

Templates for Activism: Creative Convergences in Feminist Art and Law

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Abstract

Community arts are an underexamined approach to creative social advocacy that catalyzes a shift in perceptions about social issues through cultural, symbolic and artistic means. One example, *Templates for Activism*, forges new geographies between feminist jurisprudence, feminist art and community arts practices, and in doing so seeks new ways to foster the work of feminist law.

Résumé

Les arts communautaires sont une approche de revendication sociale créative qui catalyse un changement dans les perceptions en ce qui a trait aux questions sociales par l'entremise de méthodes culturelles, symboliques et artistiques. Un exemple, *Templates for Activism*, forge de nouvelles géographies entre la jurisprudence féministe, l'art féministe et les pratiques des arts communautaires, et de ce fait, recherche de nouveaux moyens de favoriser le travail du droit féministe.

Six of them enter the room. Slowly. Solemnly. They are wearing black judges' robes. The guttural, atonal bleat of a baritone sax pipes them toward the fire-charred "Table of Experience." They navigate through the fictitious courtroom, past the maze of tiles marked with litigious language that dominates the centre of the room. They don the ceremonial "Aural Headdresses." Then they stop to face the audience. These justices are about to preside over Hearings at the Rape Maze.

"Sticks and stones can break your bones...But words will never hurt you. HAH!!" Three of the women in black sing back defiantly, "No, no, no-o-o-o. She...said...no-o-o." They continue calling these phrases back and forth, varying rhythmically and melodically, replicating the poetics of a defense lawyer and rape trial complainant. There are paper-white sticks overlaying the maze, bone-like documents bearing a body of statements from feminist legal scholars and human rights sources on the subject of rape (Figure 13). Performers stoop and collect the bone-sticks, one by one approaching the empty Table of Experience, reading the phrases aloud, ceremoniously placing the sticks on the Table of Experience, amassing them into a feminist theory nest. *cj fleury* is the last to approach the table and in the final gesture lifts off her Aural Headdress and draws from it an egg-shaped globe fully formed from the head of feminist scholars, like Athena springing fully formed from the head of Zeus. The egg-globe is placed in the nest to be cradled in feminist knowledge.

This performance of Hearings at the Rape Maze in Ottawa in the spring of 2002 is one component

of the larger, ongoing project titled *Templates for Activism*. Community artist cj fleury and feminist legal scholar Dr. Elizabeth Sheehy initiated *Templates for Activism* in the spring of 1999. They intended it as a series of templates, models to be repeated, modified and added to. At the time of publication there are four *Templates*; each *Template* has anywhere from one to eight components within. Many of the projects described in this article have taken place in the Ottawa area between 1999 and 2003, however the initiative is ongoing, open ended, and receptive to new additions as opportunities arise. Dozens of individuals in the feminist law and feminist art communities have contributed to various phases of the project. *Templates for Activism* serves as an example of an approach to creative social movement building called "community arts practices."

At the time I met fleury, one of the two originators of *Templates for Activism*, I had completed a degree in Fine Arts, I was working with the student movement, and was preparing to undertake graduate work in Sociology. Though I felt passionately about the arts, I did not see many of the artists in my community engaging with the social potential I thought art could have. It was at this juncture in my artistic, academic and political awareness that fleury introduced me to community arts practices.

A community arts project typically involves a professional artist working with a non-arts community to develop an artistic language for expressing the community's concerns, often in the service of social justice. The community arts process is consciously social. It assembles members of a community around a social cause, reconfigures social metaphors, constructs social experiences, attempting to catalyze a gestalt shift in participants and viewers. Community arts practices aim at fostering social advocacy by engaging individuals and institutions, participants and viewers, in a process designed to alter their perceptual frameworks in respect

to social issues and in respect to recognizing themselves as artistic producers and creators.

The term "community arts" describes a variety of collective artistic practices, encompassing many styles and mediums of creating. In fact, there is no one medium or style that links community arts practices. Community arts is an approach, not a style. What draws together different art practices under this title is the community arts methodology of collective, democratic art-making in the service of social justice. The many types of participatory collaborations that characterize community arts practices have flourished for decades all over the world.

Very little attention has been paid in North America to community arts in social criticism and even less in the sociology of art, which often includes a wider swath of cultural activities to their subject of analysis than does a field such as art criticism or art history. There are a variety of likely reasons for this omission: the heavy influence of Durkheim in the development of American sociology as a social science who, unlike others in the French tradition, left little space for art in his conception of sociology (Zolberg 1990, 38); the tendency for community arts projects to be less involved with arts institutions and more involved with local social service organizations, either being ignored by arts institutions or circumventing them; and, the tendency of community arts projects to be publicized among their own specialized networks.

Community arts projects such as *Templates for Activism* are meaningful social interventions that warrant closer examination by those interested in social critique. First, scholars studying the sociology of art recognize that art-making is situated in a social context involving a collaboration of multiple actors that interacts with social institutions. Community arts epistemology is reflexive about its social, collective nature. Second, many sociologists point out the social constructedness of art

(Becker 1982; Bourdieu 1984; Wolff 1983), and the ways in which art is involved in broader social processes, such as strategic games of class distinction (Bourdieu 1984). Community arts make use of the socially embedded quality of art and of the symbolic to alter the social field, particularly to advance social justice issues. The example in this article, *Templates For Activism*, plays with images of embodiment and linguistic devices, in much the same way lawyers manipulate discourse design in a trial, to re-present experiences of legal language in bold visual metaphors: as a maze of tiles to be navigated, as a chef's knife slicing and dicing, as a disassembled feminist body, as a corset of straight pins.

When community arts projects represent social issues, they acknowledge a two-fold sense of representation - as something both aesthetic and political in every instance. In *Templates for Activism*, legal poetics are inseparable from gender politics in legal representation; they are gendered aesthetics of language and performance in the courtroom. While community arts acknowledges the political/aesthetic coupling, convincing others in the art world and in the legal system of the necessity of pairing them can meet with resistant attitudes.

With rare exceptions, the "art world" (Becker 1982), including those who create, produce, administrate, sell, deal, regularly attend and critique art, considers artwork valuable when it is property that can be owned, when it is an "original" and when it perpetuates the soon to be passé myth of individual artistic genius. Community arts rejects these notions of value in art, differing epistemologically and methodologically from mainstream arts practices, presenting a foil and a potential challenge to the exclusiveness of the high-art world. Unlike conventional art, community arts projects do not lose their value when they are repeated. The *Templates for Activism* are

meant to be patterns of a collective creative process to be distributed and reanimated, purposely encouraging revolution through repetition.

Since the inception of *Templates for Activism* in 1999, its subsequent development has been rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), sharing common roots, but arising in different places at different times. The intricate root system of the *Templates* developed from fleury and Sheehy's previous activist work and the histories of the disciplines they are immersed in. fleury has worked for many years with a variety of different communities to "midwife" their collective expression and build community capacity through creative process. Sheehy is a tenured professor who has taught courses on criminal law, criminal procedure and women in the law from a feminist perspective in the Faculty of Law at University of Ottawa for ten years. Her research focus has been equality theory and rape-related laws as well as the legal challenges and defense of battered women who murder in self-defense. *Templates for Activism* is the fruition of the years fleury and Sheehy spent connecting the communities of feminist art and feminist law.

Community arts practices, feminist art and feminist law were each catalyzed in the creative ferment of 1960s social movement politics. The women's liberation movement at that time affected the growing political awareness for women's issues in the arts and in the legal system. Community arts has been a loosely-based movement of arts practices and practitioners with similar aims and approaches. It is difficult to point to a beginning of community arts because it has not documented its own history. However, both British (Kelly 1984, 9-14) and American (Cohen-Cruz 2002, 1) sources suggest the late 1960s as a nascence of community arts. It grew up as part of grassroots social movements, in a culture of political activity that aimed at direct democracy and the anti-institutional sentiment of land art. Community arts

has always been more aligned with the sentiment of institutional alternatives and the interests in social change of grassroots groups than the mainstream art world. It is a bit of a distant cousin to the "fine arts," with a different worldview and different methods.

When feminist art and art theory came of age in the 1970s, women artists asserted their right to be included in prominent museums (Raven 1988, 5) and publications and to have their work recognized as equal to that of male artists. Feminist art was not and is not simply art made by women, but rather art that makes a political statement about the conditions of sexism and oppression that women face. Examples of feminist art include such well-known pieces as: Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party*, a 200-woman collective piece featuring a table set with triangular vulva adorned plates; Jana Sterbak's *Meat Dress*, a social commentary on the objectification of women's bodies by men, constructed with wire and Grade A Alberta beef; along with the not so well-known work of thousands of feminist artists whose creative resistance recognizes diverse women's issues and experiences. Performance art hit a peak in the 1970s, when women brought the bodily experience back into a formalist art world that had previously been dominated by anti-representational minimalism and abstract expressionism (Wheeler 2003).

Feminist law is based in the fight for women's rights in systems that have historically excluded them. The feminist legal community is comprised of many different individuals and associations who approach law from feminist perspectives including activists, lawyers, law students, professors, judges, social agency workers, those who have been abused and individuals who have been touched by the androcentric bias of law. Feminist law brings together those who work in these different fields with the aim of eventually changing patriarchal legal systems. Feminist jurisprudence critiques principles, practices, patriarchal institutions and hierarchical social

systems that support sexism and the subordination of women (Lacey 1998, 3). Feminist legal critique is at the same time theoretical and practical. It is concerned not just with pointing out, clarifying and explicating problems with current social and legal arrangements, but with recommending alternatives and effecting transformation (Conahan 2000, 375).

After decades of women's legal struggles in Canada, the 1970s was a period when feminists in the legal community could describe themselves as women's rights advocates, women's liberationists, and egalitarians, but their arguments were too new to the courts and law journals to be accepted as valid. At this time, feminist inroads in the courts were characterized by the concept of "equality" (Charmallas 2003, 17). It would not be until the 1980s that the term "equality" would be revised from a notion of "identical treatment" into recognizing that women have different needs than men have due to their different positions to the social relationship in question. Issues involving pregnancy and sexual violence, such as rape, sexual harassment, domestic violence and pornography, were issues added to the primarily economic concentrations of the 1970s. Canadian rape law reform in the early 1980s is one of the examples of the significant influence of legal reform advocates (Tang 1998, 258). In 1983, amendments were made to the criminal code in Canada: the word "rape" was changed to "sexual assault" to include a wider variety of sexual activities and reclassify rape as a type of assault; the examination of a victim's sexual history was prohibited; and progress was made towards criminalizing marital rape. The late 1980s and the 1990s saw a trend towards critiquing the notion of women as a class and towards addressing issues of diversity among women. Identity continues to be an important concern in the new millennium. Connections between local feminist legal struggles and the growing global feminist movement link feminist law to

international rights movements of the late 1990s and the early twenty-first century (Charmallas 2003, 18).

Multiple projects that comprise Templates for Activism bring together members of the feminist law community, feminist artists and women who are rape survivors. By establishing "a flow of artistic and political literacy" (fleury 2002, 89) between artists and the feminist law community, the project aims to negotiate aspects of prejudice and subordination of women in the legal system to confront systemic representations that impede substantive legal equality and to contribute to the movement for substantive equality in the law and in the community. In fleury's words, the point is "to place feminist art into the many spaces of law; places where the research, analysis, defense, education and public action occur, thereby using symbolic means to give sustenance to women working in such sites" (fleury 2005a, 1).

At the same time that community arts projects such as Templates for Activism strive to encourage social and legal transformation, they also challenge dominant notions of what "Art" is, who can make art, and the function of art. In the art world, the myth of the lone, usually male, genius creator still prevails over art involving shared creation and feminist critique. Arbiters of the "fine arts" often deem as propaganda those artistic endeavours that are overtly political. Almost all creative projects directed by laypeople involved in social institutions outside the institutions sanctioned as properly artistic (recognized galleries, theatres, arts councils, arts granting institutions, critics, curators and educators) are not seriously considered by the "art" world.

Community arts defies many of the taken-for-granted contingencies in the art world and in the general public. Commonly-held assumptions that community arts work to refute include: the idea that the only person who can produce art of any merit is a lone

individual specially trained as an artist; that art is essentially a commodity to be bought and sold; and that creating art is a leisure activity of privileged individuals. Instead, community arts present a model for art that is self-consciously socially constructed and immersed, collectively created and owned, and part of the labour of social justice struggles. Community arts propose a wider sense of art's social efficacy than the politics and economy of conventional art allows.

Since "community arts" differs epistemologically from what is usually considered "fine arts," it differs methodologically as well. Community arts methodology aspires to a democratic, process-centered, community development approach. This approach can be compared with what is known in the social sciences as "participant action research" or PAR (McTaggart 1997). Heavily influenced by Paulo Friere (1970) and the popular education movement, PAR aims to bring together theory and reflection with constructive action to develop practically-oriented knowledge for emancipatory purposes, articulating pressing social issues and the well-being of persons and communities. PAR is based in a participatory worldview, involving those who may be affected by the outcomes of research in decision-making aspects of the research process. It is often used in development research with disadvantaged communities (Reason and Bradbury 2001, 1).

Likewise, community artists often align themselves with groups that have experienced or are experiencing social disadvantage. Templates for Activism brings together the feminist law and feminist arts communities who have historically been marginal groups to the dominant "malestream" knowledge production in their disciplines. Unlike conventional processes where action is usually considered a separate endeavour from research, participatory processes such as PAR and community arts integrate research and action in a combined process that involves repeating cycles of

preparation, action, examination, reflection, reaction and so on (Kemmis and McTaggart 1981). The most immediately noticeable difference between community arts and PAR is that the results of the community arts process take an artistic form. Using this process of collaborative, practical, participatory methodology, community arts projects such as Templates for Activism attempt to represent communities creatively from within.

Templates for Activism acknowledges representation as both an aesthetic and apolitical act. All depictions, visual or verbal or otherwise, are engaged in the political positioning of individuals and institutions (Bourdieu 1984). The nature of representation is inextricably two-fold, both aesthetic and political. This is evident in the very definition of "representation," which according to the Oxford English Dictionary includes:

1. the action of speaking or acting on behalf of someone or the state of being represented;
2. the description or portrayal of someone or something in a particular way;
3. the depiction of someone or something in a work of art;
4. a picture or model or other depiction of someone or something; or
5. a mental state or concept regarded as corresponding to a thing perceived.

(Soanes and Stevenson 2003)

Neither the aesthetic nor political aspects can be realized without the other. Depictions always speak on someone's behalf, while all portrayals necessarily involve a medium and an aesthetic. Often in the various disciplinary uses of representation one of the aspects of representation, either political or aesthetic, is used in a way that eclipses the other. This divide can act to obscure the interests that the neglect serves. This is highlighted when a community arts project brings the

aesthetic to the political and the political to the aesthetic.

Templates for Activism joins the dual meanings of aesthetics/politics that are often separated in regards to the arts and to law. Usually, artistic representation tends to be understood almost entirely in the aesthetic dimension, while legal representation is generally thought of in the second dimension, speaking on behalf of someone. Legal definitions of representation minimize the aesthetic aspects, focusing on the political. The entry under "representation" from Black's Law Dictionary serves as an example of how fundamental this aesthetic exclusion is: "1) a presentation of fact made to induce someone to act, or 2) the instance of standing for or action on behalf of another" (Garner 1999). As the definition illustrates, the art and science of a system of judicial administration is imagined without reference to a system of aesthetics.

The proposal that art is a powerful vehicle for politicized social engagement challenges the current economy of the fine art system which confines art to the following uses: entertainment; design; objects in which to endow notions of beauty; a marker of social class distinction (Bourdieu 1984); objects for individual meditation; and vehicles for capitalist expansion through notions such as "cultural enterprises," "cultural tourism" and "community economic development" (fleury 2005b). The Templates projects struggle against conventions of art institutions and conventional paradigms of art-making in order to take art seriously as a means of political representation. They reorder the priorities for art, promoting its socio-political use to a position equal to or above its "aesthetic objectness." Raven (1993, xv) suggests that this reordering is necessary to unseat the dominance of style over functional possibilities and to reanimate the endeavour of art-making as a communicative instrument.

Community art projects attempting to mount

serious social critique and programs of change are often quickly shut down when they are seen to be different from "real art." The labels "art therapy" and "arts and culture" act to distinguish practices that engender community development or community expression through artistic means from the primary business of art-making. The confining boundaries of conventional art can present difficulties in advancing community arts endeavours. Lack of funding can cripple projects when they are labeled as propaganda. Large, collective, critical projects, such as Templates, are difficult to actualize when they do not fit into the funding parameters of the fine art institutional systems. Opportunities to create the large, multiphase, polymorphic project that fleury and Sheehy have aspired to were restricted in the beginning by the initially narrow vision of arts funding bodies that were unable to comprehend what a "feminist law community" is and to accept the proposition of the feminist law community functioning in an artistic partnership (fleury 2002, 90).

Community art challenges the traditional paradigm of art-making since it declares itself a viable creative process that is political rather than "neutrally" aesthetic, multiple rather than original, collectively authored and intended to be repeated, rather than indulging the cult of the original. In light of the denial of the representation of political interests in art and art in the political positioning in the social, the Templates projects endeavour to bridge the gulf separating representation in art and law.

Legal discourse, as a body of rules and principles governing the affairs of a community, can be experienced as bodiless, engaging only the mind and language in the letter of the law, separating it from the bodies of community members it intended to serve. There has been a dearth of discussion of the female body in law, according to legal scholar Thérèse Murphy. In her opinion, the recent separation of gender from sex

in legal discourse has led to this omission, possibly as much as the previous conflation did (Murphy 1997). At the same time many laws continue to serve to regulate the female body, through legislation on sex and reproduction, child care, workers' rights, sex work, and health.

Several of the artworks in Bridging Visions/Template Two, exhibited at the 2002 National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL) 14th Biennial Conference, entitled "Women, the Family and the State," provided a space to articulate women's bodies in law. There, the female body was exposed and concealed, in pain and in pleasure, subject and object, young and older, in the public and private spheres, passing, slipping, immersed, entangled in the places and procedures where it is legally governed. Audrey Churgin's audio piece invited the audience to physically engage with the artwork, to listen to music and poetic text about children and child rights on a series of brilliant pink telephones placed on matching café tables. Gale Kell's wide painting of a full-figured, nude, female back was juxtaposed with the concealment offered by a body girdle embedded with thousands of straight pins. Kathy Gillis' sculptural installation articulated the transgression and oppression of a personal and political Falun Gong body. Cindy Stelmackowich's punctured legal dictionary cut and floated its phrases into a bulbous glass vessel below, examining the ways that bodies become subjects and objects of legal regulation. Ngoc Tuyen Dang's installation of light and shadow upon demolished drywall reflected the presence of immigrant women's labour against its legal and social concealment (fleury 2002, 89-93).

Several of the collaborations in Templates proffer the experience of the body within the context of law, providing an aesthetic space to express the intersection of the sensory and corporeal with the legal system when it may be a disadvantage to do so in the

courts. For example, there is an ongoing debate on how to best legally represent rape victims' experience of sexual assault in rape trial cases. Two of the options are to focus on the violence of rape primarily as assault, downplaying the experience of the sexual nature of the crime (Brownmiller 1975; Clark and Lewis 1977; Davis 1984), or to foreground the sexual element of the assault, patriarchy as a significant factor in the violence of the crime. The former strategy has the advantage of discouraging the "second rape" (Madigan & Gamble 1989). This refers to a common experience of the complainant as she struggles against the defense lawyer's attack on her sexual demeanor. This is the established tactic of raising doubts about the guilt of the accused when the complainant is not the "perfect innocent" rape victim. This approach has been successful in helping to obtain convictions, but it can deny the especially patriarchal sexual violence of the assault, as manifested in, for example, the inability of many victims to engage in consensual sex after the rape. To focus on the sexual aspect of rape allows for the prominent articulation of women's experience of sexual trauma, but it can lead down the slippery slope of having her sexual experience used against her in court. During the performance of Hearings at the Rape Maze, participants are free to gather, speak out and represent aspects of sexual violence and bodily sensation, confusion, contradiction, messiness, emotion and a wide range of experiences of the rape and the trial without the terror of having all this used against them. Participants in Hearings at the Rape Maze manoeuvre through the floor maze of legal-linguistics. It is overlaid with bone-white sticks, parts of a dislocated feminist body of knowledge, inscribed with feminist legal, social and rights-based dissent. Performers labour over the bone-sticks, stooping, gathering, and moving these implements of feminist knowledge to the charred Table of Experience, enacting the task of navigating the dizzying, maze-like legal trial

with embodied feminist consciousness. The performance transforms the legal site of re-violation into a visionary space of acknowledgement and shelter. The performance adds new gestures and images to the discourse of feminist legal emancipatory struggle.

Scholars engaged in the social and linguistic study of courtroom talk reveal the ways that poetic devices are used to dominate rape victims during trials (Matoesian 1993; Taslitz 1999). fleury and Sheehy's work in Template Two addresses the power play of poetic strategies of lawyers courtroom talk, reconfiguring the words and devices used in order to unveil and renegotiate social and courtroom power relations. Matoesian (1993) points out that unlike "natural conversation" which involves turn-taking and the continental legal system, which promotes unbroken narratives from people on the stand, the Anglo-American legal system encourages lawyers to syntactically manipulate the discourse design of the trial. Patriarchal power is reproduced in the rape trial through lawyers' practiced techniques of dominating question and answer sequences: interrupting victim's responses; structuring sequences of objections by the prosecution lawyer, which allows the defense attorney to repeat and rephrase their question to punctuate it; regulating the duration and distribution of silence for emphasis and clarity; controlling the initiation, transition, pursuit and abandonment of questioning (1993). This often works to champion the loss of a complainant's credibility in court.

Several of the Templates critique the discursive absurdities and "Black Letter" realities of rape trial prosecutions. The call-answer series in Hearings at the Rape Maze mimic the poetics of the question and answer sequences of rape trials. Performers play with multiple linguistic devices by using the words in phrases. For example, the children's sing-song proverb, "Sticks and stones can break your bones, but words will never hurt you" and the imperative response, "No!" was

developed into a melodic call-answer sequence: "Sticks and stones!," "No, no, no-o-o-o," "Words! Will never hurt you," "She...said...no-o-o |."

"You have to whack the complainant hard" and "You have to slice and dice her," declares a scrolling text emblazoning the screen in the Template Four video, *Slice*. In this MTV-type short video, these defence strategies combine with a frenetic red onion chopping scene to create one of the most jarring images of rape trial experience in the video. Law students walk with the Supreme Court of Canada on the horizon, balancing key legal tomes on their heads. Later in the video, a law student tap dances on a precarious ledge of this federal court house, her arms weighed down with stacks of law books, calling to a monumental Veritas, "There's so much more!" The stone statue of Veritas is her only witness as a low British voice calls back "The whole truth and nothing but the truth!"

Appearing like the words from a Scrabble game, the Paper Rape Maze of Template Three is a small, poster-sized replica of the large floor maze of tiles on the floor in the Hearings at the Rape Maze performance. These identical mazes contain words and phrases used in rape trial proceedings, some complex and unfamiliar to many, such as "actus reus" and "mens rea," others such as "promiscuous" and "mischievous" are all too familiar reminders of the ways women are labeled when they seek justice against their attackers. The Paper Rape Mazes are printed on neon yellow paper referencing the yellow tape used for danger zones and crime scenes. Additions to the maze and other responses written on them are encouraged.

Like many aspects of the Templates, the Paper Rape Mazes are designed for re-imagining the same projects in different places and times. They can be reproduced at minimal cost and are meant to be easily and freely distributed. Participants are encouraged to write a word or phrase in response before posting the

mazes in contested spaces or women's safe spaces in order to perpetuate action and reaction. Many of the materials for the performance piece are low-cost and easy to access, such as the use of papier mâché and the body.

Reproducibility and repetition are key to the design of Templates for Activism because the Templates projects acknowledge that social change is usually the result of a numerous individuals coming together in processes involving many acts of defiance against oppression, not the heroic act of a single individual. The Templates are reproducible models for engaging with and shifting people's perceptions about feminist legal issues, encouraging social and legal change. Through numerous re-enactments of the creative process, Templates for Activism seeks to comment on social and political conditions and enact change. In the process of building community narratives, community arts projects such as Templates for Activism endeavour to debunk myths about the great men of change, to create spaces in the composition of history and law for the struggles and gains of women and other historically marginalized communities. The Templates encourage repetition in a way that demotes the importance of the "original" author and the "original" art work, challenging people to question the purposes at work in venerating the "original" and the authorship of art by the sole, inspired individual. By perpetuating a Template as art, the project takes a position on the post-modern debate surrounding the nature of the "original" and its relation to being. The theoretical underpinnings for repetition in the Templates projects favour a Deleuzian model of repetition as a vehicle for the production of difference (Deleuze 1994), rather than the more common Baudrillardian notion of repetition in which signifiers¹ without a signified nihilistically circulate simulacra as empty copies of copies (Baudrillard 1984). The Templates projects are far more Deleuzian in the sense of creating

a difference through acts of repetition; they assert themselves as something new each time they are performed. To illustrate how this works, Brian Massumi (1987) gives the example of a chameleon lizard that appears to be similar to the leaf it stands upon. The chameleon does not attempt to "be" the leaf, it only looks like the leaf. The chameleon camouflages itself for its own subversive purposes, to protect itself from potential threats and to perpetuate itself. This example serves to demonstrate that things which appear to be the same do not try to take on the being of the other. Each representation has an original existence with a different potential from other similar-looking representations. The presence of the simulacrum points out the error in assuming that there is a copy and an original; rather, each thing is different and has different potentials. Repetition of the Templates projects does not create empty copies of the same, rather it encourages its own subversive purpose, feminist legal and social revolution.²

Developing the potential to create "a difference" is probably the most central principle in community arts activism. When there is repeated engagement with a Templates object or process, the aim is to intensify the potentials for social transformation. Templates for Activism subscribes to the proposition that it is through the repetition of small acts that differences take form. The Templates project was inaugurated to set precedents, encourage dialogue and foster continuance for future projects elsewhere (fleury 2005c). The Templates for Activism website (www.templatesforactivism.ca) is set up to assist others by means of providing a model for starting points, processes and projects. Variation, mutation and creative repetition are all conceived as part of the community arts process. Templates for Activism was not conceived in terms of one-time events but rather as the title suggests, as a pattern for processes that shape and

assist in supporting future feminist legal activism.

Each time I reflect on Templates for Activism, and on other community arts that I have engaged with as a participant, artist and/or social scholar, my understanding of what community arts could mean in terms of social theory and practice continues to expand. The conversations I have had with cj fleury about community arts over the past few years have set me on my current academic and artistic trajectory of reevaluating the interconnections of art with social and the social potential of the arts.

Community arts uses the symbolic in creative ways to catalyze a shift in perceptions regarding social justice concerns. A shift in perceptions regarding feminist legal issues underlie both reform in the courts of law and in the court of public opinion. Symbolic goals that focus on changing attitudes and legitimizing the value of feminist law reform movements can be as significant as legal injunctions intended to reduce sexism in law (Tang 1998, 268).

Templates for Activism uses the arts to engage in the educational, research and reform goals of NAWL and other feminist legal communities. The Templates depict and speak from within the communities of feminist law and feminist art on behalf of these communities. Templates for Activism aims to raise awareness, encourage critique, express women's interests and innovate legally and artistically to develop new potentials for progressive, artistically-literate legal work and socially engaged feminist art informed by legal activism. Through creative processes of repetition and representation, both aesthetic and political, bringing bodily sensation into legal discourse and highlighting legal linguistic domination, Templates for Activism opens up new ways to understand and promote feminist legal concerns. It pushes the boundaries of two disciplines, feminist art and feminist law, to present an interdisciplinary challenge to the status quo. Templates

for Activism projects make explicit that legal representation serves political interests that utilize aesthetic means. It critiques the complicity of the law and legal proceedings to reproduce and compound gendered violence against women, exposing linguistic strategies in the courtroom used to dominate women who take their attackers to court, positing art as a safe space to articulate women's narratives of rape trial experiences and to safely bring their bodily experiences into rape trial discourse.

Templates for Activism proposes an interdisciplinary model to engage in and support creative legal struggle. Each time one of the Paper Rape Mazes is photocopied and posted to a bathroom wall or the Slice video is copied and shown to a law class, a new potential is created, however small, for education and transformation of current social and legal norms. The project continues to build on this potential, fostering community capacity for activist production regarding these concerns by adding to and repeating templates with new voices in new communities. Through repetition of community arts projects such as Templates for Activism the goal is to first imagine, and then actualize real legal change in courts and transformation in patriarchal attitudes in communities.

Endnotes

1. Drawing on Ferdinand de Saussure (de George and de George 1972, 59-79).

2. See Deleuze's (1994) references to Karl Marx on pp. 91; 186; 207-08.

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Figure 13. Hearings At the Rape Maze, 2002. Photo by Adrienne Herron.