

# *The People's Choice: Transcultural Collectivity and the Art of Shared Knowledge Production*

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On January 10, 1981, the New York-based artistic collective Group Material opened the show *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* in a room on 13<sup>th</sup> Street in New York, which the artists had rented as a space apart from the common institutions of art.<sup>1</sup> The name of the exhibition points to the collective's agenda; it invites the predominantly Spanish-speaking local residents to participate by choosing the objects to be displayed, including personal everyday objects as well as works specifically created for the exhibition. Consequently, the aim of the exhibition can be described as an institutional critique, combined with a democratic empowerment of the people from the neighborhood.

The exhibition addresses different modes of collectivity. On a first level, Group Material acts and defines itself as an artistic collective, referring to forms of participation within the group. On a second level, the exhibition engages different people from the neighborhood surrounding the exhibition space as creative partners, who are encouraged to contribute to the content of the exhibition.<sup>2</sup> Last but not least, collectivity is also defined by the show's objects themselves, which can be understood as potential agents. Thus, modes of collaboration appear as a complex network, engaging human and non-human agents in the production of meaning and the circulation of knowledge.<sup>3</sup> According to Bruno Latour, knowledge derives from "movements."<sup>4</sup> "Knowledge, it seems, does not reside in the face-to-face confrontation of a mind with an object, any more than reference designates a thing by means of a sentence verified by that thing. On the contrary, at every stage we have

1 For a description of the exhibition see also: Ault, *Show and Tell*, 30–36. The following members of Group Material organized the exhibition: Hannah Alderfer, Julie Ault, Patrick Brennan, Lilian Dones, Anne Drillick, Yolanda Hawkins, Beth Jaker, Mundy McLaughlin, Marybeth Nelson, Tim Rollins, Peter Szypula, and Michael Udvardy.

2 It has already been pointed out that Group Material's projects move away from the ideal of autonomous works of art, instead defining the process and the action itself as art: "[T]heir product, or work of art, is signified by the exhibition itself and the collaboration it represents." Avgikos, "Group Material Timeline," 90.

3 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 63–86.

4 Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 39. Emphasis in the original.

recognized a common operator, which belongs to matter at one end, to form at the other, and which is separated from the stage that follows it by a gap that no resemblance could fill.”<sup>5</sup>

In *The People’s Choice (Arroz con Mango)*, the works displayed exemplify the gap between an object used for private purposes at home and bearing primarily personal—rather than aesthetic—meaning, and the cultural transformation of the object into something perceived in the context of an exhibition space. Their “chain of transformations”<sup>6</sup> concerns not only a change of place, but also a transformation of the cultural agency of objects, which are able to convey and transform notions of culture. Understanding the exhibition then as a site of transcultural knowledge production, the transmission of knowledge through the objects themselves must be addressed. As “migrating images,” they are part of the cultural, social, and national identities of their owners.<sup>7</sup> As “cultural transmitters,”<sup>8</sup> they are involved in their own cultural transfer processes, from private homes to public visibility in an exhibition.

Recent approaches to participation in art have referred to the change of the former spectator into an active participant, who fulfills the artwork either by perception or sometimes even through an involvement in the actual production of art.<sup>9</sup> However, *The People’s Choice (Arroz con Mango)* also draws attention to the function that the objects themselves have in shaping the collective process. This inevitably raises the question of how the objects evolve as artworks, and what kind of cultural significance they gain when temporarily abandoning their place and functions in private homes in order to be put on display in the exhibition. In seeking to answer these questions, the paper will first address the context of participatory art as such, then move on to an analysis of the exhibition, contextualizing it in relation to site-specific practices;<sup>10</sup> finally, it will offer an exploration of the cultural transformation of objects in the exhibition as well as their agency as transcultural objects.

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5 Ibid., 69.

6 Ibid., 79.

7 Mersmann and Schneider, “Cultural Transmissions and the Mission of Images,” 1.

8 Ibid., 2.

9 See Bishop, *Participation*; Blunck, *Between Object & Event*; Billing et al., *Taking the Matter into Common Hands*; Frieling et al., *The Art of Participation*.

10 Kwon, “One Place after Another.”

### Participation, collective artworks and the circulating reference of objects

There is an increasing interest in art history and related disciplines to describe artworks that are collaboratively produced by several people.<sup>11</sup> However, collaboration is a highly ambiguous term, as it can refer to working together as well as to working with an enemy.<sup>12</sup> While the term “collaboration” refers mainly to art that is produced by several people, wider notions of “participatory art”<sup>13</sup> have stressed the importance of the relations between participants who perform collective—and at times even anonymous—artistic activities. According to Boris Groys, these collaborative practices are oriented toward “the goal of motivating the public to join in, to activate the social milieu in which these practices unfold.”<sup>14</sup>

While the term participation is commonly used to describe situations wherein one or more persons participate in decisions, actions, or the creation of works, the forms or the extent of communication may vary greatly, from possibilities of limited or only partially fulfilled involvement to extended forms in which every member has equal rights and thus also takes part in the decision-making process. In *Art and Intention*, Paisley Livingston distinguishes between rare forms of collective or “joint authorship” and collective productions of art.<sup>15</sup> Although some works have been “collectively produced” and are, therefore, a result of group efforts, in many cases they are not collaboratively authored as such. Furthermore, cases of joint authorship can apply to actions that show only limited participation and communication; for example, when single authors are performing independent actions that only relate to each other in the outcome. Finally, Livingston addresses forms of joint authorship that require that all participants know of the actions and plans of the others, with mutual support and reciprocal monitoring, united in the urge to perform “an irreducibly collective action.”<sup>16</sup> In these cases, joint authors must “*intend to realize*” the shared goal, act in accordance with it, and develop “meshing sub-plans;” meaning that different acts of participation can be realized simultaneously and still represent the mutual belief of all actors.<sup>17</sup> In the case

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11 Billing et al., *Taking the Matter into Common Hands*; Kester, *The One and the Many*.

12 Kester, *The One and the Many*, 2.

13 See Bishop, *Participation*; Blunck, *Between Object & Event*; Billing et al., *Taking the Matter into Common Hands*; Frieling et al., *The Art of Participation*.

14 Groys, “A Genealogy of Participatory Art,” 18.

15 Livingston, *Art and Intention*, 75–76.

16 *Ibid.*, 77.

17 *Ibid.*, 79. Emphasis in the original.

of *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*, it is evident that the forms of participation envisioned by Group Material's members cannot be defined as joint authorship between the artists and the owners of the exhibits: not only did the artists' collective clearly appear as the actual author of the show, but the artists had also very clearly described what kind of works they deemed appropriate for the exhibition in the first place. As consequence, the group did not claim authorship of all of the objects on display, but assumed an authoritarian position by legitimizing the concept of the show as an artistic enterprise.<sup>18</sup> Critics have observed that alternative art groups tend to glorify the artist's role, often sharing the "almost mystical belief that artists are endowed with special sensitivities and powers that set them apart from other people."<sup>19</sup> However, this focus on questions of authorship and the role of the artist in participative art carries the risk of overlooking the ways in which knowledge is produced and transformed through the objects.

Therefore, the role of the objects within networks of collaborative productions should also be analyzed. When addressing media-based processes of participation in which knowledge is produced, i.e. existing gaps between knowledge and non-knowledge of the art's cultural context, transmissions between different human or even non-human actors come into focus: What happens when a culturally diverse neighborhood becomes a "laboratory"<sup>20</sup> for artists? What does it mean for personal objects to receive a broader cultural meaning in a public exhibition? It is thus important to also address the "circulating reference" of the objects,<sup>21</sup> which become mobile and re-combinable after having been removed from their homes and arranged aesthetically in the exhibition; yet, even a gallery space that is explicitly defined as an alternative to the museum becomes a "white cube," in which objects are perceived as artworks. In *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*, the works shift from the personal sphere to something perceived in the context of an exhibition. Their "chain of transformations"<sup>22</sup> concerns not only a change of place, but also a transformation of the cultural agency of objects, which become mediators in a transfer of knowledge from private to public.

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18 Referring to similar artistic practices, Miwon Kwon has already noted that "because of the 'absence' of the artist from the physical manifestation of the work, the *presence* of the artist has become an absolute *prerequisite* for the execution/presentation of site-oriented projects." Kwon, "One Place after Another," 102. Emphasis in the original.

19 Goldbard, "When (Art) Worlds Collide," 190.

20 Latour, *Pandora's Hope*, 32.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 79.

This paper will therefore explore media-based processes that go beyond basic notions of authorship, addressing instead forms of participation that have to be understood as a collective production; at the same time the objects induce the experience of cultural transformation. An in-depth analysis of this transformation requires a closer look into the conception of the exhibition to begin with.

### **The exhibition *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* by Group Material**

*The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* was on view in an independent room financed by the members of Group Material between January 10 and February 1, 1981. It was one of the first collective exhibitions of the group, which was founded in September 1979 and initially consisted of students who had just finished their undergraduate degrees at the School of Visual Arts.<sup>23</sup> Soon after their first meetings they rented their first exhibition space in July 1980—a storefront at 244 East 13<sup>th</sup> Street on the Lower East Side in New York. The concept of *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* was originally announced as follows: “*The People's Choice*—an exhibition of favorite art possessions on loan from the people and households of 13<sup>th</sup> Street between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenues, and the members of Group Material. A display of the private gone public, of the-not-normally-found-in-an-art-gallery, of personal choice and cultural value on one block in New York City.”<sup>24</sup> In planning the exhibition, the members of Group Material went from door to door in the neighborhood of their collective exhibition area, addressing the neighbors and requesting their participation with the help of Hector and Celinda, two Spanish-speaking children.<sup>25</sup> In a letter of invitation addressed to “Dear Friends and Neighbors of 13<sup>th</sup> Street,”<sup>26</sup> the group also noted what kinds of objects they would prefer for the exhibition: “We would like to show things that might not usually find their way into an art gallery: the things that you personally find beautiful, the objects that you keep for your own pleasure, the objects that have meaning for you, your family and your friends. What would these objects be? They can be photographs, or your favorite posters. If you collect things, these objects would be good for this exhibition. If you knit, crochet, do needlepoint, or any other craft, these would be good, also. Drawings, paintings, sculpture,

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23 The first members of the group were: Hannah Alderfer, Julie Ault, Patrick Brennan, Yolanda Hawkins, Beth Jaker, Marybeth Nelson, Marek Pakulski, Tim Rollins, Peter Szygula, and Michael Udvardy. Ault, *Show and Tell*, 7–8.

24 Excerpt from Group Material, “Press Release, January 1981,” 34.

25 Ault, *Show and Tell*, 30.

26 Group Material, “Letter to the friends and neighbors of the 13<sup>th</sup> Street,” 35.

furniture or any other art forms created by yourself or others will be included. Choose something you feel will communicate to others.”<sup>27</sup> The intention was for the community to hand in their own objects for display. Rather than objects of an aesthetic value, those with personal meaning were favored, among them “personal mementoes, photographs and gifts.”<sup>28</sup> The objects were sometimes accompanied by a personal statement from the owner, a fact that underlines their personal significance: “Nearly everything came with a story, as a whole, the show turned into a narrative of everyday life, a folk tale in which intimacies were shared without shame.”<sup>29</sup>

To adapt the exhibition to the needs of the working class, the gallery was open from five to ten in the evening and on weekends and holidays from noon to ten.<sup>30</sup> Installation photographs from the show reveal that the objects were not displayed in a systematic way, as is usually done in museums, but more like the arrangements of objects in private homes, for which the owners combined objects which they liked and to which they had a personal connection. Around one hundred objects were stacked from floor to ceiling right at the entrance to the exhibition space,<sup>31</sup> together with labels identifying their owners, and sometimes including a personal story. The majority of the objects displayed were figurative pictures, which built an association with the human body. Reproductions of images of saints were juxtaposed with comic drawings, wedding pictures, and school pictures, as well as different kinds of personal family photographs. Also on display were a mural made by the neighborhood kids, amateur paintings—among them family portraits or imaginary landscapes—and a clay item made by someone’s dead grandmother.<sup>32</sup> Central to the exhibition was the display of portrait photographs of family members or relatives: “The photographs were of babies, first communions, weddings, pictures taken in the army, and in one case, a billboard of superimposed snapshots documenting the history of an entire family. Each picture had its own story, and together they added up to a moving, detailed record of a small community within the city.”<sup>33</sup>

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27 Ibid.

28 Lawson, “The People’s Choice,” 32.

29 Ibid. Discussing Group Material’s first show, Richard Goldstein has mentioned that “there is much assemblage of image and text, as if the artists were trying to coax you away from a purely visual interpretation.” Goldstein, “Enter the Anti-Space,” 1–40.

30 Avgikos, “Group Material Timeline,” 90.

31 Green, “Citizen Artists: Group Material,” 18.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid. However, Green does not analyze the transcultural implications of the objects.

Consequently, most of the objects and pictures displayed in the exhibition are part of everyday life, and are used to remember as well as to mark the different stages in the life of a social person.

The photographs displayed foster the relation between image and object and thus act in direct relation to the people of the exhibition's neighborhood. Since the invention of photography, the photograph has given "a sentiment as certain remembrance"<sup>34</sup> and has had an aura of authenticity due to the physical relation between it and its object.<sup>35</sup> Whereas the act of taking a photograph has been discussed widely in terms of a physical connection with its object, the processes before and after the click of the shutter can be understood as culturally coded gestures.<sup>36</sup> The selection of the subject, its staging, the distribution of the photograph, its reception and the handling of the picture are thus part of daily life practices in a specific cultural context. Consequently, photography is evidence of a culture of memory, in which the pictures are not only taken, but also used, and thus are part of everyday social practices. The significance of the exhibition lay in those forms of personal memory that were part of daily life practice and became visible without being reduced to a stereotypical vision of "the other;" and this is mostly due to the fact that the people of the neighborhood claimed their own visibility through the selection of their objects.

In the exhibition, the objects underwent a transformation in visibility from a personal to a broader cultural significance, attesting to the lives and tastes of a multicultural neighborhood in New York: "Imagine, that for three weeks there would be a room full of things that describe the people of 13<sup>th</sup> St!"<sup>37</sup> This emphasis is also reflected in the title of the exhibition: *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*, referring to the inclusion of the people from 13<sup>th</sup> Street and their creative involvement. Furthermore, the title also makes a reference to Cuban culture; the subtitle of the show, "Arroz con Mango," suggested by someone from the neighborhood, is a Cuban expression that means something like: "What a mess."<sup>38</sup> This reference calls to mind the political situation between Cuba and the United States at the time. From April to September 1980, a major "Cuban exodus"<sup>39</sup> reached Florida and became known as *los*

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34 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 70.

35 Ibid., 76–99.

36 Brändle, "Das Foto als Bildobjekt," 84.

37 Group Material, "Letter to the friends and neighbors," 35.

38 Ault, *Show and Tell*, 30.

39 Pedraza, *Political Disaffection in Cuba's Revolution and Exodus*, 151.

*Marielitos*, among them artists and intellectuals as well as prisoners. Due to the ephemeral quality of the exhibition, and the fact that few reproductions and reports of it are still in circulation, an analysis of the exact historical and cultural background of the objects in the show would be more than difficult. Nevertheless, by virtue of their diversity, the objects were a manifestation of the diverse culture of the neighborhood of 13<sup>th</sup> Street.

### **From alternative spaces to site specificity as transcultural practice**

The collective works of Group Material relate to the site as a cultural location, are defined by locational identities. In an attempt to depart from criticizing the cultural framework of the museum, the group ended up renting its own room for exhibitions; which, as group member Tim Rollins put it, was “not a space, but a place, a laboratory of our own.”<sup>40</sup> By using the metaphor of a laboratory, Rollins refers to processes of knowledge production as tied to a specific location.

The exhibition *The People’s Choice (Arroz con Mango)* must therefore be discussed in the context of art that is produced outside of conventional museum space. However, this still raises the question if, or how, the perception of visitors changes in those alternative spaces. The group’s claim that *The People’s Choice (Arroz con Mango)* attempted “to approach the relationship between artists and audiences” by enlarging “the capacity that the gallery has to represent different aesthetic agendas”<sup>41</sup> really appears to have remained the hope that, in getting familiarized with both the new objects on display and the curious site of display, the visitor would experience an intensification of the act of viewing, which would lead to increased participation. In *Caution! Alternative Space!* from 1982, Group Material referred to their development and artistic strategies while simultaneously addressing the importance of an alternative space for their projects:

Group Material started as twelve young artists who wanted to develop an independent group that could organize, exhibit and promote an art of social change. In the beginning [...] we met and planned in living rooms after work. We saved money collectively. [...] We looked for a space because this was our dream – to find a place that we could rent, control and operate in any manner we saw fit. [...] Without this justifying room, our work would probably not be considered art. And in our own minds, the gallery became a security blanket,

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40 Rollins, “What has to be done,” 218.

41 Group Material, “Group Material Interviewed by Critical Art Ensemble,” 25

a second home, a social center in which our politically provocative work was protected in a friendly neighborhood environment.<sup>42</sup>

Even if a truly “alternative space”<sup>43</sup> will never be realized as a space independent of all given power relations, to call for and try to realize such an alternative already marks an important step in correcting and questioning the authority of the museum. Still, Group Material, like many other alternative art groups, later returned to museum space for exhibiting their artworks when they became well-known artists, even though many of the cultural and political implications of their works remained the same.<sup>44</sup>

In her essay, “One Place after Another. Notes on Site Specificity,” Miwon Kwon analyzes the concepts as well as the transformation of site specificity from the late 1960s to today.<sup>45</sup> By departing from the phenomenological sites of Minimal Art, Kwon addresses the social, institutional, and discursive formations of site specificity in art. While artists criticize the institution of the museum as such, their work, at the same time, “no longer seeks to be a noun/object but a verb/process, provoking the viewer’s *critical* (not just physical) acuity regarding the ideological conditions of viewing;” and its relationship to the site becomes one of “unfixed *impermanence*,” which is experienced only in elusive situations.<sup>46</sup> These artistic practices, which also include the work by Group Material, refer to “a *discursively* determined site”<sup>47</sup> that is shaped by social conditions, knowledge, and cultural debate. In theories of site specificity, the fluctuation of site art has been addressed as “a temporary thing, a movement, a chain of meanings and imbricated histories.”<sup>48</sup> In such conceptions of a transitive space, a transition of the objects themselves as mobile entities within such nomadic practices as well as the collective processes must be equally addressed. Moreover, the relation of the objects to the site includes their entanglement with other human and non-human agents, establishing a temporary, site-specific process that unfolds in complex networks.

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42 Group Material, “Caution! Alternative Space! (1982),” 895.

43 Ibid.

44 Paradigmatic for Group Material’s return to the museum is the exhibition *Democracy: Education* which was on view at the Dia Art Foundation in New York in 1988.

45 Kwon, “One Place after Another.”

46 Ibid., 91. Emphasis in the original.

47 Ibid., 92.

48 Meyer, “The Functional Site,” 24.

Lucy Lippard has pointed out that in the 1980s, apart from so-called mainstream art, artistic projects departed from the objectives of mainstream art and were “going to have to restore the collective responsibility of the artist and create a new kind of community within, not apart from, the rest of the world.”<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Group Material later called for an alternative production of culture with their projects, outside of mainstream art:

Our exhibitions and projects gather different levels of cultural production into one site. By doing this we are automatically serving more audiences than the mainstream. A lot of specific shows have had specific community concerns; a lot of them touch social relationships in the way the artwork is perceived. In other words, why can't an art show be organized that has a different level of concern besides the specialized artist?<sup>50</sup>

Even though it is obvious that it was the location of the alternative exhibition spaces which led to the inclusion of objects from the area's Spanish-speaking residents, the *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* nevertheless developed a collective vision through the presentation of objects that transcended the idea of a single culture. It therefore addresses local concerns, as the diverse cultural neighborhood became visible in its significance as a local group of the city of New York; in this way, they were able to portray themselves as protagonists of their own cultural history. According to Doug Ashford, the exhibition “was produced with the idea that the objects culled from our friends and neighbors would produce an alternative archive of the experiences of art, an experience deduced from the beliefs of others—those not in the room.”<sup>51</sup> Inasmuch as a transcultural approach emphasizes modes of transformation between regions and cultures,<sup>52</sup> the intention of the exhibition was to draw attention to a more transcultural vision of the local, which addressed the dynamic relationship of objects as well as the circulation of artefacts, even before the frequently-addressed topic of mobility in a global world.<sup>53</sup> Given this understanding, the various objects visible in the exhibition became mediators in a vision of culture that was depicted as global and local at the same time. Rather than a “de-territorialization” of the objects, in relation to which Arjun Appadurai has described the global transmissions of cultures

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49 Lippard, *Get the Message?*, 170.

50 Group Material, “Group Material Interviewed by Critical Art Ensemble,” 23.

51 Ashford, “Group Material.”

52 See Juneja and Falser, “Kulturerbe—Denkmalpflege: transkulturell,” 17–26.

53 See Juneja, “Global Art History,” 274–297.

and of imagination “as an organized field of social practice,”<sup>54</sup> the exhibition launched a “re-territorialization”<sup>55</sup> of the works *as* transcultural objects. Thus, the objects already belong to multiple spaces and different locations in the context of the exhibition.

While the objects themselves appear as shifting cultural entities, *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* nevertheless remains a contested place, referring to different—even diverging—cultural spaces, and thus remaining ambivalent: The collective’s theory of culture, the cultural significance of the exhibition space, and the cultural background of the personal objects of a neighborhood known as a “melting pot for ethnic groups”<sup>56</sup> and various subcultures are not easily united in a common project. This also creates a certain imbalance between the definition of art espoused by the group members and the interests of the local people, who could only speak for themselves through the presentation of objects and stories then defined as art. Thus, the group still claimed to hold an authoritarian position, for example by describing the possible content of the exhibition in advance or selecting a specific neighborhood, which was not resolved by the inclusion of those personal objects in an exhibition context. Still, as the objects remained unspecific in their reference to “a” specific and thus constructed culture, they avoided a typification of culture according to ethnic and national attributions of certain traditions.<sup>57</sup> The way the objects were presented in the exhibition thus aimed at a visibility of local culture as a whole, while trying to avoid encouraging a merely stereotypical vision of the neighborhood. These processes of transformation were not mainly defined by the members of the group, but more by the circulation of the objects themselves, which in turn determined a more transcultural vision of culture.

### **Visions of transcultural collectivity**

The concept of the *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)*, that people would actually contribute objects that had meaning for them, gave the exhibition itself a kind of collectivity that can also be understood as transcultural, establishing itself in a position that shifts between different cultures and identities. The objects displayed did not refer to one place, but themselves illustrated the idea of multiple places as well as multiple authorships.

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54 Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 31.

55 Juneja, “Global Art History,” 275.

56 Avgikos, “Group Material Timeline,” 92.

57 See Juneja, “Global Art History.”

At the same time, Group Material, in a way, performed a kind of cultural critique, including a critique of the museums' space as such, defined by the group as a critique of the dominant culture: "Indeed, it is fundamental to our methodology to question every aspect of our cultural situation from a political point of view, to ask, 'What politics inform accepted understandings of art and culture? Whose interests are served by such cultural conventions? How is culture made, and for whom is it made?'"<sup>58</sup> The aim of the collective was thus to enhance what they defined as an "actual cultural production,"<sup>59</sup> which also sought to question and redefine the idea of the dominant U.S. culture: "Group Material researches work from artists, non-artists, the media, the streets. [...] In our exhibition, Group Material reveals the multiplicity of meanings that surround any vital social issue. Our project is clear. We invite everyone to question the entire culture we have taken for granted."<sup>60</sup> However, there seems to be a strong ambivalence between the theoretical concept of culture in the writings of Group Material and the lived culture of those who participated in the exhibition. Because the objects themselves acquired a new significance in the exhibition and underwent a cultural transformation from private to public, there was always the risk that they would come to represent a mere folkloristic notion of everyday life. On the other hand, some of the exhibited pieces—like a collection of PEZ candy dispensers—also refer to processes of negotiation and shifts in the cultural identity of their owners.

Because of its ambivalent position, *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* was certainly unique in the history of the group, as the artistic collective leaned more towards an activist understanding of culture, in which art was defined as an "instrument of social change."<sup>61</sup> In a later interview regarding their activist concept of art, Group Material explained how they "wanted to truly affect the social relations that surrounded the production and distribution of artwork"<sup>62</sup>—although this vision was never fully realized, because whereas the members of Group Material later exhibited work in major museums, the people who selected and lent the objects only gained temporary visibility. *The People's Choice (Arroz con Mango)* thus remained an important attempt at involving forms of collectivity that aimed at, but never fully realized a transcultural vision of culture. It thus hovers between a portrayal of culture as a specific and ideological construct and a portrayal of culture as a practice and a

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58 Group Material, "On Democracy, 1990," 135–136.

59 Rollins, "A Proposal for Learning to Get Things off our Chests," 14.

60 Group Material, "Statement, 1985," 895.

61 Avikos, "Group Material Timeline," 89.

62 Group Material, "Group Material Interviewed by Critical Art Ensemble," 21.

process of negotiation, in which communication and circulation occur not only between people, but also between objects. Due to the transfer of the objects from private to public, locality and modes of belonging to various places are negotiated, but are always at risk of turning again into a mere representation of the lives and personal tastes of their owners. Thus, a transcultural vision of the exhibition remains partially utopian, but is most closely realized by the diverse objects themselves and their multiple ties to human and non-human actors.

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