

## Tools for Change

Timothy Collins  
Carnegie Mellon University

[tcollins@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:tcollins@andrew.cmu.edu)

We will primarily examine and discuss the existing literature in the social-visual arts. For comparison, we will touch upon the areas of performance studies, radical planning and emergent community process in areas of radical ecology.

Recently, social-art theorists and historians (Becker, Kwon, Kester, Lippard, Miles) have begun to systematically explicate the range of philosophies, theories, and criticism relevant to contemporary visual arts practice. Fundamental questions include the relationship between artists and non-artists, as well as the relationship between artists and the institutionalized entities, the systems that enable or constrain change within an urban setting. We will consider the post-colonial critique of advocacy based arts in relationship to internal and externally defined community, attempting to frame a direction for practice that is responsible to this cogent, but problematical theoretical position. We will look into the literatures of planning, political action and theater, seeking theories and applications of radical practice, those creative programs that seek social change. Initial readings and discussions in this area suggest that the relationship to ideas like subject-object relationships are more fluid in the theater literature than they are in the visual arts. Between the three areas, visual art, performance and planning there are interesting questions about the inter-relationship between autonomy, efficacy and impact over time.

In the closing pages of this paper, we will extract specific philosophical ideas, theories and practical tools useful to artists interested in the postindustrial period of late capital with its subsequent impact upon the resources of the inner (microbiological) and outer (ecological) commons as a material and intellectual condition.