

# Residencies as Sites of Discursive Struggle and Social Innovation

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## *Introduction*

The study of artists' residencies, or artists-in-residence, is a relatively new area of academic research. It is only in the past 20 years or so that artist-in-residencies (AiRs) have expanded and emerged as important aspects of the global flow of people, money, ideas and expertise in the art world. The AiR is an architecture or assemblage of opportunities related to artistic practice with generally open-ended outcomes. Artist residencies create affordances for experiment, learning and creation on the part of individual artists, social exchange and engagement, and/or cooperation among and between professions and disciplines.

AiRs exist in hundreds if not thousands of different configurations all over the world, in over 100 countries in every kind of arts discipline and are hosted and organized by many different kinds of organizations.[1] They offer a wide range of opportunities and impose a diverse range of demands and obligations. Our interest in this paper

lies in the operation of the AiR as an assemblage of values,  
expectations, materials, goals, practices and conventions  
that create, arrange and conduct desire within an  
institutional setting. Our research question focuses on how  
AiRs do this work of arranging desire into unexpected,  
unprecedented and yet hoped for outcomes? More specifically,  
in the case of the embedded AiR (defined below), to what  
extent can and do aesthetic experiences which emerge from  
AiRs short-circuit other more encompassing, dominant social  
machines? Our particular objects of study are AiRs that  
create synergistic exchanges between artists and  
non-art-based institutions, or what are sometimes referred  
to as embedded AiRs, where the goal of the residency is to  
instigate unprecedented kinds of relationalities, practices  
and knowledge within a host institution of some sort. The  
present study focuses on the role of an embedded residency  
in the context of a municipal civil government, the city of  
Edmonton in Canada. What are the experiences of AiRs for the  
artists and for the employees where they are placed? What  
kinds of outcomes can be uniquely attributed to the AiR  
experience? What makes embedded art practices relevant to an  
organization predicated on economic efficiencies,  
bureaucratic stabilities and administrative productivities?

In the present case, our findings suggest that embedded  
AiRs present a complex interaction of exigencies through  
material and immaterial contexts, contact zones and  
productive frictions. They are often tied to tourism or

other kinds of festival events linked to the development of creative economies in municipal settings, and as such – and as time-bound, temporary interventions – may be limited in ability to challenge structural rigidities, especially those related to societal patterns such as neoliberal urbanism. On the other hand, productive frictions reflect unprecedented legitimacies for the use of resources within institutions in unanticipated ways, and in this way may suggest longer-term innovations relevant to broader social arrangements. One of our findings is the need for more, long-term evaluation of institutional outcomes from embedded AiRs.

The scholarly literature that exists on AiRs has tended to focus on short-term evaluation of process and outcomes.[2] Of particular interest for our purposes are the ways some of these scholars have wrestled with epistemic questions – for example, in the notion of “context shifting” and the ways new knowledges emerge in contexts of destabilized routines, conventions and traditions.[3] Many studies of workplace AiRs describe projects designed to stimulate creativity, innovation and cross disciplinary insight, and successful outcomes from these have been described as processes of “seeing more and differently”[4] in terms of knowledge, experience and practice.[5] These are aspects of AiRs of central interest to our inquiry, but discussions about changing knowledges or epistemic shifts would be incomplete from our perspective without also considering the discursive implications of these epistemological

As Antal (2009) and others have observed, what is often overlooked in these studies are questions of power and discourse.[6] There exists a significant research gap around the impact of AiRs on the public domain and related questions concerning knowledge translation and the shaping of relations of power through discursive innovation. In particular, there are few studies addressing how the mechanisms of aesthetic production reshape everyday contexts, and the role intuitive, affective, dialogic and reflexive processes can have in settings that prioritize more empirical and rational forms of knowledge.[7] The current study addresses this gap by focusing on embedded residencies as sources of aesthetic experience manifest in a context of Deleuzian desiring-machines intended to disrupt and short-circuit assemblages of institutional efficiency and legitimacy in the interests of unprecedented outcomes.[8]

The emerging broad reach of contemporary AiRs into many different spheres of society points to a need for research focusing on the experiences of cultural workers and their potential to challenge rigid, received concepts of creativity. Sites of art production are linked to other cultural sites involved in knowledge and interlocution: dialogical and self-reflexive spaces that don't produce what we see as empirical facts can actually demonstrate the mobility of knowledge forms across discursive borders.[9] Some of the specific outcomes from an

embedded AiR might be reintegrated into art world

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sensibilities (i.e. critical appraisal, art markets, gallery circulation, etc.), but the embedded residency itself occurs in an institutional context which *ipso facto* serves different priorities. And further, many of the hoped for outcomes have little to do with art traditions, art theories and art markets; rather they are more directly related to the specific institutional context of the residency.

And finally, there is growing policy interest in cultural activities understood as ecologies – dynamic and interrelated creative practices that may not generate immediate economic return, but which interact in other sectors of society, for example triggering insights relevant to social justice, social cohesion, cultural citizenship and cross disciplinary communication.[10] AiRs fall into cultural ecologies in a unique way by forging links and patterns of exchange with sectors of society and the economy not traditionally thought of as cultural – for example hospitals, railways, laboratories, shipping lines, and so on.[11] The AiR is uniquely situated as an exploratory and even experimental form of cultural production in the context of neoliberal social organization in the sense that embedded residencies can work with, within and against a system whose fundamental aspirations are organized through instrumental rationalities which generally strive to maximize productivity, efficiency and the production of profit.

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Our case study is drawn from the municipality of Edmonton, Canada. Edmonton is the capital city in the province of [Alberta](#), a jurisdiction encompassing some 660,000 square kilometers, with a GDP estimated at about \$326 billion annually. Edmonton is the fifth largest city in Canada, with a population of 1.3 million, and is the cultural, governmental and academic centre of the province. Edmonton has the distinction of being North America's northernmost city with a population over 1 million people. This comparative isolation, as well as the area's settler history is related to both the city's and province's resource extraction economy. (Edmonton sits a few hours below the infamous Alberta Oil Sands.). Incorporated in 1905, the city's resource economy has given rise to decades of rhetoric on the role of arts and culture in superseding frontier economies and sensibilities, resulting in an active and complex contemporary field of cultural production supported by civic planning. This has included various artists' residencies in a range of media since the 1970s, but the practice has only recently been regularized as a continuing program. Embedded residencies in Edmonton are administered by the Edmonton Arts Council, an arm's length planning and funding agency almost entirely funded by the city with an annual budget of \$14 million. For the current paper, we focused on visual artist Jennie Vegt, whose residency was hosted by the Office of the City Clerk, at Edmonton City Hall 2014-2015.

*Embeddedness*

Despite surface similarities, artist-in-residencies reflect a diversity of events. There are, for example, different kinds of goals and expectations brought to bear on an artist's engagement with an institution: (i) residencies can give artists time and space and other resources to develop their own creative work; (ii) they can create affordances for dialogue and exchange among artists; (iii) they can produce outcomes such as exhibits; and (iv) they can create synergistic exchanges between artists and host organizations through which innovative organizational, artistic and/or subjective change can occur.

AiRs also reflect a diversity of contexts, which in turn influence what occurs over the course of a residency. Residencies occur within studio contexts, where what is emphasized is self-directed creative exploration. They occur in public institutions such as schools and hospitals, where creative efforts are expected to include ongoing interactivity with members of the public. Other AiRs are housed within unique institutional contexts such as laboratories, industrial workshops, cemeteries, businesses, public agencies, various levels of government, etc. where the focus is on a specific workplace and group of institutional professionals and employees working in a particular setting. The kinds of residencies that we are most interested in create synergistic exchanges between artists and non-art-based workers and professionals in unique non-art-based institutional contexts. They are sometimes called workarts,<sup>[12]</sup> artistic research,<sup>[13]</sup> artistic interventions in organizations,<sup>[14]</sup> artist led development,<sup>[15]</sup> and

embedded residencies.[16] As stated above, our preferred term is the latter: ‘embedded artist-in-residency’, or embedded AiR.

Little attention has been given in the literature to the use of the term embedded in relation to AiRs. Embeddedness has however emerged in other disciplinary contexts as a central and debated concept. For example, following the work of Granovetter (1985)[17], embeddedness was picked up as a key concept by economic sociologists and more recently economic geographers.[18] Its popularity however has led to criticisms of “theoretical vagueness”. [19] Notwithstanding the criticisms, and drawing on said literatures, our preference remains to foreground embeddedness in our terminology for a number of reasons. As an encompassing condition, embeddedness reflects a complexity of interaction. Van den Hooff et al. 2009[20], in their study of how well online networks function to integrate knowledge into organizational priorities, drew on various studies [21] to identify at least three different but integrated aspects of embeddedness helpful in formulating an approach to embedded residencies. The first emphasizes the “dailyness” of activities, or what these authors call embeddedness in practice. The second emphasizes relationships that are routinized over time in repeated exchanges based on mutual interests, or what they call embedded in structure. And the third reflects the significance of direct ongoing ties as a mechanism for



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knowledge exchange, or what they call embedded in relations.

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Embedded AiRs demonstrate similar kinds of dynamics through practices, structures and relationships which in turn shape the outcomes of a residency through necessities and opportunities for unprecedented conflict, tension and collaboration.

In choosing the term ‘embedded AiR’ we were also influenced by studies considering the phenomena of embedded journalism, a form of embeddedness bringing institutional exigencies of news media within those of the military with an expectation that the embedding process will transform epistemic agendas and sensibilities through relationships, practices and rules.[22] The political complexities of embedded journalists were also of interest. Journalists must reconcile their professional standards of truth with the military’s instrumental and stratagic use of information. The embedded artist encounters the logics and criteria of host organizations who have their own instrumental logics of administrative efficiency, financial productivity, political feasibility, and soon on. The degree to which an artist’s creative process will reflect these ‘new’ sensibilities will reflect tensions between the host institution’s values and priorities, the rules of the residency, daily practices and interactions, and the artist’s own creative process.

*Working Creatively Within Institutions, or For Institutions?*

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The link between AiRs, aesthetic experience and epistemic transformation is key to understanding the significance of embedded residencies as sources of discursive innovation. There are different ways of conceptualizing how aesthetic experience can create the conditions for innovation. AiRs exemplify what Rebecca Kukla describes as the “problematic place of imagination, sensibility, and aesthetic experience in perception and cognition.”[23] Kukla is commenting on the unique position of aesthetic experience in Immanuel Kant’s theories of mind as the reconciliation of the causal logics of nature with the free will of moral judgment. Aesthetic experience in this sense reflects the human ability to act with the same purposive purposelessness as nature,[24] in essence as if having the same ontologically creative “freedom” from which the natural world generates itself. A host institution is hardly a world in the same sense, but it presents certain purposive patterns of limitation on what can be known and what can occur and within which the artist’s generative efforts will take place and become (or not) legible and credible to the same extent as the *status quo*.

Jacques Rancière (2004, 2009) positions aesthetic experience as the (re)distribution of sensibilities, by which he means the organizing of the primary sensorial materials from which knowledge is constructed (i.e. “spaces and times, subjects and objects, the common and the singular”)[25]. Embedded residencies bring different and often incompatible distributions of sensibility together thus increasing epistemic frictions and creating opportunities for new or unprecedented ways of knowing. Similarly, Michel Foucault has argued that aesthetic experience can reconcile

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possibility with its exceptions in a discursive context.

~~Ways of knowing reflect and are sensible within particular~~  
social arrangements and relations of power. In this sense, aesthetics describes the means by which the subject can transcend the conditions not only of their own possibility but the possibility for knowledge - for example, through problemization, aspiration and creativity.[26] Aesthetic experience straddles the fluid boundary of what is and is not a legitimate form of discursive utterance in a given time and place and in this sense plays a key role in shaping what is knowable.[27]

Ways of knowing tied to social practices might also be described in terms of Gilles Deleuze's (1994) 'desiring machines' which is a term he uses for assemblages of concepts, practices and materials that create and shape the flow of desire and thus social action. Capitalism, for example, is a social machine as are other forms of ideology that motivate and justify and legitimate behaviors and outcomes. Aesthetics for Deleuze is a means by which desire can be mobilized to short-circuit social machines, where 'short-circuit' describes encounters or events that are not encompassed by an assemblage.[28] Aesthetics reflects the apperception of deterritorialized events; or to say it slightly differently, aesthetic experience allows the perception of the previously imperceptible.

These kinds of encounter produce discord, which we refer to in this paper as friction. Subjects - both artists and employees of host institutions -- are located in space and time by virtue of networks of relations, and the embedded residency creates new networks of relationality through which new identities and redistributed sensibilities can emerge. In different ways, these disruptions make room

for the previously obscured, the encounter with which is intended to produce what we are calling ‘productive frictions’— these are productive, unprecedented and desirable outcomes which may challenge given values, knowledges, priorities and practices but which create new ways of integrating experience into one structure of sensibility or the other.

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The genealogy of artists’ residencies reaches back at least to Renaissance structures of elite patronage through the Romantic tradition of the artist retreating to solitude to fire (typically) his genius. Cultural policy shifts within historical contexts of the state now routinely relegate the framing of cultural value and, more narrowly, the fine arts, as public goods with social benefits and as economic commodities, to public agencies. Western state cultural policy approaches have typically attributed productive value to the individual artist as front line culture worker, rather than, as is becoming more common, an actor in a socially embedded network of audiences, critics, facilitators, markets. In a post-industrial context, Galligan (2009) argues, we have turned back to the pre-industrial sense of art as a collective process of producing goods and knowledge. Collaborative forms of creativity can engender new meanings and subjectivities, also shaping the territory of production

Since the early 1990s, the number of AiRs has grown rapidly throughout the world, with opportunities for artists now numbering in the thousands worldwide.[30] Residencies have become an increasingly integral part of the institutionalized art world.[31] Broadly speaking there are two kinds of residency: those focused purely on artistic development, and those tied to a predefined purpose or policy.[32] Among the latter are the kinds of residencies we are most interested in: those which have the artist working in a non-art-based institutional context. In some sectors, the embedded residencies are so established (for example, artists working with scientists) that collaborations are becoming recognized as a distinct curatorial practice with a defined public engagement through exhibitions.[33] What is often lacking is a critical assessment of the processes and outcomes, and the interdisciplinary impacts of using aesthetic skills in non-art-based organizations.[34]

What drives many embedded residencies explicitly or tacitly is an expectation that the residency will be a “crucible and conduit for information exchange”.[35] For example, art/science collaborations often include expectations about the socialization and humanizing of

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technologies – or in other words, a translation of science and technology into more publicly accessible terms.[36] The artist is viewed as a “foreign element” introduced into a system to provide an outsider perspective[37] in order to “pierce existing frames of reference”. [38] In corporate contexts, there may also be expectations about transformations of practice and procedure affecting the host organization – for example, expectations about helping workers increase creativity[39]; challenging habitual ways of seeing and believing[40]; bolstering innovation, problem-solving and cultural cohesion within an organization[41]. De Certeau viewed everyday life in terms of countless exchanges between sectors of knowledge – not only for artists, but for consumers of culture who borrow and rearrange products.[42] In a new environment outside home or studio, the artist engages in complex patterns of coadaptation, in an experimental space wherein he or she does not stand outside the ‘object’ or apart from the audience or other workers. Encounters with new cultures can offer time and space for transformative knowledge acquisition and circulation both for the artist and others participating in related activities.[43]

Re-conceptualizing residencies as micropolitical and as ecologies of habitation is an ethical engagement that deterritorializes dominant codes and normalizing structures.

According to Guattari (1989), [44] ecology, in the broadest sense of the word, refers to experimentation, complex patterns of relation, subjectivity and co-adaptation between processes that are actively shaped through interrelation.[45] AiRs can operate as vectors for new circulations of knowledge: “The idea is that knowledge can be decoupled from ‘the operational demands put on it, to open it up to processes of multiplication and of links to alternate and unexpected entities, to animate it through something other than critique or defiance – perhaps as free’[46]. In the context of an embedded residency in a public school, May et al. describe the epistemic outcomes as “emergent knowledge”, an epistemic outcome as a result of transactions rather than knowledge as a given which must be located or discovered.[47]

There is also growing appreciation among private sector actors for the potential for artists to produce changes in practices that increase efficiencies and/or productivity.[48] In this sense, creativity is being recognized and sought out as an organizational resource[49] that can produce institutionally legitimate outcomes including creating a better work environment, a more effective and appealing workplace, and to encourage creativity among employees[50]. AiRs have also been celebrated for their impact on

mindfulness and their ability to defamiliarize institutional members' ways of seeing and thinking, allowing them to see more and differently[51]. Not surprisingly, this is perhaps one of the most debated aspects of embedded residencies raising questions about which logics the residency process is ultimately serving.

### *AiRs in the Cultural Economy*

Cultural labour describes creative, cognitive, affective work in the service and knowledge economies, and is increasingly the focus of capital investment within the broad organization of symbolic capital by governments, gallerists, curators and so on. The enduring energies of cities as sites of variable cultural production and consumption have, particularly since the millennium, become key components of urban planning. Antal (2009) reminds us that we tend to view art as 'the field of the inspiration, imagination, and creativity, the economy as the domain of rationality, efficiency, and profit. But these boundaries are shifting.'[52] The increasing importance of arts and aesthetics as public goods concerns perceived needs for new governance measures affecting cultural intermediaries such as government arts councils, policy and economic development agencies, artist collectives, festival producers, and AiRs.[53]

While formal cultural institutions still contribute to municipal place making and branding, civic efforts increasingly include dispersed, locally embedded artists



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involved in experimental events, spaces and programs, often  
with citizen participation. This shift may be viewed as part  
of the general evolution of experience economies and  
knowledge work, both of which value versions of what Barry  
and Meisiek (2010) call playful, imaginative mindfulness,  
and openness to new experience. As the post-industrial city  
becomes an “entertainment machine”, in the view of Lloyd and  
Clark[54] cultural components are strategically produced to  
enhance economic and political activity.[55] And as  
components of the rhetoric of cultural democracy, AiRs  
represent participatory or dialogic practices among diverse  
actors involved in the production of knowledge.

As explained in *The Ontarian* on June 19, [2017](#), the City of  
Guelph, for instance, proposes that “knowing that there’s a  
wide range of different ways of making art will both open  
people’s ideas of what’s possible as far as ... to expand  
the world, that maybe it’s got more possibilities than what  
they’ve imagined.” These include social innovation  
influencing urban planning; Donovan argues that “[i]f  
artists’ ideas and approaches are not included in the  
everyday functioning of governments, organizations and  
institutions, then the body politic is deprived of a  
valuable perspective[56].” These processes are themselves  
part of the production, nurturing, as Vij (2016) puts it,  
“permeable membranes between the inside and outside of  
systems, spaces, and even the souls of citizens[57].” These  
include the denizens of City Hall.

Claims that artists think and work in innovative ways adds  
value to everyday contexts of governing and structural

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activities while providing the artist at least some access to economic and political power through association. The discourse around the cultural economy, including ideas about creative industries, cultural industries, and creative cities, concerns the production and circulation of creative content in service and knowledge economies. As components of a cultural economy, AiRs that offer varieties of community engagement and the integration of art into daily life also typically serve economic goals of regeneration and inter-city competition. Critics have found residency programs complicit in supporting the interests of capitalism and globalization, such as, for instance, the gentrification of marginal neighbourhoods[58]. An AiR sponsored by a municipal government may challenge everyday practices and have transformative impacts on institutional policies, but such a program may also reinforce and reproduce neoliberal approaches to city planning ‘based on interlocal competition, place marketing, property- and market-led development, gentrification and normalized socio-spatial inequality’, processes in which displays of liberal cultural innovation help to reframe entrenched policy orthodoxies within appealing creative production discourses of intangible values[59]. In other words, policies oriented toward placing artists and art production in civic life may, in Ranciere’s view, simply fill “the spaces left empty by power” in an already defined process that easily absorbs and recodes outcomes of a residency as social outreach, public relations or simply as art[60].

In the meantime, AiRs present several benefits to both artist and host. Several Canadian cities sponsor AiRs, their websites listing a range of purposes including career promotion for professional artists, and working with community members to foster creativity and engagement in culture. Compensation may be in the form of a stipend, living or studio space, mentorship, or increased public profile. For example, in 1995, the City of Kitchener was the first Canadian city to establish an AiR, directed toward professional artists working on a creative project engaging

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community members and City staff. Guelph's AiR, according to its website in 2017, intends to animate public spaces, engage with the public, broaden the community experience of the art and contribute to placemaking. The municipality of Wood Buffalo offers a mentorship opportunity to build professional portfolios and facilitate creative activities with the public.[61] And there are many related models across the country. Most current programs hosted by municipal governments situate the artist in community settings. The Vancouver Parks Board, for example, collaborates with selected community centres, with members as creators, producers, performers, and active audiences. The Regina Downtown Business Improvement District engages an artist in efforts to integrate art in everyday downtown places, alleys, nooks and crannies; on July 31, 2016, the Leader-Post reported on an 'art shack' at the city's public library that hosts a new artist each week to work with the community. The Winnipeg Arts Council places artists in City facilities for periods of time that vary in length from six to eighteen months, to integrate artists and their ideas into City facilities to explore civic resources and history through the creative process. This model is one of the most similar to Edmonton's program.

## *Edmonton*

Edmonton is a relatively wealthy city, notwithstanding a recent (beginning 2008) downturn in the oil economy, with established cultural traditions and strong political support

for the arts including facilities, programs, festivals and agencies. The integration of artists and cultural workers into aspects of civic leadership include the appointments of a poet laureate and historian laureate, as well as the artist in residence. The City of Edmonton recently called for a ‘culture of innovation, encouraging staff to bring forward bold ideas and to always review ways to better serve citizens.’[62]Policy themes include the integration of culture with everyday life, and the fostering of affective experience and connections through various media of storytelling.

In a telephone conversation on April 6, 2017, John Mahon, former executive director of the EAC, recalls the adoption of the artist in residence recommendation in 2008 with “surprisingly little scrutiny” in a poor financial climate. Mahon notes the broader context of inter-city competition for recognition of cultural development, but attributes Edmonton’s support for the program also in part to a sense that the public supports a progressive arts policy. He cites the city’s sense of art as integral to civil society, part of the community rather than an elite practice. The residency doesn’t just provide a studio but requires ongoing “real and respectful...and somewhat risky interaction”.

Stephen Williams, a grants awards director with the EAC, in a conversation on March 9, 2017, also emphasizes the nature of the residency as a transitory experience of interaction with the community, while also giving the artist an opportunity to create new work for sale or professional development. He dismisses the idea of a

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specific legacy of deliverables or commissioned work,  
~~believing that arts education, whether for children or~~  
adults, is about experiencing the world. Meanwhile, the City can point to the program as success in meeting the *Art of Living* policy targets, in part to provide “quality of life for citizens...for workers...” Williams describes the ways that the artist can see through the bureaucracy or daily processes to the bigger picture, holding a mirror up to daily work so that they see themselves and environment through a different set of filters. Mike Chow, director of Aboriginal/Multicultural Relations for the City also noted, on April 24, 2017, the way that art can communicate and develop complex teams and difficult conversations about tough and sensitive things, so to connect with the artist and the process opens conversations about many other things.

## *Analysis*[63]

In 2014 Jennie Vegt became the artist in residence at City Hall, at the Office of the City Clerk the operations manager for the municipality for what became a one-year period in 2014-15. The Edmonton Arts Council facilitated the artist selection, covered the

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costs and materials, and called

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~~for further interest from other~~

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city departments “willing to engage with an artist over a reasonable period of time.”[64] As

EAC representative Stephen Williams put it, “We show up with the money [for an artist stipend] ...and...[look for a partner] to come forward with space and the willingness to interact.” This was followed by advertising for artists and working with the hosting department to select the artist and establish parameters and expectations for all parties involved. It is noteworthy that the residency was offered rather than imposed on city departments, as the role of the EAC was to facilitate an apparatus of opportunity - including suitable physical space, a suitable artist, and interaction over time - without predetermining outcomes.

Vegt was interested in working within a community rather than alone in a studio. These individual, cultural and organizational expectations and requirements at the outset are fundamentally important to embedded residencies and make up the first category of analysis in

our outcomes, *contexts*. Contexts can have two dimensions: the material and the immaterial. Material aspects encompass spatial and physical settings, proximities, materials, people and tools. The immaterial aspects reflect the

ideologies, values, professionalisms, conventions, rules and priorities through which the materials, spaces, practices and people make sense and become sensible.

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Initial negotiation between the Office and the EAC focused on perceptions of desirable qualities in the artist; the Arts Council, which tends to be composed of people deeply entrenched in local art worlds, emphasized experience and professionalism, whereas the Office was more interested in style and subject matter. After some negotiation, the latter's preference led to Vegt's appointment, with satisfactory outcomes for all concerned. In great part, this was due to the artist's ability to employ not only technical aesthetic skills but social skills, interactive disposition and the flexibility to accept uncertain job descriptions and undetermined outcomes. One of the most difficult parts of the residency for artists, including Vegt, can be a lack of structure and uncertainty in terms of day-to-day practices and expectations.

Rather than an explicitly and rigidly defined commission, the AiR stresses an ambiguous process, although Arts Council expectations include engaging staff and the public in the arts and creating a body of work for exhibit. These are aspects of immaterial context – the ideas, expectations and rules that shape an embedded residency. The City Office had expectations of the AiR as “documenting democracy” in terms of day-to-day work at City Hall, but had no firm definitions of what that might mean. Contexts were also created by implicit expectations that Vegt's work would relate to City Hall activities. “I didn't want to...[become a booster for] city hall,” she said. “But I didn't want to be super satiristic...so it was ...an interesting balance or tightrope to walk...” Vegt found that where perceived expectations pushed against her own sensibilities, she tended to produce work that in her estimation was weaker.

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<sup>aasd</sup> Vegt's expectations and goals ranged from personal artistic development to learning about politics, especially its administrative side. The artist, in turn, had to juggle perceptions of the residency by two different organizations as well as her own set of criteria. Vegt valued the opportunity to focus on her work in an appropriate space for a sustained period with few creative limitations, and the setting of City Hall dovetailed with work she was then exploring: portraiture of people in suits performing professional roles. As someone with no experience of professional environments, she looked forward to a new learning experience in a world to which she was an outsider, "to absorb, to be open -- obviously I've chosen such a different career from everyone at the City Hall." As time went on, she allowed both her expectations and those of staff to influence how she engaged during the residency, immersing herself in the work culture. "So...I tried to blend in. I wore professional clothes. And...one day I actually had to work on more messy work, so I was wearing my artist scrubs and had my hair pulled back in a little bandana, and people were just so thrilled to see me dressed as an artist."

In terms of the material context, Vegt was given a normally unused, well lit room apart from the main offices and directly above council chambers with a good view of activities there. Staff and public were allowed and encouraged to drop in, and she often felt like she was on display. "I'd often be in the studio...and we have tourists, [school groups]...or new employees..., and my studio would be part of their tour and they'd be like "And this is our artist." According to the City Clerk, initially Vegt found it lonely, so they found an unused



cubicle “very much in the centre of the office” which she

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began to use regularly along with her studio. Here, she not only rubbed shoulders with and became a part of her new colleagues’ daily routines, but where, as City Clerk Alayne Sinclair recalled in a conversation on April 6, 2017, she was also subject to employee rules of confidentiality. Staff who dropped into the isolated studio were encouraged in their own private creative practices, sometimes incorporated into visual outcomes and became dialogically entangled with the artist.

Vegt’s routine presence in the cubicle and in her studio exposed her to institutional culture and lead to ongoing exchanges and interactions with City staff. Her daily presence in the cubicle exposed her to the working routines of city staff and their habitus. Personal, ongoing interactions with staff members in visits or by participating in large meetings in effect naturalized the artist’s presence and both directly and according to Vegt and Sinclair, indirectly influenced staff to think in more creative ways in everyday routines. She began to paint scenes of office activities, but from an interpretive rather than mimetic perspective. As she observed and considered the significance of activities at City Hall, unexpected directions evolved. She encountered and became involved in a women’s group working on Aboriginal reconciliation (a priority of the City, which provides space for related work). Through this work (producing an art show based on archival images and convincing the City to host an aboriginal round dance as a step towards reconciliation) interactions emerged among different branches of the municipal government including Indigenous Relations, the City archives, budget staff, and others that, according to Sinclair, “don't normally interact with each other

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that much...forcing us to work more organically as  
<sup>aasd</sup>~~city departments."~~ These different contextual  
opportunities for unexpected and unprecedented  
interactions we describe as 'contact zones'.  
Contact zones reflect territories of relationality that  
uniquely result from overlapping context assemblages. In  
this AiR, we observed three different kinds of movement in  
contact zones (i) collaboration (ii) conflict, and (iii)  
exchange. Contact zones manifest physically, dialogically,  
through mediated interaction or practice-based forms of  
activity.

As a result of Vegt's interactions with City staff and the women working on aboriginal reconciliation, Vegt helped produce a large, visual art show based on images of indigenous / settler relations drawn from the City's archives called Reconciling Edmonton. The event involved Danielle Metcalfe-Chenail, at the time the city's Historian Laureate (or historian in residence), and two indigenous women, Anna Marie Sewell and Miranda Jimmy. The goal, as Sewell put it, was to see reconciliation from a new perspective following the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission' findings, "looking for...moments when we could have seen things differently, and that we are here because of treaties of peace and friendship."[65] The installation exhibited seven archival images of cross cultural meetings, related paintings by Vegt, poems, and a Round Dance in City Hall.[66] Over 500 people, including City staff, elected officials and aboriginal participants, attended the event. Partners included the Canadian Native Friendship Centre, City's Aboriginal Relations Office, City Clerk's Office, Edmonton Arts Council and Reconciliation in Solidarity Edmonton. Also involved were the City archives, budget staff, and others "that don't normally interact with each other that much...forcing us to work more organically as

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city departments." (Sinclair). The round dance portion of  
~~this event was the first ever Aboriginal round dance held in~~  
City Hall, considered by many to be the most important work  
Vegt produced during her residency. As indicated in fig. 1,  
the round dance occupied a large physical space where City  
staff, elected officials and aboriginal guests held hands  
and danced slowly in a circle to singing and drumming  
produced by an aboriginal drumming group. The Round Dances  
in many contemporary Indigenous cultures, including the Cree  
of the Edmonton region, serve both social and ceremonial  
functions including memorials, social  
gatherings and celebrations.[67]



Yet another outcome was the involvement of staff in creative work. What had been at first resistance or reluctance from those assuming that only artists could be creative, was transformed within contact zones through workshops, informal conversations, and projects created by Vegt designed

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specifically to address this tension. Vegt created ~~collaborative opportunities such as a canvas in progress~~ which portrayed all of elected officials with faces completed but bodies left blank for staff to fill in details. Staff enthusiastically completed the painting with humour and pointed insight reflecting perceptions of councilors' personalities, one with a pink teddy bear suit, another with an eccentric sequined outfit, someone involved in feminist issues with red high heels, and the mayor as a superhero. It was a project both subversive and reflective of perceived relationships, possible because the artist rather than mirroring the world created a structure where, according to Stephen Williams, "the world can reflect on themselves."

Vegt produced a number of large canvasses of images based on experiences she had during the residency, images which reflected elected officials, members of the public attending ongoing proceedings, and City staff - all of which were interpretive as Vegt came to new understandings about the role of the municipal government. In one diptych, her family watches city councilors portrayed as on TV, while in the other city councillors watch her family also portrayed within a TV screen. The paintings show visually her growing awareness of the interconnected and even intimate and yet distant realities between policy-makers and those they make policies for (see figures 2 and 3). Vegt also produced paintings reflecting a newfound respect for people she met in the office -- for example, portraits of strong women in undefined but powerfully resonant spaces (see figure 4). Yet another image created during the latter part of her residency shows an assembly of aboriginal and settler dignitaries at City Hall on Treaty Six Recognition day, suggesting an equality of power that has aspirational resonance, also represented in official city policy of reconciliation (see figure 5).

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Many of the outcomes were unexpected and had little to do with Vegt's practice directly. For instance, after listening to complaints from staff about regular mandatory meetings (sometimes including up to 80 people at the meeting), Vegt suggested some changes to meeting activities, e.g. working in smaller groups and involving staff in documenting the meetings in different ways. Another unexpected outcome was a greater sense of self-awareness among city staff about what was happening at City Hall on a daily basis. Because Vegt was paying such close attention to the day-to-day events that were happening around the building, staff started to re-encounter the significance of their collective work, according to Sinclair "because of what she saw and talked about."

Other work produced portrayed the everyday life at City Hall. In these images tensions were exposed between professionalism versus human qualities such as fatigue or whimsy. Images of a frustrated, tired public at a council meeting, or of powerful women conferring, as well as a napping staff member, suggest the human costs and dynamics of democratic processes. A vision of a council meeting as a card game interprets the subtleties of political negotiation.

All of these unpredictable outcomes we refer to as '*productive frictions*'. Productive frictions are activities, practices and events which run counter to the explicit organizational goals of efficiency, but which in the end are productive in unexpected ways. Productive Frictions are the unconventional, unanticipated but hoped for disruptions that manifest including revelations of habitus, epistemic



boundary softening and dissolution, identity (re)creations,  

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and various innovations in practices both in the part of the  
artist and institutional staff.

### *Conclusion: Contexts, Contact Zones and Productive Frictions*

Our approach to the embedded AiR is to encounter it as an assemblage of opportunities related to artistic practice, with open-ended outcomes including potential organizational, artistic and/or subjective change. Characterized by contexts including location and framed within structures of expectations and goals, embedded AiRs are elements of cultural ecologies, participating in fluid and dynamic sets of creative practices – in this case, within the City Clerk's office of a municipal government. What emerged from this analysis is a more complex understanding of the various moving parts of the discursive machinery and relationships that precede, encapsulate and which were transformed by an embedded AiR.

The aesthetic interventions on the part of the artist in the present case reorganized contextual elements in the City Clerk's office by locating a daily creative practice in an office environment, thereby creating opportunities for exchange in contact zones where staff and members of the public would encounter the artist in different settings: at her assigned cubicle, in her arranged studio space, or at meetings or other public events. The exchanges were uncontrolled and led to different kinds of productive friction including a series of interpretive large-scale paintings exploring the relationships between municipal authority and the public, but more poignantly in the event of a round dance held at City Hall that brought aboriginal

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members of the public together with City staff, elected <sup>aasd</sup>officials and various departments and braches of the ~~municipal government~~, a use of space and resources that had no organizational justification or jurisdiction until the embedded AiR along with her indigenous collaborators made it happen. Productive frictions reflect the discovery of resources for new experiences, the creation of new experiences, and the making visible of previously obscured or invisible experiences. And they reflect unprecedented legitimacies for the use of resources in unanticipated ways.

A particularly significant outcome in this case was productive friction that led to collaborative projects. The round dance and painting exhibition that reanimated historical photos of Indigenous peoples brought together municipal offices, artists, archives and community groups usually siloed from each other in the normal day-to-day operations at City offices. Another was the large collaborative painting event that engaged a number of staff in expressing ideas about their employer and that served to lend new legitimacy to normally unspoken perceptions about identities, roles and power differentials. In other words, the collaborative painting reterritorialized the indiscernibles obscured by hierarchies of administrative and class power. (It is worth noting that despite a positive reception by its subjects at the time, it could be that the status quo could not assimilate what was revealed: shortly after, the City gifted the portrait to its sister city of Harbin in northern China, where the painting hangs today.)

The instrumentalization of culture for spectacle and consumption commonly exploits artists as precarious or temporary workers, who provide a progressive profile of cultural support at relatively low cost, while devaluing everyday unsponsored activity. Zeplin (2009) concludes that most AIR programs and outcomes rarely address foundational political economies or establish sustainable community partnerships, with some collaborations essentially using the

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community for unpaid labour in the production of high  
profile trademark commissions.[68] ~~Calls for creativity in~~  
urban life do not usually include novel solutions to  
problems of equality and working conditions. We suggest the  
outcome in the present case may be more ambiguous, that at a  
deeper level of significance the round dance in particular  
resulted allowed embodied forms of acknowledgement on the  
part of City staff and elected officials of historical  
grievances by aboriginal people, their ongoing struggles  
against colonial legacies and residue, and an aspirational  
hope for more egalitarian future relations between municipal  
authority and local aboriginal communities. There are no  
direct policy outcomes to point to, of course, in such a  
short time frame, but decolonizing settler imaginations is  
among the first steps towards decolonizing policies[69] and  
the round dance in our estimation suggests at the very least  
a step in this direction.

What this kind of suggestion begs is the question of  
evaluation. There is typically little serious evaluation of  
embedded AiRs, especially long-term and from the host  
organization's perspective, for several reasons. Evaluation  
of arts projects that involve the community at any level are  
difficult because there are many and diverse stakeholders  
and multiple possible outcomes. Further, more generally,  
quantification is often not necessarily suited to artistic  
processes and temperaments. Absence of firm conclusions is  
in part justified by the non-utilitarian nature of art, with  
participation suggesting an end in itself. A 2003 literature  
review finds that reports by participants tend toward  
positive benefits, but specific outcomes like employment or  
education cannot be attributed to the intervention with any  
degree of certainty. In any case, arts interventions are  
more likely to be credited with enhancing social capital,  
though again it is uncertain how many and what sort of  
community members are reached.[70] One of the outcomes of  
our research points towards the need for longer-term follow  
up with host organizations within an evaluative framework.

In conclusion, public funding bodies typically rationalize AiR budgets in relation to claims for impacts on social justice, cohesion, cultural citizenship and interaction. Certain outcomes may be tied to tourism or festival revenue. In this framework, a time-limited residency may open space for new ideas, practices and voices, but may be limited as to any structural changes that might challenge neoliberal urbanism and existing socio-economic problems. Part of the difficulty is in evaluating the long term impact of productive friction in contrast to the many ways institutional legitimacy and authority will strive to reassert itself.

The artist in this case described her “weaker” work as those images that reflected prosaic expectations about her role as documentarian to the important work of City Hall – in a sense, work that reflected back to the City its own habitus rather than disrupting it. It is where the two sensibilities found a meeting ground – that is, where power balances are realized in epistemic terms, and the images and meanings produced escaped either sensibility directly that the stronger, more interesting work and innovative practices emerged from. Future research will follow related questions, including the inquiry into the roles and experiences of cultural workers and concepts of everyday creativity outside limited ‘art worlds.’[71]

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[1] See, e.g. Dutch Culture. Transartists. n.d. 'Residencies.'  
<http://www.transartists.org/>

[2] For example, see Gardner, S., ed. 2013. "International Perspectives on Artist Residencies". *D'Art Topics in Arts Policy* 45. International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies, Sydney; Loots, E. "An Exploration of an Organization Form: Artists' Residence." Paper presented at ACEI conference, Kyoto, Japan, June 2012.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233935158\\_An\\_Exploration\\_of\\_an\\_Organization\\_Form\\_Artists'\\_Residence](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233935158_An_Exploration_of_an_Organization_Form_Artists'_Residence); Kenins, L. 2013. "Escapists and Jet-Setters: Residencies and Sustainability."

<http://cmagazine.com/issues/119/escapists-and-jet-setters-residencies-and-sustainability>; Zeplin, P. 2009. "Trojan Tactics in the Art Academy: Rethinking the Artist-in-residency Programme." *Scope / Art & Design* 4.  
<http://www.thescope.org/art-and-design-4/trojan-tactics-in-the-art-academy-rethinking-the-artist-in-residency->

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[4] Antal, A.B. and Strauss, A. 2013. "Record, Replay, Shuffle and Switch: How to See More and Differently with Artists in Organizations." *International Journal of Professional Management*

[https://www.academia.edu/4604863/Record Replay Shuffle and Switch How to See More and Differently with Artists in Organisations](https://www.academia.edu/4604863/Record_Replay_Shuffle_and_Switch_How_to_See_More_and_Differently_with_Artists_in_Organisations) , p. 3

[5] Another way of describing these kind of epistemic tensions are as the product of "emergent knowledges" generated within social transactions, where the boundary between knowledge and experience is blurred (May et al 2014; Osberg et al. 2008). Similarly, the idea of "free knowledge" has also been used to describe hybrid knowledge outcomes from AiRs. Free knowledge, according to Rogoff, is knowledge that has been "decoupled from the operational demands put on it, to open it up to processes of multiplication and links to alternate and unexpected entities" (Rogoff, I. 2010. Free. *E-flux Journal* 14: 1-11, 10). Artists reinterpret taken-for-granted forms of knowing in professional settings and then generate new and unique forms of legitimacy.

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[6] Antal, B. 2009. *A Research Framework for Evaluating the Effects of*  
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~~*Artistic Interventions in Organizations*. Sweden: TILLTEUROPE.~~

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[7] For accounts of related projects and experiments in diverse workplaces,  
see, e.g., Barry & Meisiek 2010; Candy, L., & Edmonds, E. (2002). Interaction  
in art and technology. *Crossings: EJournal of Art and Technology* 2 (1); Fountentraux, J-P.  
2007. "Governing Artistic Innovation: An Interface among Art, Science and Industry."

*Leonardo* 40 (5): 489-492; Hansen, H., Barry, D., Boje, D. M., & Hatch, M. J. 2007.  
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<http://www.artsandbusiness.org.uk/Media%20library/Files/Research/Mapping%20ABIs%20-%20Prof%20SchiumaFINAL.pdf>; ; Styhre & Eriksson 2016.

[8] A lack of evaluation of AiR impacts on sponsoring bodies, communities and  
cultural workers themselves is a key impetus for further research into specific  
instances of practice, process, and contexts. And evidence based research supporting  
claims that artists can play important roles in civic life is lacking as well.

[9] Rogoff, 2010

[10] Fisher, S. 2012. "The Cultural Knowledge Ecology." Working Paper. London, UK:  
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*by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Cultural Value Project*. London, UK:  
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[11] Jahn, M., ed.. 2010. *Byproduct: On the Excess of Embedded Art Practices*.  
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[12] Barry & Meisiek. 2010.

[13] Fountentraux 2007.

[14] Antal 2009.

[15] These kinds of residencies emerged in 1960s UK, where groups introduced  
art-making as relational practice into corporate settings. In the 1990s, residencies  
in organizations tended to serve more explicitly organizational needs such as an  
interest in creativity, productivity and innovation (Barry and Meisiek 2010; Antal  
and Strauss 2013).

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~~Problem of Embeddedness." *American Journal of Sociology* 91(3):481-510.~~

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[18] Krippner, G. and Alvarez, A.S. 2007. "Embeddedness and the Intellectual Projects of Economic Sociology." *Annual Review of Sociology* 33: 219-240.

[19] Ibid. p. 220

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[21] See Agterberg, M., Van den Hooff, B., Huysman, M. & Soekijad, M. 2008. "Keeping The Wheels Turning: Multi-Level Dynamics In Organizing Networks Of Practice." *Research Memorandum 2008-003*. Amsterdam: VU University; Cook, S. & Brown, J.S. 1999. "Bridging Epistemologies; The Generative Dance Between Organizational Knowledge And Organizational Knowing." *Organization Science*, 32: 554-569; Gherardi, S. 2000. "Practice-Based Theorizing On Learning And Knowing In Organizations." *Organization* 7(2): 211-223; Granovetter, M. 1985. "Economic Action And Social Structure: The Problem Of Embeddedness." *American Journal of Sociology* 91(3): 481-510; Hislop, D. 2002. "Mission Impossible? Communicating And Sharing Knowledge Via Information Technology." *Journal of Information Technology* 17: 165-177.

[22] Embedded journalism today, in conflicts such as the Iraq War, requires correspondents to live, work and travel with a particular group of soldiers, both for their own protection and a measure of control over news outcomes. In the process, relationships between journalists and military personnel would unpredictably reshape how the journalists practiced their profession and often how soldiers regarded theirs. In very different contexts, embedded artists also demonstrate the apparatus of one sensibility searching for discursive legitimacy inside the apparatus of another---introducing fine art sensibilities, practices and knowledges into a context of non-art-based institutional sensibilities, practices, and knowledges.

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[61] Richmond, B.C. provides an apartment in the historic Branscombe House, where artists develop their own work as well as public programming including workshops and exhibitions. Victoria's first AiR, as of 2017, embeds an artist in civic planning processes, working with staff in various departments to develop a creative artwork for one or more capital projects. Public events involving art workshops have also been held at City Hall. The city also hosts an Indigenous AiR with the goal to "engage the community and City staff to produce a range of artistic works, which may include for example an exhibition, performance, publication or forum."

[62] City of Edmonton. 2016-2018. *YEG City Budget*.  
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