Discussion Questions
01.19.10

Tasillo, Mary.
“Context Is King: The Democratic Multiple in the Digital Age.”

(1) How does Tasillo define the democratic multiple?

The idea of the democratic multiple is that one produces hundreds or thousands of copies of a work that are available cheaply or for free, removing economic access barriers to art and information… To me, the democratic multiple suggests an art practice that is about communicating, and ideally communicating with more than an elite audience, well versed in the realm of fine arts. (28)

(2) How does Tasillo respond to the assertion of the myth of the democratic multiple?

Lippard points out that making a book materially available bears no connection to the accessibility of its content. (28)

All too often we overlook the roles of both content and reader experience in our assessment of the democratic multiple. (28)

(3) Ask yourself this question when formulating ideas for your Mid-Term Project.

Is there aesthetic or social commentary, a narrative or political mission, that justifies disseminating the work so widely, propagating an idea rather than a brand identity? (29)

(4) How does the contemporary democratic multiple function in Tasillo’s eyes? Which of her examples resonate most with you?

Given other modes of exchange, need we identify the democratic multiple as open edition work, as clive Philpott does?, or might less in fact be more in our media-saturated society? Does the mode of the democratic multiple tie to the ideas inherent in the project, and how might one creatively interpret the concept of democratic multiple to encourage engagement and dialogue, reaching people rather than page counts? (29)

If you want to reach people, in the broadest sense, the printed page still holds sway. And narrative, a form closely tied to book format, is a powerful force and tool. (29)

Tract House… Here, the role of artist is that of the facilitator, using what capital is at her disposal to give voice to other citizens and encourage dialogue—an information age Robin Hood if you will. (30)

Kerbloom… The format for these works is affordable, well-designed, portable, and, compared to digital documentation, less traceable—something of concern to activists. (31)
Migratory Book…The books are meant to literally enact this movement. The receiver of a book is instructed to read it, contribute a response to the question “what connects us?” to the project’s blog[^1], and then pass the book along to someone else… [The blog] serves to track the book as well as being the site of the discussion. (32)

While these works don’t fall under my favorite “cheaper than chai” price point, they do facilitate the spread of an art form that is free to view, as well as supporting its audience as creators and participants in public discourse. (33)

Sure, the artist book is an elite object, housed in the Special Collections section of the library or viewed in the gallery, but does that mean that we should play exclusively to the bibliophiles? Or, instead, should we use the familiarity of the book form as a springboard from which to connect to our communities? (33)

The projects discussed here offer models where the artist acts as facilitator, conversation partner, witness, storyteller, and coordinator. This model offers alternative modes of exchange outside of spend-and-consume capitalism. (33)

These visions of how the book can function in contemporary society are in line with both activism and interventionist practices in fine art. They offer models for how the artist making books can maintain relevance not only in the present world, but in the world of 2019, to return to Superstruct. (34)

You can’t hack a handmade book. Its power will not fade when the power goes out, nor if your computer is sadly outdated. (34)

In an era where many are more attached to their iPod than to where they put their feet, book artists are utilizing the multiple to elicit meaningful interaction amongst friends and strangers, bringing us back to an analog version of community—one which is necessary to our survival as a race. (34)