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Degree in Metalsmithing with Honors
April 2006

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April 19, 2006
www.200hearts.net was envisioned as a way of bringing people together through their interactions with a series of handmade objects. My goal as a metalsmith is to create objects compelling enough to elicit response and inspire an ever-evolving Internet-based conversation on the general topics of friendship, love, universality, and shared experience. Thus, I am interested in art as a dialogical process of shared knowing rather than a process solely relying on the insight of the artist.

Two hundred copper hearts were created by hand to facilitate this discussion and to create a community based on the shared experience of interacting with these objects. While each heart was formed from a single mold, the result was two hundred hearts that are each unique. Utilizing a hydraulic press, each piece of copper became a volumetric form and then was further embellished using a variety of techniques including enameling, roll printing, and texture hammering.

After fabrication, each heart was numbered with both an edition number (1-200) and an alphanumeric serial number (for authenticity purposes), documented through the use of a flatbed scanner, and then either mailed to a specific acquaintance or left in a public place to be found. The hope is that recipients will respond to their hearts and then can choose whether to keep their heart or to pass it along to someone else, thus eventually making the website an abstract representation of a broader social network.

It is my goal that these two hundred hearts will only be a starting point and that eventually more hearts will be created, distributed, and circulated around the country, and eventually around the world.
I would like to publicly thank the following individuals for their insight, continuing support, suggestions, generosity, energy, passion, laughter, good jokes, bad jokes, enthusiasm, conversations, late-night telephone calls, adventures, and understanding. This wouldn’t have been possible without you.

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It’s 6:30 on a Thursday, six days before thesis turn-in day. I was revising and editing until 5:30 this morning and until 4:30 the morning before. I was probably awake until 3:00 or so on the nights before that, working on art projects, having long conversations, wasting time when I should have been finishing art projects, finishing art projects when everyone else was wasting time. It’s exhausting, but I wouldn’t have it any other way. My experiences are not unique, this I know, but I am buoyed by them nonetheless. For everyone there is something that compels you to be awake when the rest of the world is sleeping. My advice then, is to know this passion intimately. You must see that the thing you are creating does not yet exist in the world, know the urgency of your creation, and vow to not sleep soundly until it is finally real. No one is obligated to be passionate about your work, thus cliché as it sounds, the passion for your project must come from within.

When you have amazing friends, however, and are surrounded by love constantly, it is easy to direct the passion from your life into your work. It was my friends who gave me the courage to change the focus of my thesis in my last semester of college, my friends who laughed with me during long studio days and nights, my friends who offered suggestions when I seemed to be facing a wall, my friends who celebrated with me when I accomplished my goals, my friends who will help to complete this project as participants, and my friends who will celebrate with me when this project is finally completed.
When I first began considering the possibility of undertaking an Honors Thesis Project, I was specifically attracted to the idea of creating art in a forum broader than just my major or my studio community. Such an interest led me to not only make work that was intended for a larger audience, but informed by the input and participation of this audience as well. Secondly, completing a thesis offered the possibility of narrowing my focus to a specific interest, rather than the haphazard method by which I typically combine inspirations and ideas from divergent sources. In seeking out such a concentration of subject matter however, I was able to gain a better perspective on the types of work I was already making and I came to see that while one piece or series might appear radically different from the next, they were all informed by the same thought progression and sensibilities. The process of embarking on a thesis has challenged my personal creative process and my assumptions about the role that my art can have within the context of a broader landscape.

Seeking to combine my interests in metalsmithing, communication, writing, and dialogue, I created 200 copper hearts to serve as catalysts for an Internet-based dialogue. I am hopeful that this project will create an ongoing conversation that can exist across spatial and temporal boundaries, creating a community that otherwise would be impossible to locate within the physical world.
BEGINNINGS

As a metalsmith, I am committed to the beauty and uniqueness of individually handcrafted objects, but I have found myself at times wishing that I could produce things in greater speeds and amounts. One of the most elemental joys of my craft is my ability to make things to give to other people, especially without having a specific reason or occasion. While there is a business aspect to metalsmithing, the individual objects I make are often not affordable to many. Metal is an inherently valuable material, but it becomes instantly more precious the minute it has been altered by human hands. My interest in the possibilities of making objects in great quantity was first explored when given the chance to create something for our metalsmithing club’s Valentine’s Day jewelry sale. For this, I began to experiment with the heart form, using the hydraulic press and a variety of techniques such as piercing, enameling, and drilling holes. My initial concept for my thesis project was to explore metalsmithing as communication and I eventually returned to the heart form to represent this idea. Although the heart seemed a bit cliché, the beauty of symbols is that they can mean anything to anyone. In trying to appeal to the widest amount of people possible, a broader statement from the artist allows viewers to fill the form with their own specific content. Hearts can be associated with love, emotion, caring, passion, the body, the spirit, the soul, joy, infatuation, or sentiment. With so many possibilities for interpretation that were directly related to the ideas I was hoping to communicate with my thesis, the heart seemed to be both the most appropriate and the most accessible symbol. Admittedly, I was initially apprehensive about this theme.
What authority did I really have to make statements about love or understanding or universality? Could I be satisfied putting enormous amounts of time and energy into a project though I would never know how and if the hearts were found or cherished or saved or misplaced or thrown away? Despite my reservations, however, I chose to continue with this symbol because I knew that the physical objects were only one part of a larger plan.

Though the hearts sat dormant for what became almost two years, they sat near the front of my locker, jostled by tools or projects-in-progress, but somehow they never managed to get pushed to the back of the cabinet. I would pick them up and place them in the palms of my hands for a moment, enjoy how they felt against my skin or inside a pocket, and the return them to the locker. Each time I encountered them they seemed to compel me softly, suggesting that they had a life beyond their current purgatory.

Then, in the summer, I had a vision of creating hundreds of hearts and dispersing them in public places to be found by strangers. Somehow they would be found and treasured, and the recipients would know that for an instant there was love and energy and excitement waiting for them in the world. I am drawn to tiny, miniscule moments: the strange and almost magical feeling to see a beautiful leaf lying on the sidewalk or to find a familiar song on the radio and find yourself instantly buoyed in spirit. That then was my initial impulse, as far as I can remember, that these tiny hearts could be spontaneously found by strangers and that they would perhaps inspire a similar moment of joy and connection.
Though dialogue is perhaps the most obvious form of communication, it is conceivably the most overlooked. While I was studying abroad in Florence, Italy, the experience of a new language was one of the most transformative aspects of my semester. Living with a host family and another American roommate, we all had enough grasp of our respective second languages to make dinner conversations both humbling and wildly entertaining with ridiculously enunciated phrases, poor to non-existent grammar and sentence structure, and frantic gestures. Such experiences make you relish your competency in your own language, value the words you are able to speak when you have the opportunity, and understand the urgency of listening. The time also made me understand the things that common language is unnecessary to communicate – the universality of gratitude, empathy, compassion.

During high school I was involved in a number web and email-based exchanges concerning music and poetry. December Black Psalms was an email listerv group for fans of the Smashing Pumpkins, a now defunct alternative-rock group based in Chicago. Though the band was initially the main topic of discussion, emails quickly moved into other realms of politics, religion, romance, (two of the members – one from central Pennsylvania and the other from Australia were actually married – and have been for several years now), rants of many sorts, philosophy, and of course, other music. I recognized the power of correspondence – aided by words that were free from the constraints and judgments of every day life. In his book Community, Gerard Delanty writes about such Internet-facilitated interactions: “The Internet brings together strangers in a
sociality often based on anonymity and where a ‘new intimacy’ is found in which politics and subjectivity are intertwined” (Delanty 171).

A poetry website, [www.poesie.com](http://www.poesie.com) (now closed), allowed for similar discussions – allowing users to post poems and short stories which could be responded to by other users via ratings, comments, and critiques. Although I personally find that there are some poems or art projects that need to be made purely for the artist’s sanity, for the sake of making, or for understanding a new technique, the act of sharing an art work with an audience is a critical and important aspect of the artistic cycle. I doubt I would have framed such participations within this context at the time, but looking back now, I can see how these affirming interactions have led to my interest in creating art experiences in a wider, public setting.

**THE PROCESS**

As a working jeweler/metalsmith for more than 25 years, I often wonder about this compulsion that keeps pulling me back to the bench, and once I’m there it refuses to let me do sloppy work. I recognize that there is something that moves me, and I recognize its persistence. But I’m hard pressed to say precisely what it is. I think it is a love for making things carefully. It seems to have two components: first, the making of things; and second, the investment of care (Metcalf 14).

The wonderful thing about a communal studio building is that there are always people floating around and ready for anything – whether a good conversation, an informal critique, or a snack break. The downside of this, of course, is that it’s easy to get distracted from your own work. As I began to notice that I seemed to be spending an enormous amount of time in the studio but not having very much to show for my long hours, I decided to create an informal
time sheet for myself so that I could be more accountable for my time and my accomplishments (or lack there of). Based on my informal time logs, the studio time spent fabricating all of the hearts took between eighty and ninety hours. While this amount of time is shocking enough, it does not take into account the hours spent accomplishing other related tasks beyond fabrication, including for example, documentation, website development and design, obtaining addresses, preparing boxes for distribution, and making labels. Deliberation time – discussions with friends and professors, critical writing about the project, time spent gazing off in the distance imagining how and if all this would really come together – is another aspect of the project’s completion that is not reflected on my time sheet. Overall, I’d imagine that between 100-130 hours were spent to complete the entire www.200hearts.net project.

All of the hearts began from flat sheet copper. I had ordered copper from a company in California, but while I waited for my order to be delivered, I scavenged the scrap bins in the studio for useable copper. Sifting through fragments and abandoned projects, I looked for metal that was foremost large enough to accommodate the shape of my mold: I had spent a day making two molds from squares of ½” thick Plexiglass – first by cutting out the shape with a jeweler’s saw and then filing the edges to a smooth contour. Though new sheet copper was infinitely quicker to use, the history of some of the pieces from the scrap bins, evident by hammer makers or textures from previous use, led to some interesting results in the later stages of fabrication. To flatten and to thin the metal so it is easier to work with, metal is annealed (heated with a torch until it is bright
red which changes the arrangement of the molecules of the metal, making it temporarily more malleable), quenched in water to cool it, and then placed in a solution of sodium bisulfate (commonly called pickle) to remove the oxides and dirt that are left on the surface from annealing. Oxides aren’t particularly detrimental, but removing them helps keep everything cleaner – including your fingers and the machines in the studio.

After the metal is cleaned and dried, it is run through the rolling mill (like rolling out a pie crust between two rolling pins). It can be run through two to three times before it becomes brittle and work-hardened and must again be annealed and pickled.

Once the metal is at a workable gauge (thick enough so that it still has strength but thin enough that it can be deeply pressed into the heart-shaped mold on the first time, rather than annealing and pickling and repeating the process several times), it is cut into smaller 3” squares. Any surface designs are most easily created while the copper is still flat. Thus all the textures and holes were made while the metal was flat. When I made my first series of hearts, I noticed that if holes were drilled into the surface, they created weak axes along which the copper would crack, a process I used to a great extent. This became one of the most interesting aspects of fabrication because although I could make predictions, I was never sure how the copper would look once it came out of the press. Considering that most viewers would have little to no knowledge about how such objects were made, I liked the idea of an aspect of the physical fabrication process being evident in the final piece. It seems that most people’s concepts of metal are
of it as a medium that is entirely static and unable of undergoing any sort of change. To see evidence of this struggle between man and metal is like seeing a glimpse at history.

The ability to quickly make volumetric forms depended on the use of the hydraulic press. By cranking a lever by hand, a piston causes a platform to rise. Between the platform and the top flat surface of the machine’s ceiling, one creates a sandwich with the Plexiglass mold on the bottom, flat piece of annealed copper on the top, and then several plates of rubber on top of those. When the lever is cranked, the platform rises up and forces the rubber to squish down and move the copper into the negative space of the mold. Though at times tedious and labor-intensive, the repetitive nature of the fabrication process has an appeal to me. Repeating a task over and over leads to a sort of meditation and I’ve found that some of my best reflections and insights on the project have come from journal entries written after a long night in the studio.

After the hearts were pressed, the volumetric form was still surrounded by the square of copper from which it was pressed. Though for some I left a square edge for either design or structural integrity, the majority of the hearts were next cut out so that only the heart shape remained. Using metal snips (like scissors but with shorter, stronger blades) enabled me to cut around the perimeter like I would with a piece of paper. However, the slightly serrated blades left a jagged surface along the edges, unsuitable for tactile objects which are meant to be physically inviting to touch. I retreated to my apartment with my favorite #2 and #4 files (the #4 file makes a smoother edge, eliminating the need to do any further
sanding). As this was one of the more repetitive but less skill-intensive tasks, I filed from my couch with a poster under me to catch the copper dust. By the time all the filing was finished, I had accumulated about three teaspoons of copper dust and watched about five feature length films.

With the most mechanical processes completed, more creative surface embellishing could now take place. While some of the hearts were perfect in their current state, the rest of them were either enameled (fusing powdered glass to the surface of the metal); colored with a heat patina (copper is naturally a reddish-pink color, but when heated slowly it can be encouraged to change to a rainbow of colors); or subjected to my experiments with keum-boo (a Korean technique of evenly heating a piece of metal so that gold leaf – mine was 23 karat and thinner than tissue paper – will permanently adhere to the base metal when it is rubbed against the surface with a smooth metal or stone burnisher). Because dirt and oil on the surface can impede the enameling and keum-boo processes, most of the hearts were then cleaned with the bead blaster – a machine which employs a compressed air gun to spray tiny glass beads at the surface as a means of removing dirt and also applying a textured finish.

The hearts destined to be enameled were moved to the studio’s chemical room where the enameling kilns are set up. While waiting for the kiln to heat to approximately 1450 degrees Fahrenheit, I would paint Klyr-Fire (a liquid that acts as a binding agent) onto the front of the hearts. Though some enamellists prefer to mix their enamels with the binding agent so that the color can be painted on, I’ve been successful and perhaps less wasteful by sprinkling the powdered enamel
directly onto the surface. The hearts are placed on steel mesh pallets upon which they will sit while being fired inside the kiln – making it possible to move objects without disturbing their coats of unfired powdered enamel and preventing enamel from adhering to the surface of the kiln. Enamel can also be fired with an indirect flame from a torch (placing the flame under the piece as opposed to applying a flame directly to the enamel which would cause it to burn off), which I did while waiting for the kiln to heat. The opaque enamel colors seem to require less heat while the transparent colors seemed to need a consistently higher heat for a longer period of time, a task more difficult to do with an irregular heat source. Some of the final hearts have a bumpier surface, which are likely torch fired and in retrospect, a bit under fired. I think though, that this so-called orange peel effect adds to the tactile quality of the objects. Once the kiln got up to temperature, each round of firing only took a few minutes.

Finally with all the hearts finished, they were labeled with the project URL, an identifying edition number (1-200), and an authenticating serial number for use on the website. I had originally intended to stamp the information onto the backs but the cost of and time to order custom stamps made me reconsider. Though I was initially worried about their durability, I ended up using clear mailing labels. This quickly proved to be beneficial not only because of the range of useable size and type of the text, but also because of the ease of application. So that the hearts would be more resistant to the changes presented by time and wear, each one was coated with four to six coats of semi-gloss spray lacquer.
With the fabrication aspect completed, I was finally able to see all 200 together at last. Clearing one of the worktables in my studio, I found white paper to serve as a backdrop and remember having to add additional paper as the grid of hearts became successively larger until it encompassed nearly half of the eight-foot table. In what I later began calling the “family portrait,” I could clearly see and even be amazed by the fruits of my labor. Though united by form, each heart seemed to have a distinct personality. When a friend saw them laid out in their massive grid, she remarked, “How can you send them away? Aren’t you going to miss them?” And though I hadn’t had that specific thought cross my mind until that moment, her comment seemed to speak to me on some subconscious level – yes I had grown attached to them. They kept me up late at night and consumed my spring break, but soon they would be heading off into the big world on their own.

As a final step before their journeys, each heart was documented so that I would have a record of their existence. Though I had originally intended to photograph each heart, I was inspired by the process of fiber artist Zoë Sheehan Saldaña. One of her most recent projects involved buying clothing from Wal-Mart, replicating it with original materials, and then “shop-giving” her item back to the store with the original item’s labels and tags. To document her work, she began using a large flatbed scanner and was able to record her work without having to worry about inconsistent lighting or focusing issues. Although the scanning process was a bit tedious (I would scan ten at a time, crop the document into images of singular hearts, and then individually correct each image for
appropriate color and brightness), it was infinitely faster and more consistent than photography. With all the hearts completed and documented, I could now focus on the keystone of the project.

THE WEBSITE

The website is clearly of equal importance to the physical hearts, but it was actually the last matter to receive attention. And though it was the area in which I had the least confidence (in terms of the level of my own skills) and the most anxiety, it couldn’t be made until the hearts and the images were ready. I have been an avid user of the Internet since its introduction into daily life, but my experience as a contributor has been limited. Using popular site hosting companies like Geocities and Tripod, I had taught myself rudimentary HTML in high school.

My first plans for the website were based on my own basic understanding of web-design. I planned for a website with four main sections – an image gallery of the hearts, a page describing the process of fabrication, a page containing information about the project specifically and about my general artistic practice, and a main page that would function like a guestbook where visitors would enter the number of their heart and their response. I hoped that recipients would identify themselves as their number and continue to check back and respond, creating an informal dialogue and a sort-of collaborative blog. I also considered that recipients might want to respond in non-textual ways and hoped that recipients could respond with a photograph, drawing, or painting – perhaps depicting themselves interacting with their heart or crafting it into something new.
Finally, I planned to register my own domain name for the project – hoping to add a sense of legitimacy and also to encourage ease of use.

I was fortunate to be introduced through a mutual friend to Nathan Halabuda, an Albany native and freelance computer consultant who lives in the Euclid-Westcott neighborhood. After several discussions about the project and its possibilities, Nathan became my unofficial and uncompensated, I should add, technical advisor, onboard because we shared a mutual interest in finding out how singular handmade objects might affect a wider public audience.

The first benefit Nathan brought to the project was a voice of experience and an understanding of the realm of possibilities. Our first decision together was to implement the use of serial numbers for each of the hearts in addition to their edition (1-200) number. Although I could see the grand scale of my project, I still envisioned it as a small personal endeavor, with a majority of the responses coming from friends, family, and other willing, predetermined participants. More experienced with the Internet from a creator’s perspective, he worried that anyone would be able to post about anything in such an open forum – that the site could quickly descend into a collection of advertisements and spam that would constantly need editing by the webmaster. Also, though we hoped that we would have many interested visitors, we wanted to make sure that the people entering responses actually had received or found hearts and weren’t just entering a random number.

Once the hearts were scanned and cropped, designing the site moved along fairly quickly. Though in my own work, I have a tendency towards ornamentation
and excess, by keeping the site’s design fairly simple visitors are able to focus more on the hearts and the ideas of the project rather than the look of the site. Nathan introduced a program that shows two of the 200 hearts at random each time the page was loaded. The page looks unique every time considering that there are 40,000 possible combinations of two hearts, and gradually draws the viewer deeper into the project. The splash page was based on an early graphic design of Nathan’s when he noticed that it was impossible to make a square grid with two hundred characters. Another random generating program configures a new grid each time the splash page is opened. All of the heart graphics are identical black outline illustrations with the exception of one solid red heart – the link to the main page. Coming from an unassuming and playful first page, it seemed important to emphasize the exploratory nature of the site and of the project.

When designing was at its earliest stages, we also imagined that although there would be one site visible to the users, it would be designed so that there were really two paths of possibilities – one set of options for the recipients of hearts and another set in which guests (people who stumbled onto the site and did not have hearts) would have different means of interaction. In implementation, the only difference between recipients and guests became the ability to post comments about the hearts. Though anyone can post comments to a general guestbook and view all of the content pages, only recipients can post responses on the page dedicated to heart responses. When writing the code to allow users to log-in and respond to their hearts, we concluded that ideally, a participant might
browse and contribute more than once. Thus if a participant chose, he or she could even send their heart onto another acquaintance so as to add a new perspective to the project. With this possibility ensured and emphasized in the instructions of the site, it is conceivable that a continuing stream of new recipients could update the site for years to come as hearts are slowly circulated from one person to the next.

To emphasize the connection between metalsmithing and writing as intersecting means of communication, we introduced another randomly generating feature which would display one of sixty responses (fragments of my poetry) in the footer of the site. We first intended these responses to serve as thank you messages to the recipients who had posted on the site, however, this plan also unintentionally devalued the guests (people who had not received hearts) who might also post to the site. Instead we introduced poetry in the footer of almost all the pages (except for the process and home pages due to clarity concerns) as a way to entice viewers to further explore the site. New poems and were written and old poems were chosen so as to compliment the sentiment of the hearts – feelings of wonder, joy, connectedness, delight, buoyancy, hope, promise, potential – but in a more concrete medium.

THE PARTICIPANTS

I’ve written at length thus far about the creation and process of my thesis. The most interesting and perhaps terrifying aspect of the project however, is the responses from the recipients. Thus the first question that must be addressed is who are these participants and what is their relation to me?
When I began fabricating the hearts, I knew that I wanted to have a large round number. The logical first step was to figure out how many people I really could send hearts to, accomplished using a popular social networking website called The Facebook (www.facebook.com). The site allows users (any college student or alumni with a functional university email address) to create profiles, send messages, post pictures, create event listings, and become friends with other users. Though I was first skeptical, a friend asserted: “I’ve found that the real value of Facebook isn’t so much as a social/communication tool in itself, but more of a foundation to support real life friendships/acquaintances. It’s been really helpful to remember people and maybe more importantly their names. Then when I see people out and about I am much more inclined to say hello.”

With a friend count of 276 I first imagined creating 300 or even 400 hearts, but as I scrolled my list more carefully, I knew that some people wouldn’t be interested, some people would be interested but wouldn’t likely participate, some people would be unreachable, and some people I wouldn’t feel comfortable giving a heart to, even if we were “Facebook-friends.” The heart can be at once an innocent or inviting, platonic or passionate and although I felt comfortable leaving hearts for strangers to find, it seemed a bit more personally awkward to give one to a vague acquaintance known only through a class or a friend of a friend.

About one quarter of the participants I would classify as good friends. Another quarter would be people with whom I’m less well acquainted but whom I thought would be interested in the project – this group includes a few former teachers and some other significant mentors from my life. Another quarter would
be friends who I’ve been close to at some point or another, but with whom I do not tend to stay in consistent contact. For this group, the gesture of giving a heart and participating in an art project feels particularly meaningful as a means of reconnecting. Finally, the last quarter includes people whom I don’t know particularly well but I’ve included partly on impulse and partly by virtue of their enlivening personalities. In search of addresses, I sent a mass-email to 109 people whom I hoped might participate in the project, vaguely describing a thesis involving mail, metal, and the Internet. This last quarter of participants consists of people who I emailed more for the sake of sending out an email to as many people as possible but who responded none-the-less and warranted being included on the final mailing list. Furthermore, I had acquired addresses for about a third of the overall group of intentional participants before I began the project. Thus this third received hearts without having received an introductory information-seeking email. This adds another layer of eventual analysis by seeing if prior knowledge of the project – and subsequent agreement to participate by giving me a mailing address – might cause some people respond in a differently than they might otherwise.

Due to the misfortune of my last semester topic-reinterpretation, the hearts were not mailed until the week before this reflective essay was due, therefore it is not be possible to classify and reflect upon the responses in this format. I am confident however, that a number of responses will be received by the time of my thesis presentation and that further responses will be viewed via the website and perhaps a later addendum (likely viewable on the website and on paper). Had I
settled on this topic and secured funding a year ago, such analysis might be able to be made, but I came to the conclusion in February that it is preferable to pursue the project as it demands to be undertaken and rather than to cut corners solely for the purpose of a deadline and at the cost of artistic integrity.

Finally with approximately 140 hearts going to specific people and addresses, the remaining sixty will be distributed randomly in public places for strangers to find. This is another aspect that will most noticeably continue into the future beyond graduation. Possible drop points include tables and seating areas at coffee shops, shelves in libraries, sinks of public bathrooms, ATMs, dressing rooms in stores, etc. My goal is not to distribute sixty in the same day and then wait with my fingers crossed but rather to leave several at a time, wait for them to appear or to definitively disappear, study the results, and then refine my methods. Among the friends with whom I’ve spoken at length to regarding the project and its development, we’ve wondered how people will know that the heart is intended for anyone to discover and keep. We also wondered collectively whether their seeming preciousness might deter people from taking them. After the first few rounds of distribution I’ll be able to improve my system, with the current theoretical solution to the theoretical problem being to somehow tag the heart with a message that says I am for you. I’ve also had the thought that it might be interesting to leave a heart in a public place and then move to another part of the public place to watch and see what happens to the heart so that I might know definitely. A third possibility involves geocaching – a network of outdoor-enthusiasts who create caches (somewhat like modern treasure chest) at points
identified by their latitudinal-longitudinal GPS points. These points are listed on the Internet and then other people can choose to find these objects or boxes and then add to them. Perhaps the drop points of these sixty hearts could be mapped on the website and then people wanting to participate could find them. Again it is unfortunate that these experiments will not happen at this moment, but as this is only the beginning of what will hopefully be a very long project, I know that the results will continue to be shared via the website.

**REFLECTIONS**

Community may be seen as an open system of cultural codification. In this view, symbols are cultural forms that require interpretation and their versatility is due to the fact that they are not closed systems but require interpretation. “Symbols are effective because they are imprecise,” argues Anthony Cohen. While their form may persist, their content can change as society itself undergoes change. In this way…community can…be a source of stability in face of transience. Symbolization is amenable to change in many ways…and most symbols can simply be interpreted in ever novel ways. Moreover, this suggests that a community need not be based on uniformity: “It is a commonality of forms (ways of behaving) whose content (meaning) may vary considerably among its members” (Cohen 20-21 qtd. in Delanty 47).

Finally there is the question of why all of this was undertaken in the first place. As a metalsmith, one of my first loves is the simple act of makings things to give to other people. Although a painter can give a painting to a friend for example, I feel an affinity for making something that has the potential to be an integral part of someone’s daily life and routine. Rings that you wear all the time, scratched and dented so that they fit the exact contours of your finger, worn in and out of the shower, above and under the sheets – I love the intimacy of wearable objects. I’d love to make something for everyone I know – as a way of
commemorating our relationship, our highs and lows together, our conversations and our impromptu adventures. I’d like to be able to give these gifts rendered and forged by my own hands and I’d like to be able to give spontaneously and freely, without pretext. However, there are not enough hours in the day nor is there enough reserve in my wallet to pay for all of those materials. Thus my first impulse was somewhat insular – simply desiring to make things for the friends surrounding me. As I considered my ideas further, I saw this group of people unified by common handmade objects as a sort of community and this type of community as a means of communication. Though the objects are not handmade, in imagining a group with membership rings, one can see how these objects confer a sense of identity and belonging on the individual. This idea of communication communities is first established by Immanuel Kant’s *The Critique of Judgment* published in 1790 and more contemporarily investigated by Gerard Delanty in his book *Community*. Delanty states:

> What is stressed is the fluid nature of community as an expression of modalities of belonging. Rather than see community as something spatially fixed and corresponding to a particular kind of social arrangement, the suggestion here is to see community as an expression of communitas; that is, a particular mode of imagining and experiencing social belonging as a communicative, public happening (Delanty 26).

And although such community would be initially opaque to individual recipients of objects I had fabricated, framing these interactions in a larger context could lead to a greater transparency. Within a cycle of the artistic practice, completing the fabrication of an object is only half of the journey – the next half revolves around the wearer or recipient—how it fits, how often a piece is touched or worn, how it is reacted to. I see jewelry and in this case miniature metal companions as
a chance to step away from everyday life. Again, I refer to Delanty who states:

“Underlying this view of communitas is a view of social relationships – the *We* – as transient and liminal. Community as spontaneous communitas is ‘always unique, and hence socially transient’” (Delanty 45). A page earlier, Delanty more clearly defines this terminology by clarifying: “Liminality refers to those ‘between’ moments, such as carnivals, pilgrimages, rites of passage or rituals in which normality is suspended. Liminality – ‘moments in and out of time’ – is thus often connected with those moments of symbolic renewal when a society or group asserts its collective identity” (Delanty 44). It is my hope that the hearts can present such a moment of liminality to the recipients.

Stemming especially from ART 500: Art and Community, a selected topics course taught by Joanna Spitzner, I had begun to understand the power and possibility of community. Though I had grasped that there were various shades of meaning for such a concept, the course and its readings (from which most of my critical quotations are derived) demonstrated that community could be more than place or tradition or common interest, but could alternately be seen as a form of “participation in a universal order” (Delanty 14), as a “certain consciousness of the mutual connections between people” as described by René König (Delanty 40), or as a ritual in which multiple people can participate but can each experience a different meaning, signifying that community can be “both an ideal and a kind of symbolic reality” (Delanty 46).

Although the structure of my project aims to make this apparent, it is important to note that communication on the web acts as a supplement to face-to-
face interactions, not as a replacement. When the power and possibilities of the Internet were first being explored, many intellectuals imagined new social groups forming across boundaries of locality and bringing a sense of immediacy to a broad and otherwise unrelated group of participant and ideas. Manuel Castells theorizes that: “the Internet has a positive effect on social interaction, enhancing democratic possibilities and offering people a more communicative means of ordering their relations” (Delanty 176). Castells continues in his book *The Internet Galaxy*: “Perhaps the necessary analytical step to understanding the new forms of social interaction in the age of the Internet is to build on a definition of community, de-emphasizing its cultural component, emphasizing its supportive role to individuals and families, and de-linking its social existence” (Castells 127).

Though mediated by time stamps and time zones, the Internet has a certain ageless quality to it in the way that it can present information instantly to anyone regardless of location and suspend such barriers that might otherwise impede relationships and dialogues from forming and occurring. Both jewelry creations and websites are similar in that they have a possibility to live forever, a strange parallel considering the tactile quality of the former and the transience of the other. I am continually amazed by the possible lifespan of the objects that I am creating when I visit museum antiquities collections and see Etruscan brooches, Renaissance bronzes, and silver British hollowware. Especially compared to fragile media like textiles or paintings, it is fascinating to know that we are seeing objects that aside from oxidation and patinas on the surface are the same as when
they were first created, often with little or no care, and it is enthralling to imagine something that I’ve made being dug up from the ground and found hundreds of years from now. Though the Internet has an infinite quality, pages come and go relatively quickly. Friendships too, tend to wax and wane due to both circumstances within the relationship and external factors. Gerard Delanty writes: “While there are virtual communities that are highly experimental and based on relationships that are entirely virtual, many in fact take the form of supplementing existing relationships” (Delanty 177). And as these initial relationships may ebb and flow, the hearts can also be passed along to new recipients and circulated infinitely, thus the social network of the site is constantly renewed until all the hearts are either lost, misplaced, or hidden away for the archeologists of the future to find.

What the excavators of the future will find are not pristine perfect duplicates of one initial idea but unique objects akin more to gesture drawings than to framed portraits. Of the handmade objects treasured by the Arts and Crafts movement, David Revere McFadden writes:

In Arts and Crafts practice, an object was made to look imperfect in order to proclaim its honesty and worthiness as something handmade. It was this ‘mark of the hand’ that distinguishes these works from what was perceived as the emotionless and inhuman perfection of industrial products. Standards of craftsmanship continued to be valued during this period, but so, too, were the friendly flaws, irregularities, and accidents of the handmade (McFadden 39).

I believe it is this mark of the hand to which recipients will react and respond strongly, understanding that all of my efforts and works are for them, the recipient, specifically. Some of the hearts which I feel most compelled by are
those that most clearly show a sign of work history, muscle movements, action and reaction, cause and effect. To give such a portrait of a miniature history is evidence of my fabrication time and revealed by file marks, oxidation, split seams, or patinas. It is important to me then, that participants in the project be able to understand the process of fabrication, as explained by a photo-diary process section on the website and by the step-by-step description that has taken up a significant amount of this document.

The remaining question perhaps not yet directly answered is of course, why specifically has the heart been taken up as the source and foundation of this project? I’ve written briefly about the symbolism of the heart and as stated, I was initially wary of using such a commonplace, sappy, cliché, greeting card-type of image. More and more though, as I considered who among my acquaintances I wanted to include, the symbol became convincingly appropriate for my sentiment of connectedness and shared experiences. Because symbols have endless levels of meaning, they can be reinterpreted infinitely but still retain a level of commonality. In a catalogue about the painting of Jim Dine, Robert Creeley writes: “A heart is a sign that one can care, that there is a consistent presence of feeling” (Beal 95). I have an understanding of what the heart means to me, but I am more interested in the notion of connected knowing, a form of knowledge defined by Mary Field Belenky and several-co-authors in the study Women’s Ways of Knowing (1986). “This ‘procedural’ form of knowledge…is concerned with recognizing the social context from which others speak, judge, and act.” Secondly, “rather than enter into communicative exchange with the goal of
representing ‘self’ through the advancement of already formed opinions and judgments, a connected knowledge is grounded in our capacity to identify with others” (Kester 113-114). I eagerly await the new definitions and vocabularies that these two hundred participants will forge. Let us share memories and experiences in new languages of wonder and joy.

Ultimately, I hope to create an ongoing and evolving community and conversation around this series of copper hearts. Socially interactive art was conceived as a reaction against avant-garde art in which the artist is perceived as all-knowing genius who must use his brilliance to shock the viewer out of complacency. Instead, London-based artist Stephen Willats has suggested:

a concept of ‘socially interactive’ culture that redefines art in terms of the discursive relationship that it establishes with the viewer. Willats argues for a form of aesthetic exchange in which the artist’s own presuppositions are potentially challenged by the viewer’s response through a process of direct collaboration and feedback (Kester 92).

Instead of the artist’s exalted and revered opinion on a given subject, “What emerges [from an exchange between an artist and collaborators] is a new set of insights, generated at the intersection of both perspectives and catalyzed through the collaborative production of a given project” (Kester 95). These hearts have been fabricated by my own intentions but they will be filled by the meanings of their recipients. The project will be completed by my collaborators.
Sources Cited


Appendix II.

Splash page/introduction: Each time the page is reloaded or each time a black heart is clicked, the image is refreshed into a new arrangement of 200 hearts. Clicking on the red heart brings viewers to the homepage.
Homepage: A minimalist design allows for viewers to concentrate on the project without distraction. Two images are randomly loaded each time the page is loaded, encouraging users to browse and explore the site further.
Homepage above and Process page below: With 200 images to load, the homepage has 40,000 possible configurations. Showing two images emphasizes that while each heart is unique, they are part of a larger network. The process page uses a series of photographs and captions to explain how these hearts were created.
About page above and Gallery page below:

The about page gives a more detailed description of the project and also includes a link to my personal artist statement and also an email address to which questions or comments can be directed.

Each image in the gallery can be clicked to open a ‘life-size’ image of the heart in a separate window and when rolled-over with the mouse pointer, shows the edition number.
Guestbook above and Log-in page below: Visitors can interact with the site in two ways, either by posting general comment on the guestbook, or by entering the code of the heart which they have found or received. Again, focusing on simplicity helps to make the site more user-friendly and less intimidating.
Responses page: All the responses are listed in chronological order with the most recent post at the top of the page. Participants are not asked to respond by name but rather are solely identified by their unique heart. Clicking on the small heart image displays a larger image of that heart in a separate window.