I first walked past the building of Mäkelänkatu 50. The men were always standing in front of the center’s entrance, smoking, spitting, drinking, and shouting. While this chapter contains various portraits and images of these men, it focuses on two main characters with the past stories of Marko and the reflection of Esko.

“the challenger” – the second chapter of the book tells the life of Juha. As the title suggests, the chapter explores the journey of Juha to challenge the rigid and bureaucratic systems that contributed to his homelessness. Moreover, Juha’s educational background and political involvement also tell a different story other than the normative judgments which are usually projected on the homeless.

The third chapter is titled “the youth” since the subject of this chapter, Jenna, was a nineteen-year-old that has been experiencing a troubled and unfortunate past despite her young age. In her part of the book, Jenna talked about her hopes and dreams, as anyone her age would. While having a couple of drug issues, Jenna was one of the sweetest characters I have ever met.

At The Other End ends with the chapter called “dysfunctional family”, which is a collection of images taken inside and surrounding the premises of Illusia. The title of this chapter from the photobook is in fact the way one of Illusia’s staff members described the community. In this chapter, the staff, the volunteers, and the customers of the daycare center together present in a shared space, making Illusia a unique family that is unlike the others.

The form of photography in this artwork considers the matters of genre and techniques. During the project, I defined my photos as a form of a documentary while staying away from the traditional approach of depicting homeless people in a quick, dirty, pitiful, and judgmental orientation. In order to execute this vision, I let components such as composition, lighting in the photos, as well as the layout of the book be the tools to tell about the subject's characteristics.

5.2.2 Artistic process

Sininauhasäätiö (or *The Blue Ribbon Foundation*) is a Finnish non-profit organization founded in 1957. The organization provides support to people who experience homelessness, as well as the people at risk of homelessness. The services include assisting their customer groups to get safe accommodations and get the support they need. Moreover, Sininauhasäätiö also provides and develops substance abuse and mental health services for the benefit of its clients. (Sininauhasäätiö, 2021a.)

Illusia daycare center is Sininauhasäätiö's communal space at Mäkelänkatu 50 in Vallila, Helsinki. In Illusia, the people in need can take care of their basic needs, including food, beverage, a place to sleep, and laundry facilities. The center also distributes clothes received as donations and provides entertainment to their clients. The services of the day center are open to everyone, free of charge and anyone can use the services anonymously if they wish to. (Sininauhasäätiö, 2021b.)

I have had various experiences with groups of people standing in front of the Mäkelänkatu 50 building's entrance in Helsinki's Vallila district, a building at the opposite end of the street from where I live. They would always hang there, either drinking alcohol, smoking, spitting, chatting loudly, or trying to banter with the passers-by. These were the people that my partner and I tried to ignore every time but left me wondering who they were and what the place was. After figuring out the Mäkelänkatu 50 building is a daycare center called "Illusia" for homeless people with substance abused issues, I decided to get on with the photography project to listen to the stories they have to tell and to capture their images. The

core question of the project then came up more concretely as I tried to figure out how the people of the Mäkelänkatu 50 building – right at the end of my street, have been experiencing life.



PICTURE 9: Man at the door 2020 (Minh Pham)

As previously mentioned, the project concept sparked up in a somewhat spontaneous way. Therefore, while I had a concrete idea on how to first approach the subjects, most of the making of the *At The Other End* photobook was unplanned. Firstly, after the topic idea was conceptualized, I did various research on Sininauhasäätiö and Illusia, as well as read the information concerning the organizations and the areas. During my search, I came across different news of violence and shooting crimes, which truthfully have taken me aback. Nonetheless, I decided to continue with my project by reaching out to the Sininauhasäätiö organization and signed up to work as a volunteer.

Then, I managed to arrange three different meetings with Soile Bar-Yosef, who is the Head of Volunteering and Fundraising Department at Sininauhasäätiö, and some of their volunteers. During these meetings, I presented them with my portfolio and previous works, as well as shared the plan of creating a photo book and the topic with them. I also asked for possible supports, especially with the Finnish

language while conducting interviews with their customers. From there, I got assigned to work at Illusia, which is also where most of their volunteers come to work.

During the first few days of volunteering, I managed to get acquainted with the customers and had a few small talks and chats with them. For me, it is important to gain the trust of my subjects so that they feel their stories will be heard and their photographs will be taken without prejudice or my judgments. Later, in my photobook, I conducted one-on-one interviews with each subject, asking them casual questions to get them comfortable with me so that I could explore their range of emotions, and attempted to capture their images at the right moments. The unique aspect of this project is that I have no expectations about what would happen during my interviews with my subjects. One subject follows another, and one story is led by another. The subjects spontaneously lead me through the entire journey with them. This has reaffirmed the previously mentioned characteristic of *At The Other End*, which is how spontaneously the project had been progressing. The spontaneity and coincidence aspects of this artwork have thus been surprising and rewarding to me.



PICTURE 10: Book presentation with Illusia staff 2020 (Minh Pham)

From my point of view, *At The Other End* as an artwork is more than just merely a collection of images and stories. In other words, the photobook is just the tangible result and outcome of the art project, and there are different intangible performances successfully achieved throughout the making of the artwork. For example, through fostering participation and collaboration in the forms of voluntary work, conversations, and interviews, I have not only gained the trust of my subjects but have also encouraged them to open up, to tell their experiences, and to share the vulnerable moments with me. Therefore, photography can rather be considered as a medium to capture the results of a different artistic process.

In the process of gathering references and inspirations for this project, my emphasis was not on finding the best works on the subject of homelessness by well-known artists, but rather on identifying photographers whose images visually appeal to me the most, using the same methods of approach: discovering stories in the ordinary day-to-day living.

Joel Meyerowitz is one of them, and he once claims: "It's not just about shaping a picture nicely in a frame but how much compassion or emotion can you bring to the frame." Joel's remarkable photography career is diverse in terms of approaches and projects, and one cannot simply define his visual style because he has done so many different things. However, the one thing that inspires me the most is his attitude towards photography and every single photo he took depicting lives on the street. He shared his thoughts on meeting strangers on the street and taking of them, that if the photographer could make the stranger show their secrets, the hidden mysteries that tell about the subject's humanity, their compassion for themselves and others, the subject will become more and more real. This was just what I aim to accomplish with my project.

5.2.3 Working with subjects

In this chapter, I would elaborate in detail on the methods and experiences I had with my subjects. Firstly, my first impressions that the people who were experiencing homelessness were somewhat biased because of the information I have researched online and the previous encounters I have had. However, one of the

most surprising things I learned that I would not need any support in translating the conversations I have with Illusia’s customers. My subjects all speak fluent English, while not every staff at the daycare center can communicate clearly in this language.

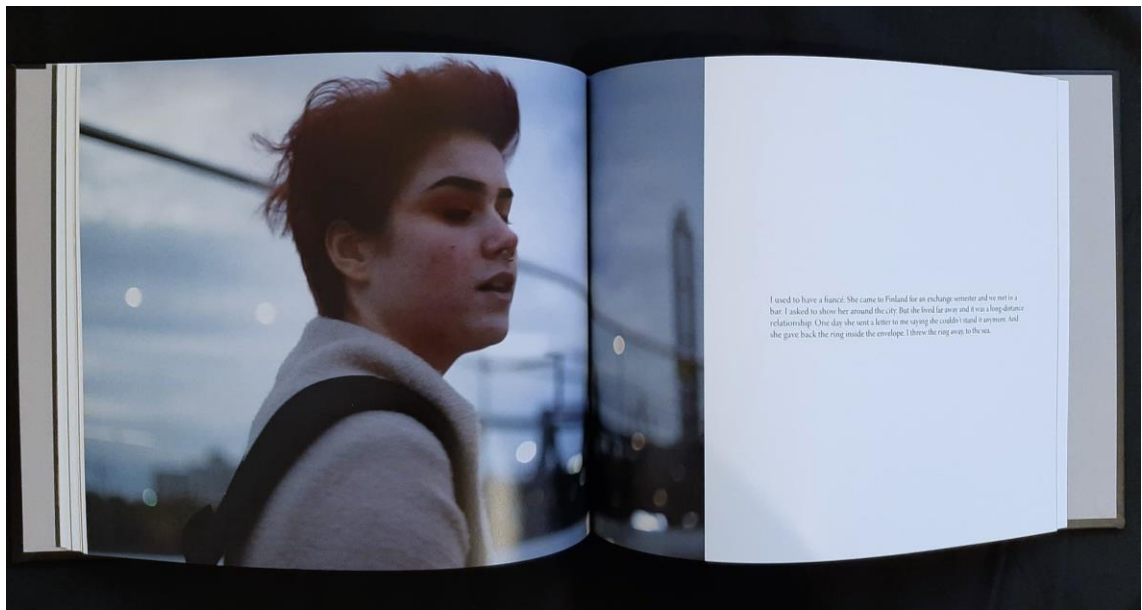
With the characters that have appeared in the first chapter of the book – “men at the door”, I first tried to fit in the groups that were standing at the entrance of the Mäkelänkatu 50 building while talking to them. It felt strange at first as if I were hanging out with a unique group of friends that I have just met. Nonetheless, they have included me in their conversations, and it made me feel unironically welcomed. It was also when I realized that from that moment onwards, I would not think of my subjects as “them” – the strangers that seem to have no connection with me, but as “us” – the unique individuals that welcome me to listen to what they have to share. While standing in front of a building and chat with a group of people was not something I was familiar with, it felt utterly natural at that point.



PICTURE 11: Juha celebrating after submitting his complaint to the Parliament 2020 (Minh Pham)

Juha, the main character in the second chapter of the photobook is a person with a unique background and a charismatic personality. The day I met Juha, he had just got featured on *Ilta-lehti* for his life story. Juha is a highly-educated homosex-

ual Finn who had stayed in South America for over 20 years. He got three university degrees and was doing a Ph.D. at the time we met. Coming home to take care of his ill mother, his registry data and info has been lost and he had a lot of problems with the social security system in Finland. Juha was talkative and have led me to the different paths of Helsinki while telling me how he had been experiencing life as a person without a home, and without a legal identity. His plan was to get involved in politics to change the system from the inside.



PICTURE 12: Jenna's chapter in *At The Other End* 2020 (Minh Pham)

Representing the stories of the youth who experiences homelessness in the *At The Other End* artwork was Jenna. I invited her to lunch as we discussed and shared stories over our Chinese food. After that, we strolled together, as Jenna continued to open up with me and I was taking photos of her. The shift in spirits and openness are visible in the portraits taken of her, as Jenna's facial expressions were not as tighten up as when our appointment first started.

The last chapter of the book was mostly conducted on the premises of the Illusia daycare center. The photos were taken on the days I was volunteering, as I approached different staff members, talked to them, and asked what stories they have to share. All in all, I think I have been able to capture the atmosphere of the staff, the volunteer, the customers, as well as the communal spirits of the space that connect them all.

While interviews are made in different situations, as some were conducted in the daycare center and some were on the streets of Helsinki, the values that I brought to these conversations remained unchangeable. In my opinion, being respectful and considerate to the subjects is the key to successful interviews and photo shooting sessions.

5.2.4 Challenges

The challenges that I have faced during the making of *At The Other End* were rather external, but there were also personal conflicts that I had to overcome. First of all, different cases of violence had happened surrounding the subjects' area, as well as the uncontrolled ongoing coronavirus pandemic at the time this project was first conceptualized. This means taking the art process forward means accepting the precarious risk the project entailed. Moreover, there were opposition ideas from people surrounding me because of the possible uncertainties that can happen when I carry on with the project. Furthermore, I had to come out of my comfort zone as well as unconscious bias in order to proceed with *At The Other End* in the most objective way possible.

Nonetheless, the greatest challenge and reality that I had to face when expanding my artwork was the inability of maintaining my relationship with most of my subjects. This can be explained by the difficulties, struggles, and uncertainties any person who experiences homeless had to deal with in their daily living. First of all, the rough reality that people without a home face is the lack of communication means. Their phones – which are the common communication devices they own can be lost, stolen, or being sold in exchange for drugs. Moreover, they do not have anywhere to stay permanently, which means no one can certainly locate where they are at a specific time. In addition, the subjects' range of emotions and personalities would also be affected by the influence of addictive substances.

For example, after my conversations with two subjects – Esko and Jenna, I truly felt the bonding connection I had with them and would like to invite them to the second part of the *Home* project. They had agreed to join the project as we met, and I also sent multiple emails and given calls to Sininauhasäätiö to ask for their

information. All news I have received from them was nothing. This felt disheartening for me, as at that point I have considered them as new friends to whom I was somehow emotionally attached. Furthermore, the main reason behind my intention to invite the two of them to the second phase of the project, which will be explained in the next chapter, is to do something nice and to create a meaningful memory for them.

5.3 Allan

The second main part of the *Home* artwork is a documentary film exploring the meaning of “home” under the lens of someone who has been experiencing homelessness. The video is 10 minutes long, capturing my subject doing mundane day-to-day activities in the settings of an apartment, as well as sharing his life stories with me and the audience. In the subchapters below, I will further explain and discuss the processes as well as delve into the different theoretical approaches to answering the question: “What is home?”



PICTURE 13: Allan, 2020, still frame from video, Allan enjoying his long-yearned-for Cuban dish (Minh Pham)

5.3.1 Home

In this subchapter, I would examine some distinguished research articles on the different ways to define and conceptualize “home”. Specifically, I will study the three interconnected dimensions of the home theory that were offered by Sixsmith (1986). On the other hand, the subject of this art project was a foreign man coming to live, then to experience homelessness in Finland from a different continent. Therefore, I would discuss Ralph and Staeheli’s (2011) study on the sense-making of home in the migratory context.

Sixsmith (1986) points out that while there is more and more literature on the definition of home, there is little research on the complexity of the concept. According to the author’s quantitative research, 85 percent of the time, the meaning of home does not reflect the physical structures such as houses or any type of building. Home was identified through the personal characteristics as well as the social aspects that are embedded in those architectural structures. Notable, to some of the surveyed people, home was not bounded to physical structures at all. For instance, Sixsmith gave the example of some cases when home was described in a spiritual and religious meaning. Therefore, it is utterly crucial to consider the various forms, either physical or social, a home can have in order to understand its meanings and definitions. (Sixsmith, 1986.)

In addition, Sixsmith offers three different modes of sense-making home, dividing by the dimensions of the personal aspects, the social aspects, and lastly, the physical aspects. Firstly, the personal sphere can be explained as the relationships and attachment between the elements or processes of the self and the physical space. For some, home can be understood as one’s extension of themselves, either subjectively or objectively. Secondly, the social aspect that partially makes a place a home is the co-existence of and interactions with other people. Sixsmith points out that as important as the presence of other individuals is in contributing to the fullness of home, the further significant facet is that home should be the place fostering the enjoyment and leisure of other people’s companionship. For example, a person claiming that a home without the family would not be home. Thirdly, the physical dimension is crucial as it plays the role of structuring the activities and emotions that are correlated with physical forms. Home

can be understood in the spatial and stylistic meanings, but there are great complexities and interrelations between it and the other two. (Sixsmith, 1986.)

On the other hand, Ralph and Staeheli (2011) agree that it is academically accepted that home encompasses multispectral, intimately connected, and overlapping aspects. However, it is useful to embed the frictions between the dimensions of home as mobile, as well as home as stable to each and every existing attribute. In short, migrants' own definitions of home can be complex, as they are both influenced by the routine practices and the daily livings at their place of origin and the migration destination. Ralph's and Staeheli's (2011) research claims that by studying transnational migrants' characteristics, the authors have been able to demonstrate how home is both 'here' and 'there' at the same time.

From analyzing the literature, it can be concluded that the way home is conceptualized and experienced is deeply influenced by social meanings and relationships. To put it another way, one can feel and be homeless not only in terms of lacking a shelter but also in a way that one does not feel any social connection or personal belonging with the physical structures they live in.

5.3.2 Approach

As I began with the second phase of the artwork *Home*, I aimed to take the artistic approach to a deeper level. This means that I imagined my project would be able to translate my subject's mundane activities to a more intimate and even raw heart-to-heart conversation with the audience. That is the reason why I decided to use moving image, a documentary film to be specific, as the medium to capture those moments instead of still images like *At The Other End*.

Bernard (2012) defines a documentary film as the presentation of factual information about real people, places, and events using moving images. The author argues that documentaries can do more than just entertain the viewers. Documentary films can and should demand active engagements from the audience, challenge them to reflect on themselves and what they might want to know more. Along this line was what I hope to achieve with the video part of my artwork: to

push the boundaries, to portray a scenario that can emerge them in, to confound their expectations, and to provoke their thoughts. (Bernard, 2012.)

Nonetheless, similar to *At The Other End*, videography should be considered as the medium to capture a tangible visual product and not the entire artwork. Once again, it took a performance to facilitate and foster engagement and participation of the subject in order to make the artwork successful.

Once again, I defined the key values to upkeep in this project. The most important value is to always have mutual respect and understanding between the artist and the participant. It means that I should be considerate of the participant's background culturally and educationally, as well as his thoughts and feelings. Moreover, the definition of respect also expands to being respectful of the subject's personal space, so that they can have ownership of the space that we were sharing. This aspect is especially relevant to the artwork, as I was asking the participant to make a strange place their own home, and taking the ownership is crucial in that sense.

5.3.3 Artistic process

Firstly, the idea to extend the idea of the *At The Other End* art project into something more individual-focused came naturally to me as an inevitable next step. Therefore, I brainstormed a range of ideas that could have the people who experiencing homelessness as the main subject. Finally, I decided to rent a cozy apartment in Tampere with the purpose to invite my subjects to stay there and do whatever they would like to feel like they are 'at home'.

As I have previously mentioned, I first intended to invite Jenna and Esko – the two people that I had worked with and taken their photographs in the *At The Other End* photobook. However, after multiple attempts of reaching out to them, I could not contact both Jenna and Esko and felt like they had vanished into thin air.

After that, I reached out to Juha, who is also one of the main characters in the photography part of the *Home* project. While Juha was also experiencing homelessness at the time, he was educated, did not have any addiction, and was fighting his way out of homelessness. Juha was not the typical person without a home, so he introduced me to one of his contacts. Juha and I had an appointment to meet with his friend, and to my disappointment, that person who promised to come and who said that he was close to the meeting location did not show up. He disappeared just like the others. At this point, I was frustrated, but Juha came up with the idea of asking his roommate, Allan, to participate in my project.

Allan was then a 38-year-old Cuban man, who only spoke Spanish and some Finnish. He had moved to Finland for over 9 years to stay with his spouse. However, with his divorce, Allan had to face deportation as a legal consequence. He was staying at a shelter for the undocumented people in Vallila, Helsinki.

During the first meeting with Allan, I had Juha translate the project's idea to him. Since I wanted to create the best possible experience for Allan, I asked him to bring the items that feel homey to him. I also asked Allan about his favorite food to make and his favorite type of flower. He wanted to make a Cuban traditional dish that he could not have for a long time, which has rice, pork, and cassava. He loved sunflowers, but it was November at the time and the flower season had ended. I had prepared all the ingredients he requested, along with a bouquet of carnations before our trip to Tampere.

On the shooting and experiencing day, I had to use Google Translate and used the limited Finnish and Spanish vocabularies of mine to communicate with Allan. While the language could be a barrier to get our messages across, it could not take anything away from this experience. By reading the translation of our conversations on our phone screens, Allan told me about his life before and after moving from Havana, Cuba to Finland along the way.

At the rented apartment in Tampere, I did not direct him to do anything specifically but only asked him to do at his pace some of the activities that one would do at home. He first brought out his belongings, which were the sentimental items that

reminded him of Cuba. He put on the shelves the picture frames of his late grandparents, as well as two traditional items that are often used to decorate in the Cuban holidays. Allan laid on the corner of the bedroom a face-shaped rock, called it 'el nino', which means 'the boy', as well as some Cuban coins and toys surrounding the rock.



PICTURE 14: Allan's sentimental items that reminds him of a home 2020 (Minh Pham)

Naturally and instinctively, Allan made himself familiar with the place through the different activities from studying to flower arranging. Especially, I felt that Allan was in his element and it felt like he had been living here for a long time as I saw him cooking the Cuban dish with confidence. He enjoyed that dish and also made a portion for me as dinner. After that, Allan sat down and told me his story, in his mother tongue – Spanish and I could feel the emotions he had.

I tried to wrap up the shooting as early as possible, as I wanted Allan to have more time on his own to rest, and to be comfortable in this apartment which he had just made himself home. Off-camera, I gifted Allan a new coat for the upcoming winter and he genuinely showed his appreciation. Before I left the place, Allan "told" me via Google Translate that he did not have the opportunity to sleep in a

bed for such a long time that he could even die sleeping. When we parted at the train station, Allan once again wrote me a message that he was thankful to join this artwork with me. His gratitude genuinely touched my heart and reaffirmed the true meaning of this project: to create the most memorable and enjoyable experience that I could for my subject.

After that, I considered the different methods to compile and edit the footage I had of Allan. One option was to leave it untouched and unedited, but I eventually chose to edit the video narratively, so that the audience can together listen and watch his life stories simultaneously. I had Juha help me to translate Allan's speech, which in my opinion feels like a dialogue to the audience than a monologue.

5.4 Challenges

The challenges from this project with Allan were on a different spectrum in comparison with the ones I had to face in *At The Other End*. I did not have the resources I would need, both in terms of human, equipment, and monetary. Specifically, I wished I could have more crew members to support with technical aspects of the project such as lightings or cinematography. Without the extra help, I had to alone direct or foster the atmosphere as well as the conversation, while taking care of the technical details during the shooting. Moreover, I wished I could rent the apartment for a longer period of time for Allan to really enjoy himself.

This was utterly a significant challenge, as pre-mentioned in the reflections of the *At The Other End* project, videography is merely the medium to capture the result of a performance. Distractions while attempting to curate and facilitate the social art processes with Allan were something I had to accept, knowing that it is inherently the utmost crucial aspect of my project.

Most importantly, none of these hurdles have stopped Allan and me from participating in this project together. Interestingly, one of the things I thought can be an obstacle was not one. We did not share a common language but the gestures,

body language, and technology have helped us to break the barriers and to share intimate moments together.

5.5 Summary

One would argue that by offering Allan a condition that he could not afford in order to make an artwork out of it, I am exploiting his situation and acting from a superior position giving him a favor, which goes against my ethical approach to the whole artwork. I could agree and disagree at the same time. To elaborate, it is important to consider carefully the notion of exploitation here. It is a fact that the experience was too short and merely insignificant to the daily living of my subject from the social justice viewpoint. However, as previously mentioned in Santiago Sierra's chapter concerning artistic exploitation, it creates an emphasis on the ubiquity and inescapability of the situation while motivates the audience to reevaluate their moral compass.

In addition, I did engage in various activist activities in an unexpected manner. For instance, I find myself following Juha for a couple of days to support him with his election campaign to the municipal election. Specifically, his agenda was to advocate for the homeless and for the democratic equality of this demographic.

Reflecting from the current standpoint back to when I first started this project, I think I was more naively and easily fall for the neoliberalism trap that the cultural policies promoted: a diverse society of mutually respectful human, and that art needs to consider and engage with the excluded minorities. On the other hand, I learned that being respectful to a homeless person's past and the current situation is not synonymous with the ignorance of poor political policies and authorities performance in supporting them.

Another takeaway is that art sometimes oversimplifies the social problems. For example, giving a shelter or architectural structure for the people who are experiencing homelessness is not the ultimate solution, as home is more than just physical. Thus, the more socially sympathetic approach should be considering each and every's individual background, social connections and routines.

Asking Willie Baronet on how to work with the people experiencing homelessness, he re-emphasized the vitality of being respectful of people, as well as their wishes and boundaries. The artists also need to acknowledge their own intentions, methods and thus recalibrating their moral compass accordingly. It is also important to reflect upon your “blind spots”, which are difficult to recognize, but always exist in any of one’s approaches (Baronet, 2021)

The last reflection I would like to add is that artists should factor in the unpredictability of people who experiencing homelessness in the art-realizing process. Moreover, emotional attachment is a double-edged sword art material, as it engages the artist in the relationship with their subjects, but it is at the same time romanticizes them and creates a biased mentality.

6 DISCUSSION

Socially engaged art through history has challenged the notion of passive spectatorship and strived to liberate it from the ascendant ideology of consumerism, capitalism, and dictatorship by activating the audience participation. Artists in social practice have always been dealing with social injustice: through the gestures of constructiveness towards social changes and impacts, or through the deconstruction of exploitation and unethical approach. (Bishop 2012, 275.)

The merging of social and artistic judgment does not happen as they require different criteria. There are two directions of artistic strategy from artists, curators, and critics. One follows the 'good moral' and the consideration that art's responsibility is to intervene whenever social agencies fail. Its judgments are based on humanist ethics which prefer the solutions, even short-term rather than exposing contradict social truths. The other sector of artmakers, curators, and critics' judgment is based on a sensible response to the work. Ethics now falls into the dimension of vagueness as art continuously throws the audience and their established moral value into question, and by doing so it reveals the social contradiction. (Bishop 2012, 275, 276.) In the case studies of this thesis, these approaches were illustrated by works of Willie Baronet, Michael Rakowitz for the first, and Santiago Sierra for the latter. Artists often fall short in trying to balance the conflict of social discourse and artistic discourse in the social practice and their methodology naturally gravitates towards either of them. It can be concluded by art critic Claire Bishop (2012), that "art relationship to the social is either underpinned by morality or it is underpinned by freedom".

In Western countries, the exponential growth of participatory art has a lot to do with the neoliberalism political agendas. Artists stand against neoliberal capitalism, however, the value through their participatory practice in fact indirectly contributes to the neoliberalism's current structures without their recognition. (Bishop 2012, 276.) Nevertheless, the political discourse of participatory art in society is not to convert people like propaganda but to expose the ethical, political contradictions in reality, in which the representation of subjects plays a crucial part.

Without the intention and acknowledgment of social practice's characteristics beforehand, I made *Home* a participatory work with the attempt of raising awareness about homelessness and the uniqueness of each individual participating in the project. It aims to generate a sense of understanding and empathy from the audience experiencing the work. It is clear that by going this direction, *Home* follows the path of constructing social change by exposing reality. In this type of project, empathetic identification is crucial, since it motivates us to think beyond our own living experience and form a more compassionate connection with others (Bishop 2012, 25). The work implies mutual respect and the collaboration process as its core values. In addition to photography and video work as a medium, communication and social interaction can be considered the tool constructing *Home*.

To apply art critique on *Home*, it is important to utilize the aesthetic regime suggested by Bishop (2012) which is dictated by the 'ethical regime of images and 'representative regime of art' (Bishop 2012, 28, 29). In other words, the criticism is based on the ethical consideration of the work in the collaboration process: how collaborations were undertaken and whether there are hints of exploitations that failed to represent the subjects. For these ethical questions, *Home* is fully representing my ideal process of collaboration in participatory work by respectfully approaching the participants and giving them enough space and time to be themselves. However, it is unavoidable for the participants not to be fully represented in terms of character traits, as I was not intended to do so. In the artistic process, I was completely aware of my position in speaking with the less fortunate individuals but also tried to avoid self-censoring that their position is lower, or their behaviors may be 'weird', 'abnormal'. In fact, some of the conversations were incredibly enlightening that I felt connected with and educated by them.

Like any other artists that work with the community-based collaborative projects, it is likely for me to expand the artwork further in the future.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Kaleidoscopers 2021 Exhibition Website.

<https://kaleidoscopers2021.com/>



Appendix 2. Minh Pham's Website.

<https://www.minhppg.com/>

