

Muntadas  
Activating  
Artifacts:  
About  
Academia

UMBC

# Muntadas

# Activating

# Artifacts:

# About

# Academia

Edited by Niels Van Tomme



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Muntadas

### Gather/Unfurl\*

The group of college art students go camping, and learn from local Boy Scouts how to make a fire. They unfurled their sleeping bags. Seven out of ten students had never camped and had to try to pitch tents, pack appropriate food and clothing to sleep outside. It is a class assignment.\*\*

# Communiversality: Inside and Outside Art Education

Daniel Tucker<sup>1</sup>

*A camping trip as classroom. An apartment as classroom. A boat trip as classroom. A neighborhood meeting as classroom. A classroom as a meeting. A classroom as a garden. A classroom as a gallery. A classroom as a home.*

In this essay you will find a selective amalgam of experiences and reflections. Starting with a personal reflection on my life in between educational models, then a focused section on teaching ecological art and a section on independent art school projects, then another section on the tensions between working inside and outside formal educational institutions, and finally a conclusion and some proposals. What is illustrated in the text on the facing pages is a braided field-scan of the work of several spaces and projects relevant to the categories of ecological art education and independent art schools, along with my own encounters with them. The goal is to set up a proposal for a hybrid educational practice that engages contradictions in order to eventually push beyond them.

1 Dedicated to Dara Greenwald. Before her untimely passing in 2012, my close friend Dara was a frequent interlocutor on the subject of education. A lover of both school and community, she penned a provocative blog post on [justseeds.org](http://justseeds.org) in 2010 entitled “School as Art” following her participation in Rebecca Zorach’s “Pedagogies of the Periphery” session at Chicago’s Threewalls Gallery during the College Art Association conference that year. See <http://justseeds.org/school-as-art/>.

\* A note on the sources: the examples of independent school projects are all drawn from personal encounters between 2005 and 2015. The following “eco-art” professors participated in my email interviews between 2014 and 2016: Christine Baeumler (University of Minnesota), Nicolas Lampert (University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee), Amy Franceschini (California College of the Arts), Jeanette Hartmann (University of New Mexico), Melinda Stone (University of San Francisco), Matthew Friday (State University of New York at New Paltz), Sarah Ross (School of the Art Institute of Chicago), Sarah Lewison (Southern Illinois University), Brett Hunter (Alfred University), and Laurie Palmer (School of the Art Institute of Chicago and University of California, Santa Cruz). Additional feedback came from participants in my workshop held on April 19, 2015, in the series organized by Ariana Jacob and Sheetal Prajapati, where participants were asked to share their own ecological art education projects.

\*\* Amy Franceschini, interview with the author, December 1, 2014.

We gathered. A living room is packed, we are there for a discussion about the geopolitical dimension of the 2005 French riots. We are inside the small flat of Henriette and Jakob, known then as Copenhagen Free University.\*

## INTRODUCTION

### An Artist in an Office and the Project of Self-Directed Learning

*Find a book on a shelf and see where it leads you;  
go on a field trip and see what grabs your attention.*

Like most aspects of one's life, an educational philosophy is as much a response to time spent learning in various environments as it is a discrete theory. As a child I was educated in an experimental public school focused on social justice and self-directed learning. Initially this offered a model for education which felt very much like an unplanned journey through ideas, a Situationist-inspired *dérive* in the library.<sup>2</sup> Its practice was a mix between experiential learning and a hippie variation on what human resources departments now call "competency-based education." Essentially this meant field trips and lots of unstructured independent work. Without being given conventional grades or homework, the young students were left to themselves for long periods of time to explore. The vision, it seemed, was that something would inspire enough curiosity for the students to find and push their way into an integral approach to any given topic, form, or technique.

Satisfied with this independent approach, upon the completion of high school I had no aspirations to reenter formal education. Then a friend suggested an alternative route, describing a unique place where my disparate interests in graffiti, activism, street theater, global subcultures, and the organizing of events and exhibitions could not only coexist but would be interpreted through an increasingly heterogeneous historical canon. With no significant training in art, I was soon off to art school and within a decade had also completed a master's degree in art at a research university. In parallel to that, most of my free time was spent participating in and documenting social movements that brought together farmers, students, and labor activists to learn how the global economy worked. Drawing from that inspiration, I took on many projects that tried to facilitate such informal and collaborative ways of learning with diverse and eclectic groups. I had found my educational home in the strange and special place that is art school in tandem with community spaces where art and activism mixed. With two fine-arts degrees in tow, my movement inside and outside and on the fringes of what most people experience as formal education has now led me fully back into the classroom.

2 For a definition of *dérive* see Guy Debord, "Definitions," trans. Ken Knabb, *Internationale Situationniste #1* (Paris, June 1958), archived at <http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/definitions.html>.

\* The Copenhagen Free University existed from 2001 to 2007 and is archived at <http://copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk/>.

They unfurled. “They learned how to glean from four farmers’ markets and, with what they gathered, creatively design a menu to feed approximately seventy-five people. Through this we found that students created a strong community—from the beginning. They created a community amongst themselves, with the folks they serve, the farmers they glean produce from—I find it impossible to teach community building skills through readings and one-off experiences—and learned that the students created community due to their need to rely on each other—folks were depending on them, they wanted to prepare delicious food and they needed one another to make this happen—they had a blast in the kitchen and were so proud of their accomplishments when the diverse group of assembled eaters praised their wares.”—Melinda Stone\*

Five days a week I wake up and go to work at a school. It is a small art school in the center of Philadelphia where I run a small new graduate department called “Social & Studio Practices.” It is one of these multifaceted jobs that requires a virtuosic balancing act of eclectic activities that feels almost designed to result in a few things falling. I’m not complaining. This is who I am. While I am critical of my own neoliberalizing subjectivity, my whole life with flexible project work and interdisciplinary education has been a training ground for such eclecticism, and also for the very specific kinds of questions our department asks about art.

On a day like today I may move from a meeting with a community organization we are hosting an event for, to an email exchange with a student about the role of mastery in the context of deskilled and dematerialized project-based art, and then to the writing of some copy for an advertisement in an art magazine, a task that could not be entrusted to the marketing department because they lack familiarity with codes specific to the discourse surrounding today’s participatory art. Then I might design a survey for the school’s entire student body about diversity and inclusion, and go on to book some travel for an upcoming visit to a public art symposium in a nearby city. At night I come home to eat dinner and work on my Communiversity essay, which you are now reading. And then I wake up tomorrow and spend half the day writing a grant report for some recent funding for an exhibit about social movements and poetry, before devoting the second half to studio visits with six graduate students who work across ceramics, photography, installation, performance, youth media, and participatory action research. With me are two visiting artists I have scheduled to join us in order to make up for the fact that our faculty, comprised nearly entirely of adjuncts, can’t be available for regular meetings with students.

Such jobs are a contemporary phenomenon insofar as they represent a dissolved division of labor characteristic of our post-industrial era, but they build off the precedent set by there being increasingly more artists teaching in higher education. As anthropologist Judith Adler wrote in *Artists in Offices*, her impressive 1979 ethnography of the California Institute of the Arts, “Finally freed from the compulsions of the marketplace, the university artist engaged in his aesthetic research can feel more purely professional than those artists whose projects are compromised by other ways of making a living [...] who can afford for only a limited time to explore an idea which does not sell.”<sup>3</sup> Later in the book, Adler describes the tensions of running an institution with employees whose prior work experience has predisposed them to treat the

3 Judith Adler, *Artists in Offices* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1979), 11.

\* Melinda Stone, interview with the author, December 3, 2016.

We gathered. For four nights in the financial district of Manhattan we gathered in the third-floor meeting rooms of 16 Beaver Street to discuss neo-liberalism. We came back the following year, in 2006, for three more nights of presentations and discussion. To begin that process, the hosts shared in their notes that “Continental Drift is a modular and experimental seminar which has embarked upon the ‘impossible’ task of articulating the immense geopolitical and economic shifts which took place between 1989 and 2001, the effects of those changes on the emerging bodies of governance (i.e., the formation of economic blocs like EU or NAFTA) and in turn the effects on subjectivity today. We seek individuals who are concerned about what is taking place around us in the name of politics. We may be activists, artists, cultural workers, non-aligned subjects, whatever singularities seeking possible lines of flight which may be collective. Our goal is to use these seminars to take our inquiries beyond self-interest and contribute to this pool that some have called the general intellect. We hope in sharing our thoughts, research and experiments, we may initiate further experimentations with collective research/action and actually connect to various movements.”\*

school as a temporary site of engagement: “The early institute was a utopian community in which the longer one stayed, the further one fell from honor.”<sup>4</sup> Indeed, art school is simultaneously a place where some of the most dynamic ideas and people in art go to die and, one hopes, sometimes to grow. Fast-forwarding thirty-eight years past the moment when Adler was writing, today we find many more people staying in such jobs, and many art schools growing. This development has produced a range of new challenges and new possibilities.<sup>5</sup>

As the critic Pascal Gielen says of the present moment looking forward, even though there is “a nostalgic longing for a new elite and the training of artists in isolation [...] art education cannot isolate itself from the world, like the classical academies did.”<sup>6</sup> Drawing on my own experiences in the field—in the streets and in the garden, in alternative and conventional schools alike—I focus on socially engaged art education because it has the potential to change both art and social life by taking all the things that art means to people and reconnecting them with how art is described and organized in society. Such art education has to move beyond debates about artistic autonomy and must assume the necessity of schools being relevant to and engaged with society. Going beyond merely a narrow market-driven approach to some new discipline or subgenre of art, this work can merge the best of art education’s past with the necessity of connecting with new concerns. As the curator Okwui Enwezor wrote while serving as Dean of Academic Affairs at San Francisco Art Institute, “The task I see for art schools lies

4 Ibid., 88–90.

5 The critic Jerry Saltz and the artist Coco Fusco, among others, have penned some useful and pointed criticisms of the current state of art schools, focused largely on their cost. Additionally, Saltz points out that “we need to find a way to stop dogmas from being taught and teachers from inculcating students with ideas that were fashionable 30 or 40 years ago, when the instructors were the student’s age. Not to mention that too many of those who teach in the actual art departments everywhere have these privileged positions based on doubtful credentials, long-ago, onetime accomplishments, or, in the case of a lot of men my age, only good-old-boy connections. These teachers get into these places, never leave, and rot institutions and unsuspecting students from the inside.” Jerry Saltz, “We Need to Reconsider Art School,” *Vulture*, December 5, 2014, <http://www.vulture.com/2014/12/we-need-to-reconsider-art-school.html>; see also Coco Fusco, “Debating an MFA? The Lowdown on Art School Risks and Returns,” *Modern Painters*, December 2013, reprinted at <http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/989814/debating-an-mfa-the-lowdown-on-art-school-risks-and-returns>.

6 Pascal Gielen and Paul De Bruyne, “The Catering Regime,” introduction to *Teaching Art in the Neoliberal Realm: Realism versus Cynicism*, ed. Pascal Gielen and Paul De Bruyne (Amsterdam: Antennae/Valiz, 2012).

\* <http://16beavergroup.org/drift/intro2006ny.htm>.

Across the southwestern United States every fall the Land Arts of the American West program takes art students into the field to explore topics, including Watershed, the U.S.-Mexico Border, Foodshed, Utopian Architecture, Land Use, Eminent Domain, Resource Extraction and the Rights of Nature. Jeanette Hart-Mann, the instructor, shared that “the objectives of this course are to orient students within the expansive field of social and environmental issues in the most profound way possible, while maintaining an experimental space for each student to respond independently, collectively, creatively, and critically [...]. Teaching environmental stewardship is not the primary objective of the LAAW program, but it might be implicated in many of the activities and projects undertaken. Stewardship implies that we know what the best environmental practices are, and this basic assumption is often fraught with problematics of power structures, dominant cultural trends, and historic norms, which are the roots of many of these issues. This territory also includes both environmental and social relationships, which should not be parsed out, one over the other. What LAAW does is support skills necessary to ask questions through broadening experiential investigations on the ground and deconstructing the normative of environmental and social structures and nature/culture debates.”\* They unfurled.

in reconciling the experimental, radical practices of the individual artist with the unruly, unpredictable, asymmetrical relations that constitute the world in which such art is fashioned and realized.”<sup>7</sup>

## ECO ART EDU

### Place-Based Arts Pedagogy and “Connective Aesthetics”

*To move from inside the air-conditioned, wifi-enabled thumbtacked walls into where the city and the garden converge with social and natural worlds beyond any invented boundaries: into a liminal space where learning by doing can occur.*

My interest in ecologically-minded art education is twofold. First is a pedagogical interest, which has led me to consider the possibility of an arts pedagogy that is place-based and that models how art should be taught today—a pedagogy that is literally inside and outside the school, merging the concerns of both spheres. Second, and fundamentally, I am hopeful that anyone offering an ecological perspective in any educational context at this moment in the planet’s history can encourage and orient attention toward practices that will ameliorate the effects of climate change and other environmental transformations that have led scientific experts to propose that we are living in a new geological epoch, one based on humanity’s impact on Earth that is “defined by nuclear tests, plastic pollution and domesticated chicken.” This is how art must be taught in the anthropocene, and it can show us how we have lived and how we can live differently.<sup>8</sup>

Ranging from aesthetic experiments with mapping to planting and maintaining vegetation, the teaching of ecologically minded art looks and feels as diverse as ecological art itself. In her writing on how eco-art could be taught, the scholar Hilary Inwood proposes that tools such as empathetic listening, dialogue, and collaboration are key to a “contextually situated” arts pedagogy that takes into consideration the needs, ideologies, values, and sociopolitical concerns of specific places and communities.<sup>9</sup> In the facing text we encounter teachers who took their students to farmers’ markets and soup kitchens. These embodied experiences are at once

7 Okwui Enwezor, “Schools of Thought,” *Frieze*, November 2, 2006, <https://frieze.com/article/schools-thought>.

8 Damian Carrington, “The Anthropocene Epoch: Scientists Declare Dawn of Human-Influenced Age,” *Guardian*, August 29, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/aug/29/declare-anthropocene-epoch-experts-urge-geological-congress-human-impact-earth>.

\* Jeanette Hart-Mann, interview with the author, January 3, 2015.

We gathered. In Chinatown we convened at the storefront of Telic, to discuss California's educational budget crisis and what it means from the perspective both of alternative educators and of itinerant, "freeway flier" adjunct professors. Known to most as LA Public School, this space "is a school with no curriculum. It is not accredited, it does not give out degrees, and it has no affiliation with the public school system. It is a framework that supports autodidactic activities, operating under the assumption that everything is in everything."\*\* The founders explain: "We think of the Public School as a large scale collaborative public art project, one that has taken us by surprise in terms of how large it's becoming."\*\*

completely obvious and strangely foreign to arts education. As Inwood elaborates, much of the standard art-education curriculum “falls short, as the images and ideas that lessons are based on are often far removed from the lives of learners [...]. As learners identify and study features of issues central to their own community, they are developing their own content and constructing their own knowledge, a powerful means of making learning relevant. It is through this means that environmental issues will be made personal and learners will be more likely to translate shifts in thinking into concrete action.”<sup>10</sup>

As Inwood suggests, ecological art education can also serve to “green” the field of art education in general “to help grow a more sustainable praxis within the discipline [of art]. This entails a philosophical shift [...] and also a practical shift, one that reduces the waste and toxicity on which many art programs are built [...]. I [also] see eco-art education as a means to broaden the boundaries of environmental education that have been rooted so heavily in science education in the past.”<sup>11</sup> Suzi Gablick, who advocates the concept of “connective aesthetics,” has suggested in her essays and books that eco-art can be a corrective to past attempts in the history of art to isolate itself or be overly self-referential. Since the early 1990s she has been arguing that “we need to cultivate the connective, relational self as thoroughly as we have cultivated, in the many years of abstract thinking, the mind geared to the principle of individual selfhood.”<sup>12</sup>

Affirming Gablick’s and Inwood’s calls for a more integral art-education practice of connectivity, many educators practicing ecological art education shared observations in interviews with me about the necessity of the ethical capacities of listening, an engagement with place, and a time commitment for all socially engaged art practices. As Amy Franceschini, a professor teaching such a course in the Fall 2011 term at the California College of the Arts in San Francisco, remarked, “I think first and foremost we need to get students out into the field and not sitting in classes imaging what the field is or even representing it—it must

9 Hilary Inwood, “Mapping Eco-Art Education,” *Canadian Review of Art Education* 35, no. 1 (2008): 64–65. In this section Inwood draws on the writings of Gablick, Blandy, Hoffman, Neperud, and Garoian. She adds that this type of pedagogy could use environmental and landscape art of the past in order to critically reflect on the metaphors and values frequently found in these works.

10 *Ibid.*, 67.

11 *Ibid.*, 69–70.

12 Suzi Gablick, “Connective Aesthetics,” *American Art* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 2. See also her book *The Reenchantment of Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991).

\* <http://thepublicschool.org/> and <http://telic.info/node/30>.

\*\* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hw6ZErqo-4Y>.

The course catalog for the art school explains that the sculpture course Knowledge Lab: Art & Ecology “explores artistic responses to ecological issues and environmental sustainability. Using the Columbus building garden as a classroom, students will learn about how plants, soils, architecture and materials work together to produce an ecological system.” Sarah Ross, the instructor, explains: “Oh, it’s really great because there are very simple and complex systems at work in the soil, in the growing process, that are useful analogies to art-making. Further, like in other art fields, students want to use their hands to make things happen. In a garden space you can plant and manipulate things and depending on the time/weather/sun exposure, you can see things unfold. The natural world becomes responsive to how you manipulate [it] so students see this collaborator, if you will—another body/force/material that (depending on what it is) responds or sometimes even acts.” She goes on: “I feel that it is imperative to teach Environmental Justice ideas. My first class, I felt students could easily come in and leave the class thinking that if they shopped at co-ops or otherwise did things in their life it would be better—and if only OTHER people did that too, then kumbaya! So I think it’s critical to talk about the everyday facts of where landfills end up, where toxic industries are zoned, who fights back, who wins.”\*\* They unfurled.

be lived.” She continued, “I think the biggest challenge is [the] time/duration of semester’s/class time. I think programs targeted at ‘ecology, community organizing’ etc., need to be radically restructured. I was able to convince Mills [College in Oakland, where she had previously worked] and my students for one semester to squeeze the semester time (seventy hours) into a few weekends and overnight trips. This worked rather well, but it was still a very condensed experience.”<sup>13</sup>

Anyone teaching place-based art runs up against such a tension—what kinds of skills do you need to do this work, what are the relevant disciplines that need to be put in dialogue with one another, and how can the regimes and systems of value and time utilized in the classroom of the academy translate across contexts? This can clearly be seen in the seemingly endless litany of “proficiencies” and “literacies” said to be needed to constitute a twenty-first-century student experience; one of the most prominent proposals in this regard is to expand the STEM rubric of science, technology, engineering, and math into STEAM, through the inclusion of art.<sup>14</sup> Building on a history (though typically unacknowledged) of art/science collaborations in the subgenres of Art and Technology, Systems Aesthetics, Land Art, and Ecological Art to name a few, this fusion of disciplines has the potential to reconcile the historical division of the sciences and the humanities into “two cultures” if it is approached critically and is not entirely subservient to the demands of industry, where so much science and technology education has turned.<sup>15</sup>

Specifically, the historical precedents of ecological art education can be traced back to a small group of artists who have worked with ecological themes since the 1960s, including Joseph Beuys, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Patricia Johanson, and the collaborative team of Helen Mayer Harrison and Newton Harrison. The Harrisons’ early works, such as “Full Farm” (1974), sought

13 Amy Franceschini, interview with the author, December 1, 2014.

14 Anna Feldman, “STEAM Rising: Why We Need to Put the Arts into STEM Education,” *Slate*, June 16, 2015. [http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future\\_tense/2015/06/steam\\_vs\\_stem\\_why\\_we\\_need\\_to\\_put\\_the\\_arts\\_into\\_stem\\_education.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2015/06/steam_vs_stem_why_we_need_to_put_the_arts_into_stem_education.html). While critics of the inclusion of art instruction in STEM argue that it would distract from the acquisition of so-called hard STEM skills needed to work in industry, advocates promote it for reasons ranging from the pedagogical (creativity will enhance the sciences) to the tactical (funds are getting cut for art, so tying it to more marketable or fashionable disciplines can serve to secure or increase resources for art education).

15 C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1961). Based on a lecture delivered at the University of Cambridge on May 7, 1959.

\* <http://www.saic.edu/academics/areasofstudy/sustainability/>.

\*\* Sarah Ross, interview with the author, January 14, 2015.

Approaching through the long corridor of trees builds anticipation and inevitably quiets any car radio or conversation. You are going somewhere special. “What is different about Mildred’s Lane is that it is a home; reassembling the connections between working, living, and researching through contemporary concepts and projects sensitive to site. This unusual artist’s project invites you to participate in the shared experience and production of research-driven projects within a truly transdisciplinary and collaborative work environment. Apparent obstacles in traditional fine arts classrooms have been counter-productive to developing environments where the practitioner, the student, and the institution can collapse roles in attempt to coevolve a curriculum for new and emergent practices. Thus, the Mildred’s Lane Project exists in the everyday with a revolutionary rigorous rethinking (the 3 Rs) of the contemporary art complex. These rare and valuable conditions of exchange, collaboration, and generosity are shared experiences that have transformative and lifelong effects on how we think of ourselves as creative practitioners functioning in the social and civic sphere. At the core of this new curriculum are two principles: (1) that research and project-based learning are best pursued in the context of an actual site with social engagement; and (2) social education should be principally involved in the development of new modes of living—what we call workstyles. Work is our life; therefore we weave our lifestyle through it; taking our practices out of the studio and applying the conceptual tools to every aspect of living; with creative, mindful, sustainable adaptive reuse of everything we have at hand—being local.”\* We gathered to engage in an experimental seminar on paying attention.

to create living workshops about food and ecology for children in tandem with their careers teaching at University of California Santa Cruz. Joseph Beuys put forth numerous aesthetic and written proposals for an ecological approach to art and life while he experimented with pedagogy at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art. An outgrowth of the work of this period was his involvement with the West German Green Party and an experimental school known as the Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research.<sup>16</sup> More recently, since the 1980s, artists including Agnes Dennis, Mark Dion, Dan Peterman, Peter Fend, Mel Chin, Lynne Hull, dominique mazaud, Cornelia Parker, Fern Shaffer and Othello Anderson, and Nance Klehm have further developed their ecological art practices alongside consistent teaching both inside and outside institutions. Online and physical communities and veritable “schools” of ecological art practice have been formed through projects including A Studio in the Woods in New Orleans, Ocean Earth Construction and Development Corporation, Green Museum, People’s Climate Art, Fossil Funds Free, Ecovention, Center for Land Use Interpretation, Midwest Radical Cultural Corridor, Mildred’s Lane, and Platform London.

What exceeds the classroom is not a question for the arts alone, as schooling in the humanities has also been grappling with approaches to support publicly engaged scholarship.<sup>17</sup> In business as well, the concepts of “social entrepreneurship” and “social impact” have taken hold and the education of business leaders has followed suit, accompanied by academic departments and fellowship programs.<sup>18</sup> That programs aimed at social and ecological impact have been developing in the context of art and business schools alike points to the opportunism of education in an era of constantly expanding markets, when even the desire to do good can come with a hefty price tag.

The objectives of environmental and social justice place a primacy on the prefigurative, which is an integral relationship between means and ends. That the institutions advancing such concepts through education do not often embody such values produces an important contradiction. This can leave the committed

16 Cara Jordan, “Appealing for an Alternative: Ecology and Environmentalism in Joseph Beuys’ Projects of Social Sculpture,” *Seismopolite* 15 (September 2016), <http://www.seismopolite.com/appealing-for-an-alternative-ecology-and-environmentalism-in-joseph-beuys-projects-of-social-sculpture>.

17 For a crash course on these initiatives, see the website of the organization Imagining America, <http://imaginingamerica.org/>.

18 See the websites of Ashoka and Echoing Green organizations ([ashoka.org](http://ashoka.org); [echoinggreen.org](http://echoinggreen.org)), and the “social and environmental impact guide” to graduate programs released by Net Impact, <https://www.netimpact.org/business-as-unusual/top-50-social-impact>.

\* <http://www.mildredslane.com/curriculum/>.

During an online class for art educators, instructor Ann Rosenthal wove in the history of activist art since the 1960s, and in the second half of the “Eco/Community” course the students had to propose a project for their own community. A student living in rural New Hampshire developed a project about wells and water sources, then developed visual and textual responses that were displayed in a local library. They unfurled.\*

practitioners (educator and learners alike, as the roles are often necessarily blurry) with seemingly few options for reconciling the tensions involved in advancing these skills, values, and curricula in an era characterized as much by greenwashing as domesticated chickens. Possible paths forward could lead such educators to create experiments on the edges of the classroom, alter the policies and practices of the school from the classroom to the precincts of the administration,<sup>19</sup> or start their own schools.

## INDEPENDENT ART SCHOOLS

### The “Third Places” Where Education Is a Material

*What it looks like is modest. It's often some kind of storefront or warehouse or cabin space that gets activated for the purposes of a lecture or a discussion by a relatively small number of dedicated people who are committed enough to the topic to spend their evenings or weekends with some combination of strangers and friends talking about ideas. What it feels like can change your life.*

There is nothing more admirable than to follow one's inspiration and curiosity in the pursuit of self-directed learning. Artists and craftspeople have modeled this practice for as long as anyone has, eschewing disciplinary boundaries and following the threads and knots that a material or conceptual exploration offers up in a chaotic and playful manner. And it is therefore these makers who have taken up the substance of education (knowledge) as well as its conventions (curriculum, instruction, school) as forms in and of themselves. As outlined in one text reflecting on the kinds of schools recently created by artists, many are characterized by a “post-hierarchical learning environment where there are no teachers, just co-participants.”<sup>20</sup>

And what of the ideas that one encounters in such a space? What ideology, real or performed, informs the coded style of encounter that you find in a school?<sup>21</sup> What ideas do schools run

19 One such example relating to ecological concerns is the coordination of art-school “sustainability coordinators” through the PALS network; see <http://www.sustainablepals.com/>.

20 Kristina Lee Podesva, “A Pedagogical Turn: Brief Notes on Education as Art,” *Fillip 6* (Summer 2007), <http://fillip.ca/content/a-pedagogical-turn>.

\* Example shared during the workshop “Appropriate Social Technology: Ethics & Ecology in the Classroom with Daniel Tucker,” April 19, 2015, at the Open Engagement conference at Carnegie Mellon University.

We gathered in an old gym in central Germany, repurposed as a learning center during a major international exhibition. Every night there are meals and presentations, and regularly the group hosts various “learn-in” events (re-envisioned “teach-ins” of the past) about “Revocation,” “the Commons” and “non-capitalist life,” which the organizers explain via a series of questions: “Why is it easier to imagine the destruction of the planet than an end to capitalism? Can we explore together the potential for non-capitalist life? What does it look like, sound like, feel like, move like, taste like?”

“Through the collaborations in Kassel and other cities prior to DOCUMENTA (13), as well as the involvement of artists, thinkers, and visitors, a möbius strip-like experimental public program will emerge over the 100 days, blurring lines between inside and outside, learning and play, acting and thinking; resulting in food initiatives, urban gardening, therapeutic processes, (un)workshops, screenings, discussions, experiments, and situations inspiring aesthetic or political imaginaries.”\*

by co-participants decide to frame? A casual survey of the current topics for courses and meetings held by groups of the “Public School” initiative in Brussels, Los Angeles, New York, Berlin, Copenhagen, or the Bay Area include: Speculative Realism in Television and Literature, Public Art Reading Group, Theoretical Sources of Syriza’s Left Platform, On Violence, *Viewpoint Magazine* Reading Group, Architecture and Power, “The Passions Are Proportional to the Destinies”: A Brief History of Utopian Socialism, The Native and the Refugee, Rammed Earth Construction, Politics and Society Reading Group on I. I. Rubin’s “Essays on Marx’s Theory of Value,” and DOING, a study of the origins of theater.<sup>22</sup>

While I am focusing here on examples that are self-consciously connected to the practice of art, there are many such informal education practices that are intentionally and inherently more integrated into the lives of larger numbers of people, such as the activities of libraries, trade unions, political organizations, and religious spaces. Such environments constitute what Ray Oldenberg has termed “third places,” which are locales between work and home where adults can develop themselves as full human beings. In their book about independent adult-learning practices, Stephen D. Brookfield and John D. Holst reflect that the field of “adult education has traditionally viewed learning in an all-encompassing, expansive way as the deliberate attempts by adults to develop their skill, extend their knowledge, or cultivate certain dispositions in a particular direction.”<sup>23</sup> Many such practices are presented in benign, neutral and utilitarian terms, while others are more explicitly grounded in social justice and involve consciousness raising and praxis as a counterpoint to specialized and privatized knowledge economies. Writing in an issue dedicated to “the pedagogical practices of social movements,” the editors of *Interface Journal* propose that the goal of such practices is “emancipatory pedagogy [to foster] processes of mass intellectuality and creativity which build from the embodied experiences of oppression and alienation [...]. These enable communities to re-author themselves through the power of the word which, as Freire argued, is the power to name and change the world. This politics embraces multiple forms of knowledge, including the affective, embodied, oral, cognitive and cultural.”<sup>24</sup>

21 Dave Beech, “Weberian Lessons: Art, Pedagogy and Managerialism,” in *Curating the Educational Turn*, ed. Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson (London and Amsterdam: Open Editions/de Appel, 2010), 60.

22 <http://thepublicschool.org/courses>.

23 Stephen D. Brookfield and John D. Holst, *Radicalizing Learning: Adult Education for a Just World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 23.

\* See <http://d13.documenta.de/> and <http://andandand.org/>.

Balloon Mapping the Calumet River in Chicago was a boat trip developed by three classes. As one of the instructors, Laurie Palmer, explained, “The generalized project goal was to learn about and practice the DIY process of balloon mapping as a way to generate visual and sensory evidence about land use where available information from commercial and public sources was not considered sufficient or reliable. The specific goal was to witness how land is being used on the banks of Chicago’s Calumet River, a fluid industrial corridor passing through the South Side used for material production, storage, and transport connecting the Great Lakes with the Gulf of Mexico and the St. Lawrence Seaway. Even more specifically, toxic piles of petcoke, a by-product of tar-sands oil refining, were being stored along the Calumet’s banks and petcoke dust was blowing into nearby low-income communities, primarily communities of color. A local activist group partnered with us on the boat trip, providing information and context. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago paid for the chartered boat, which was a great move on the administration’s part.” They unfurled.\*

While seeking dialogue with and inspiration from contemporary social movements, a number of artists concerned with education have focused attention on historical precedents of art and activist-initiated schooling as a framework for research and reconsideration. Niels Norman explicitly draws on anarchist theories of pedagogy from the 1970s, such as the “exploding school,”<sup>25</sup> and Jakob Jakobsen has dedicated several years of research and projects to the history of the Anti-University of London, founded in 1968, and the New Experimental College, a self-organized university in Denmark founded in 1962.<sup>26</sup> Drawing lessons from these histories, Jakobsen has put forth the analysis that due to the ethics of the project, the Anti-University gradually dissolved because of its commitment to the decentralization of power, a stance that led to its own erasure.<sup>27</sup>

And yet some efforts resist the forces pushing toward such dissolution and become more firm. As A. A. Bronson writes of the contradictions that emerged after the formation of artist-run centers across Canada in the 1970s: “Suddenly we had a sense of seeing ourselves as beings seeing each other,” an art scene gradually turned into a network, and finally “soon there were little artists’ bureaucracies having exhibitions and promotions and educational programmes and video workshops and concert series and anything else you might care to think of in this parody of that museum world we all supposedly were trying to escape.”<sup>28</sup> After a recent lecture by Jakobsen about the Anti-University, an audience member posed a question for the present that reflects the desire to escape such contradictions: “Institutions that we put faith in are no longer serving us, and we have to find some way to either create a new institution or reform the institutions that we work within.”<sup>29</sup>

24 Sara C. Motta and Ana Margarida Esteves, “Reinventing Emancipation in the 21st Century,” editorial introduction to special issue “The Pedagogical Practices of Social Movements,” *Interface* 6, no. 1 (May 2014): 1–24, <http://www.interfacejournal.net/>.

25 <http://www.dismalgarden.com/pedagogy>.

26 <http://antihistory.org/>.

27 Jakob Jakobsen, “The Pedagogy of Negating the Institution,” *Mute*, November 14, 2013, <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/pedagogy-negating-institution>.

28 A. A. Bronson, “The Humiliation of the Bureaucrat: Artist-Run Centres as Museums by Artists,” in *Museums by Artists*, ed. A. A. Bronson and Peggy Gale (Toronto: Art Metropole, 1983), 29–37, reprinted at <http://goodreads.timothycomeau.com/aabronson/>. Bronson is describing the development in Canada of ANNPAC, the Association of National Non-Profit Artists Centres.

29 “Workshop on Workshops—Jakob Jakobsen,” lecture, Fondazione Antonio Ratti, Como, Italy, November 20, 2015, <https://vimeo.com/153134749>. Audience comments begin at 1:15:23.

\* Laurie Palmer, interview with the author, August 31, 2016.

We gathered. A dark gallery space opens through a small passage into a well-lit media center and exhibition space. Rows of folding red chairs provide a narrow aisle and we file in. There are seats at the edge of the “stage,” if the front of the room can be called as such. The presenter discussed her new book, where she “repudiates” the many misrepresentations and misunderstandings of the city of Venice. That the event was taking place across the street from the University of Pennsylvania was not a coincidence. The storefront venue, Slought, rents their space from the university and hosts many events one would not be surprised to find taking place in a classroom on campus. The speaker’s interlocutors were university faculty, as was three-quarters of the audience. And yet, the event was not on campus. Unaffiliated with the school, we were there, as were a handful of other audience members. As the author read from “Killing the Moonlight: Modernism in Venice,” it was notably a conversation from the inside, exported to the outside to explore the potential for public-facing intellectual life to subvert the Ivory Tower.\*

## BACK TO SCHOOL

### From the Production of Space to Comprehensive Education

*It was a showdown in the school hallway. Neon lights overhead with small-person lockers at our side and tiled floors underfoot. Over a decade ago, I was witness to a heated argument between a unionized public-school teacher and a charter-school teacher on the southwest side of Chicago at an annual event known as “Teachers for Social Justice Curriculum Fair.” The public-school teacher insisted that the primary fight was around the political economy of schools (school closures, layoffs, budgets), contrasting with the charter-school teacher’s belief that the system was so deeply flawed that the best solution for children’s education was to create social-justice-themed schools where students in small classes received focused attention on topics that would counter the dominant narratives taught in overcrowded and assessment-driven conventional school settings.*

“The university is not an inert thing,” artist and scholar Trevor Paglen writes. “It doesn’t ‘happen’ until students arrive to attend classes, professors lock themselves away to do research, administrative staff pays the bills and registers the students, state legislators appropriate money for campus operations, and maintenance crews keep the institution’s physical infrastructure from falling apart. The university, then, cannot be separated from the people who go about ‘producing’ the institution day after day.” Drawing from the social science disciplines of sociology and geography that investigate both how space is produced by people through their everyday uses and the constraints that are put in place through that “production of space,” Paglen makes use of this concept by continuing to explain that “the university also sculpts human activity: the university’s physical and bureaucratic structure creates conditions under which students attend lectures, read books, write papers, participate in discussions, and get grades. Human activity produces the university, but human activities are, in turn, shaped by the university. In these feedback loops, we see production of space at work.”<sup>30</sup>

While the well-documented failures and limitations of higher education are unnecessary to thoroughly explain in this context, they include (though are not limited to) debt-financed and ever-increasing tuition to pay for expanded administration and facilities, budget cuts

30 Trevor Paglen, “Experimental Geography: From Cultural Production to the Production of Space,” in *Critical Landscapes: Art, Space, Politics*, ed. Emily Eliza Scott and Kirsten J. Swenson (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2015), 36–37.

\* [https://slought.org/resources/venice\\_by\\_electric\\_moonlight](https://slought.org/resources/venice_by_electric_moonlight).

\*\* Sarah Lewison, interview with the author, September 5, 2016.

They unfurled. “I once offered a class at San Francisco State University through the art department that focused on art and ecology in an urban environment—that meant thinking through several scales, from the Bay Area bioregion to the life on the street in the Tenderloin. We had a dedicated class meeting space at the Luggage Store Annex on Ellis Street, made possible through the generosity of Laurie Lazar and Darryl Smith (Luggage Store Gallery). The Annex opened onto a gated alley that Luggage Store used for outdoor performances. Our class met each Friday for 6 hours. We spent mornings discussing the readings, which ranged from Beuys to contemporary considerations of urban environment. We read Paul Shepard’s dusty but kind of thrilling introduction to *Human Ecology* (Man in the Landscape). Most afternoons we took a field trip. Nearby, we visited the Coalition on Homelessness and a preschool across the street; tripping farther afield we visited Bonnie Sherk with her high schoolers, SF’s Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Temescal Amity Works. The extreme disparities between the densely populated Tenderloin, where one student witnessed a shooting on our first day of class, and the sites we traveled to presented our key dialectic to wrangle with. Collectively, we constructed a narrative that reimagined the Tenderloin as a place of tenderness and commingled, contradictory stewardship.

“One student, Marco Crescenti, created a model and dubbed it ‘The Tenderloin National Forest,’ a name that has stayed with this space, ten years later. We recognized at the time that any narrative would span a much longer temporality than our class, both before and after. Darryl Smith had already planted two trees into the pavement of the alley and we took what felt like

the next logical step by getting the Fire Department's permission to fill the street with dirt. And so we did. We put up a sign and planted seeds and discarded plants from the nurseries. And potatoes. Neighbors began to come to pick herbs. Our vision was only one partial embodiment of this place Marco gave a name to, a place that like any other being continues to grow and change, interact with others, move in and out of property relations. While I can't respond to the language of assessment, I like to imagine that the young people who participated in this class learned something about the dynamics of life-as-city-as-capitalism-as-ecological time.

"I have not gotten to teach such a class since then, but I now teach in a university where the specificities of place figure strongly; we are situated in a forest, far from any major city, and also at several signifying borders; north and south; subsistence histories and capitalist ones, glacial till plain and limestone ridges. Currently I teach a graduate class called 'Storytelling in the Anthropocene.' It's posted under Communication but students have enrolled from Geography and Sociology as well. The course is grounded in the premise that most stories in the news, the movies, on TV, in games, etc., are invisibly infused with what is made possible by oil and its kin. Another way to say it is that we have always been conditioned by narratives that promote certain ideas about what our world consists of, such as the inevitability of progress and a bifurcated nature/culture, with the 'nature' part located somewhere 'out there.'"—Sarah Lewison\*\*

We gathered. It was an international gathering premised around “Collective Pedagogy and Spatial Politics.” I can get down with a theme like that. Transductores brought together organizers who facilitated learning communities focused on urban issues as their art and curatorial practice. One group had taught outdoor seminars on the anarchist history of Barcelona; a group from Argentina had led tours along the La Plata River to study and document its changing ecology; another group had worked with teenagers to make television spots about how garbage works in New York City.\* I was there to present about a publication I had started, which either turned into a learning community or started as a learning community and turned into a publication. Hard to say. That project, AREA (Art/Research/Education/Activism), had once convened all the groups in Chicago doing some form of informal adult education: a leftist reading group, a gallery that hosted skill-shares, a group of university professors teaching courses outside the walls of their elite institution to adults who lived in neighboring communities, a network of writing groups that met at neighborhood libraries. These kinds of gatherings happened all the time with AREA.

“On a Sunday morning in early spring we gathered in the first floor of the home of local artist Claire Pentecost, unfolded chairs, put them into chaotic rows and stood around the coffee pot waiting for the show to begin. We were not setting up a house church. We were setting up for a seminar entitled Chicago as Neoliberal Policy Laboratory that would include presentations by Mackel Garrison about public transportation, Pauline Lipman on public schools and public housing, Nik Theodore on his research about how municipal

governments borrow policy models from one another and Brian Holmes on the University of Chicago School of Urban Sociology that has rendered Chicago one of the most researched urban areas in the academic universe. But just as the setting was not a house church, the gathering was also not an academic panel—it was a training for contributors to AREA Chicago #6: City as Lab. The activists, artists, journalists and teachers gathered in the room were not getting paid to be there, they were not beefing up their resumes, nor were they engaging in a conceptual school-as-art project so fashionable in the contemporary art world today. This seminar was intended to provide a common ground for people writing articles for the upcoming AREA issue reader to discuss the broader conceptual themes related to the issue. The intended goal was to give back to authors who voluntarily contribute their time and energy to AREA through offering a co-learning educational space. Editorially, the objective was to see if by giving contributors some time and space to discuss ideas before they started writing, if the contents of the publication might be more coherent than typically allowed for in the AREA editorial process, where authors communicate only with editors and not each other and have their ideas curated together behind the scenes.”\*\*

It was all about collective pedagogy and spatial politics.

They unfurled. “Begin where you are, here on the Pitzer Campus, right under your feet, with these sidewalks, gardens, buildings, and grassy mounds. But don’t imagine that this just requires that you ‘look’ or pay attention in a more ‘ecological’ manner—the world around us is not there simply to be observed. We are always in the middle of things; participation is our only option. The Pitzer Multi-Species Commons project is an attempt to foster this participation in the most direct and immediate manner possible via foraging. What does this mean? Start feeling and connecting to your local ecology by emulating other animals: join with our fellow species and bend down to eat what is underfoot. When we eat what is growing on the Pitzer Campus what has happened to it now happens to us. Our health and its health are linked. Its concerns and ours meet. We can no longer separate our fates—we have become intra-dependent. As you pick this plant, you are not alone—you have to work across species. This means forming a multi-species community based on shared pleasures, curiosities, and concerns. This is the beginning of something new that is both urgent and joyous. Share with others what you forage and celebrate the bounty all around us.” The space, “made from rammed earth, upcycled building materials, local logs and rocks, this hub contains a gathering area designed to encourage usage by multiple species. The hub includes a large map, chalkboard, and an experimental irrigation/ planting area designed to help propagate spontaneous migrant plant growth.”\*\*\*

for educational support, long histories of social engineering based on both explicit discrimination and more subtle forms of exclusion, precarious working conditions for all non-management campus service/maintenance/support/teaching employees, and conflicts over the management of curricular assessment and academic freedom. While a provocative article title such as “Alternative Art Schools: A Threat to Universities?” may occasionally appear in the media, it is surprising that formal schools have persisted so hardily despite the growth of such independent experiments.<sup>31</sup> Layered onto and alongside such a fraught context, artists have been initiating their own schools at such a fast clip that you’d think there would be nobody left studying art in conventional educational settings—but, in fact, enrollment in art degree programs continues to rise.<sup>32</sup>

Given the concerns mentioned above, the advantages of alternative initiatives seem obvious—cheap/free versus expensive, to name only one of many. And yet the tensions that independent art school projects face in the larger political-economic context, which prevent them from keeping people from actually entering the academy, are also numerous.

I will name a few of these tensions. Consider the motivations students may have with regard to the access to resources and facilities a formal educational institution can plentifully provide—such capital investments are often beyond the means of independent art schools. Related is the role that a combination of assessment, feedback, critique, and direction provides in a formal education that seems largely absent in more horizontal structures. There is also the concrete “increased earning potential” that so many colleges and universities profess, based on data provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics combined with the credentialing system that appears, at least anecdotally, to provide access and mobility in a disciplinary society that seems to persist despite widespread support for interdisciplinary experiments.<sup>33</sup> And finally, there is the nebulous factor of social acceptability/integration, which schools somehow

31 Dave Batty, “Alternative Art Schools: A Threat to Universities?,” *Guardian*, October 21, 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/oct/21/alternative-art-schools-threaten-universities>.

32 See statistics about visual and performing arts in the Digest of Education Statistics of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES): [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/figures/fig\\_16.asp?referrer=figures](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d14/figures/fig_16.asp?referrer=figures).

\* <http://transductores.net/>.

\*\* Daniel Tucker, “Inhabiting and Learning Together: Tracing the First Five Years of AREA Chicago,” in *Construir el lloc: Quadern pedagògic* (Barcelona: Sitesize, 2011), 43–54, <http://www.sitesize.net/webs/documents/Construirellocquadern.pdf>.

\*\*\* Matthew Friday of the group Spurse, interview with the author, April 15, 2015, including quotations from the project’s press release and website <http://pitweb.pitzer.edu/forage/>.

The email invitation was kind, and open. “Daniel, We were working though/debating questions regarding the social roles of an artist, the ethics of those roles, and the artist as a ‘magical creature’ who exists outside of mainstream ways of thinking during our last conversation at New Boone. I think it would be so useful to continue the discussion through the lens of the artist’s role in social practice and ethics surrounding that, but this time with more intention.” Could I come speak for free at a storefront gallery run by recent art graduates who wanted to increase critical dialogue in their community? Sure. The next email continued: “It was nice to talk to you over the phone today. Although, I do have to apologize for not giving you much information about us, New Boone, or the project we are organizing! Sorry about that. Anyway, some background info on us: Leah and I both are artists who have graduated studying fine art from different Philadelphia schools, Leah went to Moore & I was at Tyler. That’s actually how we know Jonathan Wallace & Philip Glahn through our undergrad experience. We are also both members of New Boone, an artist run collective, studio, and gallery located in Old City. Normally, New Boone functions as an art studio and puts on gallery exhibitions throughout the year, mostly on First Fridays. We’ve been doing side projects & events such as movie nights & critiques—but this is the first time we’ve started Conversations At Boone, a series of lectures and conversations in critical discourse. We greatly appreciate you giving us the time and effort to speak at our conversation series & are super excited about how everything will turn out!”  
We gathered.

have offered up to young people as platforms for changing and transforming one's life direction. It is notable that the coherence of communities of artists and activists tends to be punctuated and punctured by instances of young people moving away or refocusing their energies by going "back to school."

Such dynamics are rarely addressed in the "marathon lecture events, participatory workshops or alternative art schools" or "education-themed art events," as Dean Kenning has termed the independent art schools referenced in the facing text and the section above. He explains that "alternative art educational models risk exacerbating exclusion" under the banner of horizontality without really taking up the politics of education which are in many regards operating in a politically engineered crisis.<sup>34</sup> That many such gatherings happen inside a gallery or museum frames them as a kind of performance or image of education, yet this falls short of addressing what Kristina Lee Podesva has described as "the politics behind the shrinking of free social space in the world today." She continues: "By way of example, a gallery expresses a microtopian ethos when an artist repurposes it as a site of refuge from the real world (even though he or she attempts to recreate social interactions there typically associated with existing places such as the pub or community centre). In this way, this work does not encourage us to strive for a larger utopian goal—such as securing permanent and free communal space—but rather to sit back and enjoy, in whatever way we can, the here and now offered by the artist courtesy of the gallery."<sup>35</sup>

In a scathing critique published in *Variant* magazine, John Beagles writes that for recent publications and events of this kind, "the focus was less on responding to economic and policy assaults and more on trying to identify the possibilities and potentialities of developing radically new forms of and locations for art education." He writes, "Tackling exclusion and transforming the culture of art schools are two inextricable sides of the same coin," and concludes by diverging from the topic of art education to assert that "the severity of the present situation and the starkness of the choices facing us, means that the imperative to assert the absolute core values of comprehensive education (free, universal access for all and a commitment to a thoroughly diverse body of students) is, now more than ever, unquestionable."<sup>36</sup> That Marxist authors frequently conclude their essays about such tensions by subsuming experiments with subject matter and subjectivities to calls

33 [http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_chart\\_001.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm).

34 Dean Kenning, "Refusing Conformity and Exclusion in Art Education," *Mute*, March 22, 2012, <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/refusing-conformity-and-exclusion-art-education>.

35 Podesva, "A Pedagogical Turn."

\* Alexander Mansour and Leah Koontz, email correspondence with the author, May 19, 2016 and June 1, 2016.

They unfurled. “Most of the projects I assign in my classes are based on experiential research of a specific place. Depending on the class and the location this recently has ranged from particularly defined territories (i.e., a line of space that is five feet wide and one mile long) to a whole city as a starting point. This research is not always explicitly termed ecological, but the methodology employed ends up being what I would call ecological: sending students to investigate the interconnected systems that form the reality of a place. Each project always begins with a series of prompts and activities constructed to change one perspective, to notice what has been unobserved, collect information about and impressions of the people, issues, geography and stories that make a place. Once the students get ‘into’ a place the discussion of specific ecologies becomes a part of the process and the student-initiated projects that this research generates respond to the particular aspect of these systems (i.e., recent projects include urban floral field guides, ‘guerilla’ tree planting, bird habitat development, and ‘nature tour’ routes developed using existing city infrastructure).

“Ethics are a constant topic through every stage of research and project development. This starts with a discussion of bias in observation and continues throughout the process to reflection on outcomes. Students often move quickly from excitement about the identification of an issue that they want to work on to a sense of frustration with the complexity of the topic that they chose. These moments of frustration are key to developing strategies for keeping complex issues complex, while at the same time developing a plan of action. My focus is on the development of skills and methods that can be applied in multiple contexts,

rather than in-depth study on history, theory, and larger context. This emphasis on building connections between the student, a specific place, and local issues is good for building their own capacity for this work and we touch on the larger contexts for these issues but often, due to time constraints, aren't able to delve into them. An example of this might be a project that deals with the systems of river sediments and mid-river plant life, which develops ideas about the specific islands in a section of the river—but we were not able to extend the investigation into sections of the river upstream or downstream, let alone the watershed or larger water politics.”—Brett Hunter\*

“The discussion forum takes the form of a five-day meeting in New York facilitating debates on the current situation of art’s role in the public sphere by generating an exchange of different artistic practices and approaches. The aim is to create a dialogue between artists working in different contexts with related issues and to link the similar concerns, challenges and situations we are faced with. The programme for the five-day meeting is planned as a series of discussions addressing questions regarding notions of public space, relevant artistic responses to current conditions and the role of art organisations. A small number of speakers have been invited to give presentations on relevant topics, which will function as inspiration for further debate.”\*\* We gathered. The venue, a storefront in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. There were lofts where people lived in the back and a studio adjacent to a public space. They did co-working on weekdays to supplement the rent of the Change You Want to See Gallery.\*\*

advocating widespread redistributive reforms or revolutions is not a surprise or even disagreeable. It mirrors the tension between the charter-school teacher and the union-member teacher introduced above, and the contradictions involved in deciding what I and many others should do everyday when we wake up and go to work inside a school, or when we toil away nights and weekends on emancipatory education on the outside.

## CONCLUSION

### Toward a Communiversity

The contradictions illustrated by the above sections swirl around the tensions of making the art education that is happening inside the academy relevant to the world outside, as well as those affecting independent practices on the outside, which, despite their low-cost or no-cost affordability and intended relevance to social life, seem unable to fundamentally address the persistent forces that drive people into mainstream schooling in the first place. Perhaps it is lofty to imagine that either the alternative or the institutional could or should be permanent places to inhabit, despite the sometimes moralistic weight put on occupying an inside or outside of a system. Perhaps we should instead consider what quality of dialectical relationship the outside should have with the inside, and vice versa.

From experiments in independent schools to publicly engaged scholarship and art education, there are calls from many directions to make school more relevant to social life. As the examples of ecological art education illustrate, such practices are alive and well. As I look for inspiration in examples that model the integration of art education with the social world, I think about models that bring together contradictions and tensions—both unfurling from the inside and gathering on the outside, either to make demands of the culture and policies taking place inside or to disregard them on principle. This could be seen as a “Communiversity,” premised on the concepts of connective aesthetics, production of space, and third places. Building on the social-justice histories found in both art and the social sciences, such a practice posits a way of working inside and outside traditional educational spaces, directing attention to the role society plays in constructing and remaking institutions and the influence of institutions on community-oriented spaces.

36 John Beagles, “In a Class All of *Their* Own: The Incomprehensiveness of Art Education,” *Variant* 39/40 (Winter 2010): 31–35, [www.variant.org.uk/39\\_40texts/comp39\\_40.html](http://www.variant.org.uk/39_40texts/comp39_40.html).

\* Brett Hunter, interview with the author, September 7, 2016.

\*\* [http://publik.dk/public\\_address/](http://publik.dk/public_address/).

\*\*\* <http://notanalternative.org/>.

A printmaking student's ecological commitments didn't allow him to fill his stencils with toxic spray paint, so he developed a new technique for his class that presses mud through the stencil instead. The added benefit was that the mud was biodegradable and it was therefore legal to apply it in public: no concern about arrest. The instructor explains that after the class he enthusiastically tried to support the student to expand this technique to work with activist groups. They unfurled the stencils and unloaded the buckets of dirt and water mixed to the exact consistency needed so that it would dry but still spread. "We had legal support in case we were arrested—which we weren't. And my collaboration with him was outside of the university and outside of a class, but it raised some interesting questions for me to consider. It also reasserted my belief that the work—the stencils in campaigns—was best suited outside of academia and a university setting. But does that suggest the conservative nature of institutions and the type of material that one feels comfortable teaching in institutions? And is it honest to the project, since the origins of mud stencils was completely tied to the university and the class that I taught, where a freshman student first came up with the concept?"\*

To review several concepts introduced briefly in the sections above, connective aesthetics, as described by Suzi Gablick, represents an art practice that is “more socially responsive. It is not activism in the sense of the old paradigm, but an empathic means of seeing through another’s eyes, of stretching our boundaries beyond the ego-self to create a wider view of the world. The relational self knows that it is embedded in larger systems and tends toward integration. The independent self is invested in self-assertion. Both are necessary. What I am suggesting is not to abandon one in favor of the other but to find a greater balance between the two.”<sup>37</sup> Gablick’s concept has the potential to merge a prefigurative unity between means and ends.

The concept of “third places” developed by sociologist Ray Oldenburg builds on the most basic of observations about social life. As he has been articulating for nearly three decades: “Most needed are those ‘third places’ which lend a public balance to the increased privatization of home life. Third places are nothing more than informal public gathering places.” He continues: “‘Third places’ also suggest the stability of the tripod in contrast to the relative instability of the bipod. Life without community has produced, for many, a lifestyle consisting mainly of a home-to-work-and-back-again shuttle.”<sup>38</sup> While these observations have provided the theoretical underpinnings for some horrendous New Urbanist design and artist-as-creative-placemaker Trojan horses for gentrification schemes, his fundamental insight is deeply important.

Finally, the concept of the “production of space” was developed by French social scientist Henri Lefebvre as an attempt to grapple with the fact that space could no longer be treated as simply the stage for human activity but was something far more comprehensive that underpins all aspects of society. As he explained, “Social relations [...] have no real existence save in and through space.”<sup>39</sup> This insistence on understanding both production and space through a social lens helps us consider the relationship between how and where knowledge is produced, as outlined by the quotation by Paglen cited above.

With these three concepts in mind—Connective Aesthetics, Third Places, and the Production of Space—I want to highlight a few examples at these intersections in order to demonstrate what might serve as Communiversality practices adequate to the present moment:

37 Gablick, “Connective Aesthetics,” 6.

38 Ray Oldenburg, “Our Vanishing ‘Third Places,’” *Planning Commissioners Journal* 25 (Winter 1996–97): 6–10, <http://plannersweb.com/wp-content/uploads/1997/01/184.pdf>.

39 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 404. Originally published as *La production de l'espace* (Paris: Editions Anthropos, 1974).

\* Nicolas Lampert, interview with the author, December 12, 2014.

We gathered. It was the closing event for Mess Hall, a self-described “experimental cultural center” on the far North Side of Chicago.\* Having attended the opening celebration a decade before, I knew I had to attend. Approaching the space was intensely emotional, full of the impressions of the many lives one encounters and lives over such a period, both inside and outside of this small storefront. There I had attended lectures by my favorite artists, who became friends, hosted publication releases, organized project launches, and participated in study groups. The announcement proclaimed, “This Friday will be the last event at Mess Hall. Founded in 2003, Mess Hall has surfed on generosity for ten years, creating a particular kind of freedom, a quasi-liberated zone of experimentation where art, politics & playfulness come together & fall apart.”\*\* The week before the closing, announced from an email regarding the final months of the space’s activity, a self-organized symposium entitled “First Drafts for an Uncertain Future that May Kick Ass if We Work Together” took place. The invitation suggested that “All participants are invited to bring diagrams of their dreams for free cultural spaces and the freaky communities that might inhabit them.”\*\*\* And over the course of the event, about fifteen people drafted and illustrated and listed ideas for what might come next. The spirit of the event was perfectly appropriate to the space, and there was no easy way to end such a messy endeavor as Mess Hall. And yet it felt like a loop: the same conversations that started there ten years before were taking place during its demise.

1. In Providence, Rhode Island, there is a unique school that issues low-cost degrees to adults who attend weekly meetings where they direct their own curriculum. College Unbound is focused on a transformative learning model that is “individualized, interest-based, project-driven, workplace-enhanced, cohort-supported, flexible, supportive, and affordable.” Students include those who are currently incarcerated, non-traditional learners, and others who for a variety of reasons need self-directed options.<sup>40</sup>
2. The Prison + Neighborhood Arts Project takes professors and sends them to a prison in rural Illinois to teach semester-long weekly courses in the arts and humanities, where they ask, “What can we learn from each other?” The artwork and writing made in this context is then circulated back into the neighborhoods that the incarcerated men came from.<sup>41</sup>
3. Every year a group of university scholars, students, administrators, and community partners gather for the Imagining America conference, designed to promote publicly engaged scholarship and university-community partnerships and collaboration. The gathering is unlike any other conference space in its genuine and multidisciplinary commitment to figuring out the elusive question of how universities can be better neighbors and citizens.<sup>42</sup>
4. On-campus public cultural centers such as the University of Pennsylvania’s Kelly Writers House or the University of Illinois at Chicago’s Jane Addams Hull-House Museum offer free events that serve as points of entry between these schools and their communities. Unsurprisingly, they have kitchens and are shaped like houses, despite being retrofitted for classes and meeting spaces to varying degrees. In the tradition of third places, these buildings open a space for unprogrammed encounter while adding public access to lectures and community relevance to campus resources.<sup>43</sup>
5. While there are many distinct activist and scholarly practices that have begun to take on the political economy of higher education in general, the work of BFAMFAPHD has instigated a new approach to institutional critique that equally invests in art, research, and curriculum guides for use in a wide variety of contexts to discuss the economy of art education specifically. Their hybrid approach has sought to engage directly in the spaces and

40 <http://www.collegeunbound.org/>.

41 <http://p-nap.org/>.

42 <http://imaginingamerica.org/>.

43 <http://www.writing.upenn.edu/wh/> and <http://www.hullhouse-museum.org/>.

\* <http://temporaryservices.org/served/mess-hall/>.

\*\* <http://chicago.indymedia.org/node/17527>.

\*\*\* <http://phantomgallery.blogspot.com/2013/01/messhall-mess-hall-closing-final-months.html>.

- cultures of academia and the art gallery, along with extra-institutional contexts such as community centers and protests where explorations of cooperative economies continue to take place.<sup>44</sup>
6. In 2015 the annual summit of the public art organization Creative Time was held after its excursion to a major international art event, the 56th Venice Biennale, with a stop at the large public Boys and Girls High School campus in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. The theme of this gathering, Curriculum, was immediately inflected with the social dynamics of the host school, with teachers, students, and education activists speaking along with artists and critics who were involved with or addressing education-related projects. This convergence of often separate social worlds and discourses modeled what dialogues are necessary if we are to overcome the present crises in education, and represented a symbolic distribution of resources from “the art world” to a neighborhood school. Concurrent with this effort, Creative Time launched “The Art of the MOOC” with Duke University and artist Pedro Lasch in order to engage the massive potential of free globalized online education.<sup>45</sup>
  7. The Saint Petersburg Street University emerged when members of the art group Chto Delat and unemployed academics and former students of the European University following its closure in 2008 “decided to go into the streets to hold their lessons [...]. Given the insurrectional character of the circumstances they have retrieved the street debate and theatrical protest action as forms of learning.”<sup>46</sup>As one participant said in an interview shortly thereafter, “The university’s name refers to the only site where this kind of knowledge can be produced. Aside from other concerns, classes on the street are meant to put back the ‘public’ into a public space that is shrinking at a precipitous rate [...]. In a word, the Street University is open for enrollment. As its admissions office informs us, tuition is free and all classes are open to the public. The term of study is unlimited.”<sup>47</sup>

A Communiversity places emphasis on the social body, on connectivity, on the meaning and ecology of the site of gathering

44 <http://bfamfaphd.com/>.

45 <http://creativetime.org/summit> and <http://creativetime.org/projects/art-mooc/>.

46 Marco Scotini, “The Disobedient Class, Bottom-up Academies and Affirmative Education,” in *Teaching Art in the Neoliberal Realm*, ed. Gielen and De Bruyne, 196.

47 “(New) Street University in Petersburg,” Chtodelat News (blog), April 24, 2008, <https://chtodelat.wordpress.com/2008/04/24/new-street-university-in-petersburg/>.

48 Gielen, in *Teaching Art in the Neoliberal Realm*, ed. Gielen and De Bruyne, 6, 9, 25–31.

and learning. It does not adopt easy answers. The concept of a Communiversity is based on an acknowledgement that schools need to make room for life, for the wildness, informality, and dismeasure<sup>48</sup> found in ecological and place-based education while challenging independent school-like projects to strive not to replace schools but to focus on offering the prefigurative option that the institutions and formal schools cannot provide. As I demonstrate in the projects encountered in the facing text and the sections above, I have been looking for it for a long time. It feels within reach.

From where I sit, in the office, a Communiversity that sees an integral relationship between inside and outside is something to build toward. What should we unfurl and where should we gather once we arrive?

A partial list of Artist School projects active since 2000 (thanks to Katie Hargrave, Joseph Del Pesco, Dara Greenwald, Jacquelyn Strycker, David Batty, and Manifest 6's Notes for an Art School for their past lists):

16 Beaver Group and And And And (including Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri, among others); Anhoek School (Mary Walling Blackburn); ArtSchool Palestine (Charles Asprey, Sacha Craddock and Samar Martha); Arbour Lake School (Andrew and John Frosst, Wayne Garrett, Ben Jacques, Justin Patterson, Scott Rogers, and Stacey Watson); Baltimore Free School; Bruce High Quality Foundation University (the Bruce High Quality Foundation); Centre for Advanced Study (Diana Mishkova); Colourschool (group at the University of British Columbia); Continental Drift through the Midwest Rural Cultural Corridor (Compass Group); Copenhagen Free University (Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen); Cork Caucus on Art, Possibility and Democracy (National Sculpture Factory, Art/not art, Charles Esche and Annie Fletcher); Estudio Nómada (Iris Tonies and Arnout Krediet); Exploding School, Skool of Refuse and Appropriation, and the University of Trash (Michael Cataldi and Nils Norman); Flying University and Laundry Lectures (Red76); Free University of Los Angeles; Future Academy (Clementine Deliss); James and Grace Lee Boggs Center to Nurture Community Leadership (Barbara Stachowski, Scott Kurashige, Stephen Ward, Rick Richard Feldman, Ron Scott, Shea Howell, Kim Sherobbi, Myrtle T. Curtis, Wayne Curtis, and Tawana Petty); Home Room Chicago (Aaron Rodgers); Independent School of Art (Jon Rubin); Informelle Universität in Gründung/Informal University in Foundation, the Raumerweiterungshalle, Meine Akademie, Interference Archive, Interflugs, and Free Class (Autonomous Students Organisation, University of the Arts, Berlin); LA Public School (Telic); Learning Site (Learning Group); L'université tangente (Brian Holmes and Bureau d'Etudes); Machete Group (Gabriel Rockhill, Alexi Kukuljevic, Avi Alpert and Marginal Utility); Madison Mutual Drift (Karma Chávez, Brigitte Fielder, Colin Gillis, and Dan S. Wang); Manoa Free University, Martha Rosler

Library (Martha Rosler and Eflux); Mess Hall (Temporary Services, Ava Bromberg, Marianne Fairbanks & Jane Palmer, Sam Gould, and Dan S. Wang); Mildred's Lane (Mark Dion and J. Morgan Puett); Mountain School of Arts (Piero Golia and Eric Wesley); Momentary Academy (Ted Purves); Night School (Anton Vidokle); Oak Hill Center for Education and Culture (Kevin James, Lynn Hunter, Tannaz Motevalli, Jessica Douglas, Markele Cullins, Greg Rosenthal, Tanya Garcia, Sergio España, Priya Bhayana, Nick Petr, Ashley Hufnagel, and Sean Keelan); Oberliht Association (Vladimir Us); Open School East (Anna Colin, Sam Thorne, Sarah McCrory, and Laurence Taylor); Order of the Third Bird (including D. Graham Burnett, Jeff Dolven, Jac Mullen, Leonard Nalencz, Sal Randolph, and Audra Wolowiec); Paraeducation Department (Sarah Pierce and Annie Fletcher); Pickpocket Almanack (Joseph del Pesco); Pirate University (Miles de Vivendas); Public Social University (organized by social practice students at Portland State University); Publish and Be Damned Public Library (Three Letter Words); Pedagogical Factory (Stockyard Institute and AREA); Platypus Reading Group (Chris Cutrone); Proto Academy (Charles Esche); Read/Write Library (Nell Taylor); School for Creative Activism (Center for Artistic Activism); School for Engaged Art (Chto Delat); School of Echoes (Ultra-Red); School of the Future (Christopher Kennedy and Cassie Thornton); School of Missing Studies (Liesbeth Bik, Katherine Carl, Ana Dzokic, Srdjan Jovanovic Weiss, Ivan Kucina, Marc Neelen, Milica Topalovic, Jos Van Der Pol, Sabine von Fischer and Stevan Vukovic); School of Panamerican Unrest (Pablo Helguera); School of the Damned (Derek Horton, Pil & Galia Kollektiv, Gill Partington, Dan Mitchell); Shaping San Francisco (Chris Carlsson); Slought Foundation (Aaron Levy, Jean-Michel Rabaté, and Osvaldo Romberg); Sundown Schoolhouse (Fritz Haeg); the AS in the AS (Joanna Spitzner); Toronto School of Creativity & Inquiry; Trade School (Caroline Woolard, Rich Watts, Louise Ma, Or Zubalsky); Unitednationsplaza (Anton Vidokle); University of Sodan Art (Tsuyoshi Ozawa); Utopia School (Basekamp); Wondering Around Wandering (Mike Perry); Woodbine Collective.

## BIOGRAPHIES

### JOSÉ LUIS FALCONI

is Fellow (Researcher) in the Department of History of Art and Architecture at Harvard, where he received his PhD in Romance Literatures in 2010. His areas of expertise are landscape theory (especially in the visual arts tradition of Latin America) and ethical theory in contemporary aesthetics. In Latin America, he has been a Visiting Professor in the Chair of Aesthetics at the University of Chile (Santiago de Chile, 2012), as well as at the National University of Colombia (Bogotá, 2013) and the University of San Carlos of Guatemala (Guatemala City, 2016). His latest academic publications include *A Principality of Its Own* (2006), co-edited with Gabriela Rangel; *The Other Latinos* (2007), co-edited with José Antonio Mazzotti; *Portraits of an Invisible Country* (2010); *A Singular Plurality: The Works of Dario Escobar* (2013); *The Great Swindle* (2014); and *Ad Usum: The Works of Pedro Reyes* (2017).

### ANTONI MUNTADAS

was born in Barcelona in 1942 and has lived in New York since 1971. Through his works he addresses social, political, and communication issues such as the relationship between public and private space within social frameworks, and investigates channels of information and the ways they may be used to censor or promulgate ideas. His projects are presented in different media such as photography, video, publications, the internet, installations, and urban interventions. His work has been exhibited in numerous museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Berkeley Art Museum, the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; the Museo de Arte Moderno, Buenos Aires; the Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro; and the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona. International events in which he has presented work include the VI and X editions of Documenta Kassel (1977, 1997), the Whitney Biennial (1991), the 51st Venice Biennial (2005), and events mounted in São Paulo, Lyon, Taipei, Gwangju, and Havana.

### OLIVIA MUÑOZ-ROJAS

is an independent, interdisciplinary researcher and writer based in Paris. She holds a PhD in Sociology from the London School of Economics, having studied and worked at universities and research institutions in Spain, Sweden, the UK, and the United States. With a particular interest in the visual and aesthetic dimensions of social and political processes, she regularly contributes analysis and opinion pieces to the Spanish daily *El País*, the Spanish edition of *The Huffington Post* and other non-academic media, as well as on her own blog. She has also published extensively in academic journals, and is the author of a monograph on the wartime destruction and post-war reconstruction of Madrid, Barcelona, and Bilbao during and following the Spanish Civil War (*Ashes and Granite: Destruction and Reconstruction in the Spanish Civil War and Its Aftermath*, Sussex Academic Press, 2011). She is the mother of two young children, Diego and Carla.

### DANIEL TUCKER

works as an artist, writer, and organizer developing documentaries, publications, and events inspired by his interest in social movements and the people and places from which they emerge. His writings and lectures on the intersections of art and politics and his collaborative art projects have been published and presented widely. Tucker recently completed the feature-length video essay "Future Perfect: Time Capsules in Reagan Country" and curated the exhibition and event series "Organize Your Own: The Politics and Poetics of Self-Determination Movements." He works as an Assistant Professor and Graduate Program Director in Social and Studio Practices at Moore College of Art & Design in Philadelphia. [miscprojects.com](http://miscprojects.com)

### NIELS VAN TOMME

is the Director of De Appel in Amsterdam. As a curator, teacher, and critic, he works on the intersections of contemporary culture and social studies. His exhibitions and public programs have been presented at The Kitchen, New York; Värmlands Museum, Karlstad; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; the Contemporary Arts Center, New Orleans; Gallery 400, Chicago; and the Akademie der Künste, Berlin. In 2016 he curated the Bucharest Biennale 7: *What are we building down there?*, which saw him displacing this international art event to advertisement billboards across the Romanian capital. He is a contributing editor at *Art Papers* magazine. His texts, in which he connects contemporary art, popular culture, literature, and music to broader societal issues and cultural contexts, are published in *Art in America*, *The Wire*, *Camera Austria*, *Afterimage*, and *Metropolis M*, among others. He has published the books *Where Do We Migrate To?* (2011), *Visibility Machines: Harun Farocki and Trevor Paglen* (2014), and, with Pascal Gielen, *Aesthetic Justice: Intersecting Artistic and Moral Perspectives* (2015). The film scholar Sonja Simonyi, his life partner with whom he takes care of two young children, Jens and Nico, edits his writings substantially.

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This book is published on the occasion of *Activating Artifacts: About Academia*, an exhibition project by Antoni Muntadas that consists of two elaborate video installations. Its aim is to facilitate an interdisciplinary dialogue about higher education—its many limitations as well as new possibilities.

The project presents an opportunity to critically engage with the structure and function of the US university system. It does so by exploring the topics of privatization, corporatization, gentrification, and globalization, as well as the complex relationships between the production of knowledge and the economic interests it serves and generates.

Whereas *About Academia I* (2011) addresses these issues from the perspective of professors and faculty-affiliated scholars, *About Academia II* (2017) further elaborates on its themes exclusively from the viewpoint of students. As a whole, the exhibition and this publication open a space for a critical examination of academic education.

