

EXTRA-CURRICULAR

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# EXTRA-CURRICULAR

UPPERCASE MODELS, LOWERCASE  
COUNTER-MODELS/AN EDITORIAL

*Jacob Lindgren*



## PARIS, 1977

In 1977 the French construction firm GTM broke ground and began construction on the Centre Georges Pompidou, also known as Beaubourg, a name in homage to the working-class neighborhood that once occupied the same building site. Conceptualized by architects Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers (in addition to Gianfranco Franchini), the building and eventual cultural institution it would house were preemptively hailed as an example of avant-garde ideals, radical social practice, and futuristic design. Embedded into the ideology and layout of the building was Roger's belief that automation and technology would free man from the necessity to work: "technology offers the possibility of a society without want, where, for the first time, work and learning need only be done for pleasure, and the age-old capitalist morality of earning one's keep, the backbone of the existing power structure, would be eliminated."<sup>1</sup> As noted by Simon Sadler in *The Situationist City*, the building monumentalized the French state's effort to appropriate, tame, and dispel the energies of 1968, all while claiming to provide a platform for underground voices.<sup>2</sup>

The architectural plan was exemplary of *Bowellism*, or placing the inner-workings of a building on the outside, something almost exclusively associated with Rogers' architecture practice. All of its services (air ducts, sewage pipes, elevators) were visible and accessible (for maintenance) from the exterior, leaving an uninterrupted interior, something Jean Baudrillard described in his text "The Beaubourg-Effect" as "a fluid commutative exterior – cool and modern – and an interior uptight with old values."<sup>3</sup> The infrastructure of work wasn't made redundant or fundamentally changed in any way, its visibility was simply rearranged.

It was while observing the gaping, underground-reaching hole present at the then construction site, once a familiar home of parked cars, that Gustave Afeulpin founded his own, second

beaubourg — differentiated in text by its lowercase ‘b’. Taking advantage of the Centre Georges Pompidou’s mere four-story, above-ground design, Afeulpin’s parallel institution utilized this subterranean available space and was located deep beneath its surface-level counterpart, with a concrete slab and separate entrances dividing the two. It was within this space, in direct opposition to the Beaubourg, that beaubourg became host to bankers, bikers, addicts, students, parents, potters, activists, criminals, everyone. It was a truly inclusive venture — underground on all fronts. There was no such thing as membership; the space was open to whoever approached it. People organised and worked together based on their personal and group needs. No police, information desk, or cleaning service to be found. Private property and hierarchies of leadership were abolished, in addition to other bourgeois conventions such as eating, parenting, time, hygiene, and names altogether. Whether or not to impose fees was discussed and the idea was eventually rejected (where there is money there is danger of inequality).

A



B



When the inauguration ceremony for both institutions took place on December 15, 1976, the distinction between the Beaubourg and the beaubourg was made especially evident. While the President of France and other dignified individuals from the ministries of Public Education and Cultural Affairs did the rounds above ground, sternly inaugurating the

museum, its public library, and the expansive art collection, activity was brimming underground, 27 floors below ground to be exact, with preparations for the beaubourg's first general meeting being made, set for 7pm. A sound system and an excessive amount of chalk was sourced, allowing participants to share their voice, mark notes, and inscribe eventual decisions on the wall. Missing were any chairs, desks, or tables; it would be up to the participants themselves to decide whether or not any furniture or equipment would be of benefit to the group. At 7:30pm the entire 27th floor was filled with nearly 4,000 people. Gustave Afeulpin took the microphone, and drowning out a few hecklers, announced:

There are another 53 levels underneath this one, all equipped like this, which means they are illuminated and ventilated but without division walls, apart from the toilets. All these levels are destined for culture, for the culture that you will be doing. Everything in this house, or in this hole – whatever you prefer to call it – must be decided together: what we mean by culture, as well as the contents and methods on how to organize such cultural activities.

Obviously we'll have to expect some chaos in the beginning: it is inevitable. This happens every time there is a desire to do something new, to rethink old problems and to solve them in a new way.

Over the course of the next hour and a half Afeulpin and participants traded the microphone back and forth, exchanging and discussing at-times antagonistic and clashing proposals for motivations, studies, recruitment of organisers and other personnel (to shouts of “No organisers, no permanent staff, no property, neither God nor masters”), the cleaning of the space, acquiring of equipment, fabrication of furniture, and the accessibility of the space, among many other things.

By 9:30pm the heat, smoke, and buzz of the speakers were weighing heavily in the room. Taking advantage of an altercation between two painters, Affeulpin slipped out through the back of the room. It was during this moment that someone made a suggestion regarding the chairs, which Affeulpin recounted in his diary:

About the chairs: this was the miracle of this evening. While I was out someone proposed that in order to start saving, each one should [build] at least one chair, that it was not necessary to buy new ones and that the money would be better used for equipment for creation rather than for furniture without importance, that to furnish this floor we would need at least 4,000 chairs and that at 200 francs apiece it would cost almost a million, a disproportionate sum compared with what we could use during the year. The proposition fell flat, but there weren't any giggles either. It was such an amazing suggestion, and yet so practical and obvious, that nobody could either comment, or back it up, or make fun of it.

It was a bit like a slap of zen that suddenly opens the spirit and sparks off enlightenment. Even though I had tried to be very concrete in my introduction, so far the debate had revolved around principles: all of a sudden, such a down-to-earth proposal of such brilliant simplicity re-centred the whole debate again and allowed it to come to a conclusion. Subsequently I have had the opportunity to notice the same phenomenon on various occasions, it is in fact a requirement before being able to come to concrete solutions, and to be able to move a whole jumble of general ideas and intelligent and elegant considerations. I wonder if it isn't a feature of our over-intellectualised culture, which favours discourse over action and, for the same reason, which rejects from cultural life all those who haven't learned, either at home or at school, the categories

and the agilities for such discourse. It was necessary to react against this, even if in terms of reaction, perhaps, we have favoured too many other modes of expression than the verbal.

Let's get back to the chairs...because this elementary furniture has set the tone for the centre. To opt for [self-built] furniture meant that we [...] would straight away give up culture as comfort (or comfort as culture, which is more common), that we were ready to reconsider all aspects of life as cultural phenomena, that to reflect on things as ordinary as the chairs was a prerequisite to be able to rethink every aspect of culture progressively. And that is exactly what has happened.<sup>4</sup>

C



D



Three days after the inaugural first meeting the participants counted 73 chairs, and a month later just over 1,700. There was an immense variety in what was built, reconfigured, or repurposed: a chair made from a woodworking shop's scraps, old replica of a Louis XV chair, a modular extendable chair, chairs extracted from a Citroën 2CV, chairs from local bars, chairs made of doors, planks, and shelves, church benches, and entire rows of seats from various cinemas, to name just a few. While there was less writing and fewer posters on the walls than initially expected, a dozen participants called for meetings in the following days: seven for music, three for theatre,

one to organize a fight against repression, and one for the management of the centre. The latter was important, especially to Afeulpin, as the 27th floor where the meeting took place needed a thorough sweeping. With this in mind, Afeulpin wrote visibly on the wall facing the elevators:

WE NEED VOLUNTEERS FOR  
MAINTENANCE – BRING BRUSHES AND BROOMS.

When asked to explain this detour from the institution's initial mission of culture to cleaning, Afeulpin remarked that there was not "any reason to suggest that sweeping isn't a cultural act and, above all, we have no right to say that some will be sweepers and others creators, nor to designate who will be the ones, or the others." This message stuck, and within a few days a strange din could be heard emanating from one of the lower floors. Upon investigation, it resulted that on the 62nd floor about 50 motorbikes and their riders had grouped and were running stationery, producing an immense echo through the otherwise empty space. Lanes were marked on the ground, tire tracks were present, and the walls were marked with big characters: "MOTOR = CULTURE." They would later descend to the 75th floor, which made for a reduction in the noise, better ventilation, and safer fuel storage.

E

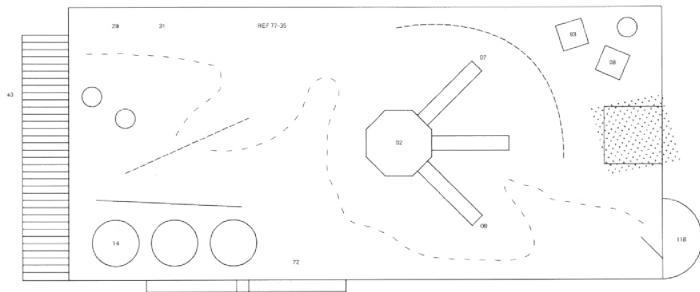
MOTOR  
=  
CULTURE

Things proceeded like this for some time with varying levels of success. Within five months all the floors were occupied: the 24th floor offered tea and painting symposiums; there was



a potter's wheel on the 41st floor; a newsletter was produced and distributed via the 11th floor; the 74th and 75th floor were covered wall to wall in creations of those who frequented the centre; a gang developed on the 35th floor, which after a string of attempted kidnappings and the theft of several motorbikes prevented access to the space (resulting in a battle on said floor and nearby levels); a communal clinic was established on the 38th floor (in the aftermath of the battle); a theatre performed *Virgin of Guadalupe* across several floors; the first (and last) exhibition in the centre took place on the 29th floor; a library comprised of everyone's collections (publications on history, politics and human sciences, several thousand technical manuals and reference books on every possible topic) was setup across three different levels; a hub of free transportation-offering motorists (local, provincial, and international) and travel agents was introduced on the 7th floor; a school of schizophrenic painters was founded on the 68th floor; and a semi-tropical garden park was planted on the 51st floor (best seen by skipping the elevator and making the slow descent via the escalator on the 50th floor); among numerous other things.

F



Not everything was smooth sailing however, there were coffee stains on LPs, altercations, burning cigarette butts on a pile of photographic paper, a projector on the floor in the middle of a passage way, and an oven left on for two days straight (its owner having left to look for clay in the river Yonne), without

touching upon the administrative backlog that developed. It was important however to not touch or interfere: self-discipline and order came from the inside, said Afeulpin.

Eventually there were beaubourgs appearing all over; in the Marseille postal code of 13005, 37000 in Tours, abroad in Switzerland (CH 1007), Great Britain (RG9 3AU), and one in the San Vito neighbourhood in Milan. These were mostly housed in easily forgotten building sites and hangars like old factories, rent-controlled housing, abandoned cooperative basements, etc. They were then transformed from the inside. The outside walls, or exterior, said Afeulpin, were “that which concerns the external world [and] of no importance to us.”<sup>5</sup>

As impressive and ground-breaking as it was, Gustave Afeulpin’s beaubourg was fictional – conceptualized, constructed, and recounted in his diary-like book *La soi-disante utopie du Centre Beaubourg* (*The So-called Utopia of Centre Beaubourg*), a work critical of the Pompidou’s construction and supposed cultural significance published in 1976 by Editions Entente, with a preface dated ten years into the future as 1986. In truth, even Gustave Afeulpin is fictional, serving as the pseudonym of the French sociologist Albert Meister, to whom the same book was properly accredited in its 1988 Italian translation published by Elèuthera. A researcher of social science at the École des Hautes Études in Paris, Meister studied and wrote primarily about self-organised communities and cooperatives. Meister’s book was translated to English in 2007 by artist Luca Frei in an edition published by Book Works and CASCO, *The So-Called Utopia of the Centre Beaubourg: An Interpretation*, from which this text (gratefully) draws its references of events and quotes from Afeulpin.

Regardless of its lacking physicality, the beaubourg certainly existed: in the mind of its principal founder and architect, the book he wrote, to its readers, and briefly on these pages.

It's within the same enthusiasm and necessity found in Gustave Afeulpin's creation of an alternative — a counter-model to the accepted and perpetually reinforced<sup>6</sup> existing structures — from the chairs to the institution itself, that this book exists.

CHICAGO, 2018

In the same way that Afeulpin's beaubourg presented an alternative, in this case via a direct counter to the established model, it's important to position the same kind of world-making and self-organised experimentation as a catalyst for change, whether it be in thought or action; in the ruins of the old, implanted into the beginnings of the new, or far away from the site of either. These endeavours serve as valuable ways of examining the “affects, effects, and defects”<sup>7</sup> of current structures.

G



H



As the neoliberalisation of (graphic design) education increases on all fronts, both from inside and out<sup>8</sup>, it becomes increasingly necessary to examine and disentangle the (sometimes messy) intertwining of roots between graphic design, learning, and the institutions and sites where these intersections occur. Extracted of politics (or rather ones different from its own), homogenized, Eurocentric, and in service to capital, the increasingly inapplicable and problematic models that graphic design

education upholds and propagates need to be reconsidered. This self-examination is taking place via an “educational turn”<sup>9</sup> or shift in the field as visible in the rising amount of biennials, conferences, projects, and books (this one included) centered around the topic. The goal is that the increase in discourse and visibility of these ideas will eventually feed back into the institutions they offer critique towards, or even highlight their inadequacies by turning our gaze to the problems inherent in their models.

This isn’t to say that these institutions (or their alternatives) where graphic design education is happening should simply become more efficient at providing design workers for the cultural sector or that its widely heralded (by venture capitalists) “design thinking” needs to simply be applied harder, but that these institutions and curriculum would benefit from a decentralizing of their current models and ideologies. Within all this there remains a risk in forming self-organised school after school, after summer school, after library, after exhibition without truly beginning to inspect the foundational reasons, identify frictions, and have the conversations necessary to working towards an educational model that breaks free from its hidden curriculum, allergy to (other) ideologies and politics, and allegiance to the historic status quo.

In addition, there exists a danger, to quote the audience member in James Langdon’s “Unanswered Letter to Leon Festinger,” of treating education as “another element for their (designer’s) portfolios.” In other words, treating it as a speculative canvas, or “treadmill<sup>10</sup>”, resulting in inaccessible and disconnected solutions that fail to rethink or propose a restructuring of design education and practice.

While accepting this concern, this book’s response is the same as Gustave Afeulpin’s: that even if via failure (or speculation) it is worthwhile to pursue alternatives without achieving a

complete or immediate reworking of the existing model (without also simply becoming an anti-network network<sup>11</sup>).

In this context, the need for ground-up, self-organised educational models and curriculum – either as stand-alone ventures, thought experiments, successes, failures, anti-institutional or inter-institutional efforts, among many other forms – becomes necessary to critically examine, redefine, and reshape what graphic design pedagogy could look like. Maybe they're not successful or viable, but they serve to help us question and think about the current structures in place. It's even unlikely that they will directly change said structures. Often times their most meaningful and tangible result is simply serving as a support structure<sup>12</sup> by which to reflect, research, and find solidarity through.

The efforts mentioned and represented in this book take many forms, sometimes from within schools, sometimes alternatives to schools, and sometimes alternatives to the alternatives. Whether to counteract or correct existing institutions, by changing a part of them, or something different altogether, what is shared is an attempt and desire to outline, draft, and model new learning structures, methods, and alternatives to what currently exists. In that same fashion, they are perspectives which are at times opposed or at-odds with each other (or themselves), but in this space exist possible ways forward, backward, or sideways for self-organised, institutional, or any other variant of graphic design education. In no way does the compilation of texts mean to suggest to the reader a particular solution to enact or path to follow, or that there is one. Instead, via its poly-vocal and contrasting contributions, the aim is to expand the concept of what a school for graphic design is, who it's meant to serve, through which curriculum its ethos is imparted, and the numerous pieces that compose it by the time we experience it.

The hope is that this book serves as a site for tensions, contradictions (even within this editorial), and experiments in self-organised graphic design pedagogy as a means to further possibilities and generate discussion. The rudder of a ship, paling in size in comparison to the vessel its attached to, is still able to apply pressure and make changes that effect the ship's course.<sup>13</sup> To take it back to Gustave Affeulpin's beaubourg, "it is necessary that we crush our rigidity first; destroy all that has been stuffed into us [...] before destroying the external hierarchies: otherwise, we'll end up (as has happened so often) building them anew."<sup>14</sup> Similar to Robert Filliou's book, *Teaching and Learning as Performative Arts*<sup>15</sup>, the ideal scenario would be one in which any empty space on these pages, in addition to discussion around it, became a construction site similar to the one beaubourg took advantage of; one used as terrain for note-taking, corrections, counter-arguments, conversation, and critiques to then be re-published in (or built underneath) an updated edition, a different book, or a learning experiment.

1. The Situationist City, Simon Sadler. MIT Press, 1999.
2. Ibid.
3. The Beaubourg-Effect: Implosion and Deterrence, Jean Baudrillard, Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson. The MIT Press, 1982.
4. The So-Called Utopia of the Centre Beaubourg: An Interpretation, Luca Frei. Book Works/CASCO, 2007 as quoted in Department 21's self-titled publication, 2010. Department 21's quotation of the text exchanges "bring at least on chair" with "build at least one chair," and "recuperated furniture" for "self-built furniture."
5. The So-Called Utopia of the Centre Beaubourg: An Interpretation, Luca Frei. Book Works/CASCO, 2007.
6. Hidden curriculum: "Within the "otherness" in the "exterior" of the curriculum, there is the most inner part of the curriculum itself (i.e., the hidden curriculum); likewise, in the "exterior" of the school (i.e., architecture and equipment), there is the most internal part of the school (i.e., the hidden curriculum). The school architecture is our dwelling and our residence beyond our awareness. It is not as external as it appears. The less it is consciously conceived and observed, the more it is taken for granted. The more it is taken for granted, the more we take to it, and the more it "holds" us and we hold it." *What Kind of School Do We Want? The Architecture of Schools as an Element of the (Hidden) Curriculum*, Ksenija Bregar Golobič.
7. After Banff by The Serving Library, (in Extra-curricular).
8. Self-organised responses to institutional learning can also be seen as symptoms or catering to neoliberalisation: entrepreneurship, lifting responsibility from larger entities such as states, diy-spirit, the self as a product, etc.



9. Turning, Irit Rogoff. e-flux, 2008. <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/turning/>
10. Letter to the Academy by Parallel School, (in Extra-curricular).
11. "Some Transparency" by Evening Class, part of Training for Exploitation? Politicising Employability and Reclaiming Education. *The Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, 2016. When describing their process for collectively designing the book as a group, Evening Class explains that it was necessary to reexamine their methodology "with the hope of opening up new methods of participation within the group and public. Otherwise, we risk becoming just another anti-network network."
12. Tweet from Édouard Urcades, <https://twitter.com/edouerd/status/943151812147892224>.
13. "...the whole ship goes by and then comes the rudder. And there's a tiny thing at the edge of the rudder called a trim tab. It's a miniature rudder. Just moving the little trim tab builds a low pressure that pulls the rudder around. Takes almost no effort at all. So I said that the little individual can be a trim tab. Society thinks it's going right by you, that it's left you altogether. But if you're doing dynamic things mentally, the fact is that you can just put your foot out like that and the whole big ship of state is going to go." Buckminster Fuller
14. *The So-Called Utopia of the Centre Beauborg: An Interpretation*, Luca Frei. *Book Works/CASCO*, 2007.
15. "The writing - space provided for the reader's use is, through the simple device of dividing the page in two\*, exactly the same as that taken by the author.\* Of course the reader is free not to make use of his writing space. But it is hoped that he will be willing to enter the writing game as a performed rather than as a mere outsider." Robert Filliou
- A. Beaubourg neighborhood parking lot before construction on the Centre Georges Pompidou began. Image: *L'histoire du Centre Pompidou*, [[centre-pompidou-hda.pagesperso-orange.fr](http://centre-pompidou-hda.pagesperso-orange.fr)].
- B. Centre Georges Pompidou construction site. Image: Archives Centre Pompidou, photo by Jean-Claude Planchet, Georges Meguerditchian, Eustache Kossakowski.
- C. "Beaubourg Chair" by Michel Cadestin and Georges Laurent. Image: *1stdibs*, [[1stdibs.com/furniture/seating/dining-room-chairs/beaubourg-chairs-from-pompidou-centre-set-of-eight/id-f\\_8054803/](http://1stdibs.com/furniture/seating/dining-room-chairs/beaubourg-chairs-from-pompidou-centre-set-of-eight/id-f_8054803/)].
- D. Assortment of chairs and tables at La Recyclerie, Paris. Image: [[sapahotels.info/day/recyclerie-paris.html](http://sapahotels.info/day/recyclerie-paris.html)].
- E. MOTOR = CULTURE wall drawing. Image: Jacob Lindgren
- F. Potential beaubourg floor layout. Image: Jacob Lindgren
- G. "There is no such thing as ethical graphic design under capitalism." Image: Desmond Wong, [[are.na/block/1833043](http://are.na/block/1833043)].
- H. Anti nuclear power movement's Smiling Sun logo "Nuclear Power? No Thanks." Anne Lund, Organisation for Information on Nuclear Power, [[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Smiling\\_Sun\\_-\\_English.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Smiling_Sun_-_English.jpg)].

LETTER TO THE ACADEMY

*Parallel School*

From: Initiative

To: Institution

Dear Academy,

I hope this letter finds you well. I want to take the opportunity to discuss the topic of education with you. I am part of a constantly changing group of students and non-students from across Europe and the world: People who get together to engage with the topic of self-organized education.

We speak about different approaches to art and design education at the Academy – about lecturing and learning, constraints and autonomy, expectations and failure. We wonder what art and design education is really all about.

Compared to you I am only a very temporary school – I only take place for a short amount of time in a temporary space but with full of energy. This is the basic situation in which people get together to share their ideas and interests, discuss and teach each other and themselves. What I – as a temporary institution – do, is offer a space for a self-defined and self-determined reflection. I try to be as open as possible and not exclude anyone or anything – people meet within this temporary space because they feel the need for discussing certain topics which might be neglected at their own universities. Simultaneously, I attempt to provide the necessary framework for exchange. Paradoxically, for a space to be open a minimum of structure and organisation is required. For a Parallel School<sup>1</sup> this means that everybody contributes to the group and agrees on a schedule and that the meeting has a beginning and an end.

I guess I am a reaction to current changes in the educational system in Europe and to the general conditions which students face at art academies all over. I don't want to be a competition or an alternative to the existing schools, but instead serve as a corrective<sup>2</sup> and as an impulse – an impulse against complying

with assignments but for circumventing them instead, an impulse against set structures but for setting structures collectively instead; against ignorance, but for “ignorant schoolmasters”<sup>3</sup> and empathy instead; an impulse against alienation but for the solidarity between students instead.

In many ways I think education is paradoxical: On one hand it is always an attempt by a hegemonic power to reproduce itself and its systems of value, while at the same time – at least in higher education – there is a democratic idea of criticality and an ideal of emancipated students who can pose questions to challenge this hegemonic power. At best, this paradoxical relation transfers onto the students and their thinking itself as it seems to be a central building block of democratic societies – citizens that are at the same time supportive of and critical towards their government.

That’s why I was created. All I really learned was to question everything since the places for learning such as schools, academies and universities have started to follow an agenda in which questions have become scarce. Rising tuition fees, rising housing prices, falling wages, failing prospects dwindling down a neoliberal abyss. This creates an environment which disables criticism and fosters streamlining.

In many cases, the university has been occupied by a neoliberal ideology. Education is an investment. It is a market to speculate on just like real estate, agricultural crops or livestock. Higher education has turned into a financial asset. The university has become a corporate entity, offering itself on this venture market. The profit has shifted from bright minds to investment funds. Education is being replaced by a marketable image of education and success. It is not a win-win situation of students and the public making a future but a lose-lose setting for students and their future. Students as well as teachers find themselves deep inside this speculative treadmill with barely any resources left

to question the status quo. They are forced to comply with a future amounting in a trillion dollars student debt.<sup>4</sup> The political and above all the economic interests that are impacting and besieging the universities have altered them. From a critical environment of opportunities providing relatively open structures, into factories following cost-benefit calculations operating exclusively on financial parameters.

I don't want to perpetuate a romantic idea of education. If anything, I am looking for a recourse. To me, learning means becoming aware of these complex relations as a whole, and the fact that I by no means stand outside of them but that I am very much part of the current situation. Let's get not confused: To be active, to be an activist, is not liberating but ultimately self-enslaving if it is not carried out in solidarity. Education cannot be reduced to what an academy or a system can offer. Education is also everything which is brought into its system by the subjects that bring it to life.

Therefore, we need the common, the occupied, the appropriated, and the lesser governed spaces.<sup>5</sup> We need to be aware of the spaces we fulfil and to build our own environments and organizations that serve our purposes. These spaces allow for a different thinking, outside but within the academy. They allow us to reappropriate the increasingly corporate space of the academy.

This is why I want to ask you, dear Academy: What spaces do you offer? How are they structured? Can the students take over? How do you deal with crumbling state support? Do you increase tuition fees? How do you learn? Can you still take a liberal position in the face of financial cuts? Do you believe that learning is about self-improvement? Do you quantify yourself and your ideas? What are your strategies of evading the pressure of proving yourself and turning in a quota in order to ensure further support? What are your excuses for not turning in an assignment? Is simulation

a valid strategy? What's your hidden curriculum?<sup>6</sup>

I am intrigued by these questions because I am wondering what art and design education should really be about – and I am worried about what its future might look like. Are the skills which are required in art and design of technical and conceptual nature or are they rather about successfully applying for grants and welfare? Are they about how to default on student loans? About navigating precarious labor? About how to Design Economic Cultures?<sup>7</sup> Or should we forget criticality altogether and become cybernetic circuits creating surplus value?

Education could mean turning a space into an experiment in communication. To become connected and to get lost, to leave traces and find meaning. I want to set an impulse for a realistic reflection of academia and a speculative perspective of how to change it – against the speculation in higher education as a financial asset but for a speculative approach towards learning and teaching.

I am a name to be appropriated, a balaclava to be worn and used as camouflage, a means to take action, to set an impulse and to bring people together to debate, to argue, to struggle, and to challenge each other and their environment of learning but all in a spirit of solidarity. “Thus the story of pedagogy is more a story of love than of didactic materials.”<sup>8</sup>

Kind regards,

Parallel School



1. [www.parallel-school.org](http://www.parallel-school.org)
2. »Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish, Said the Academy and Fed Us to the Lions.« Or: Starving With a Lot of Love in Your Stomach. Till Wittwer, Parallel School Brno 2014, in: [http://robertpreusse.com/dl/Parallel\\_School\\_Journal\\_Brno.pdf](http://robertpreusse.com/dl/Parallel_School_Journal_Brno.pdf). pp. 34-40.
3. The Ignorant Schoolmaster Jacques Rancière, 1987.
4. One Trillion Dollars in Student Debt (The Guardian, 2013).
5. Parallel School Library
6. Hidden Curriculum Annette Krauss, 2012.
7. Designing Economic Cultures Brave New Alps, 2010-2014.
8. Parallel School Workshop Berlin 2010.

# A SCHOOL INSIDE A SCHOOL

*Jack Henrie Fisher*

A contradiction hangs in the air of the contemporary design school. But it's not a fog, momentarily clouding our vision. It's more like the architecture of the building itself, the basic framework on which the existence of the school depends. It doesn't hang in the air so much as it is the thing on which the air itself hangs. This structural contradiction didn't suddenly come into being. It's been here from the beginning, with William Morris, who caustically noted its existence in 1888.



Invitation to Socialist League Meeting, dated February 15th, 1890. The Hammersmith Branch of the Socialist League, founded by William Morris in 1885, often hosted lectures and parties to share socialist ideas and enjoy the company of fellow party members.

In considering a proposal to introduce the “minor arts” of design into general education, with the hope that “sound workmanship combined with beauty” might thereby become a general condition of society, Morris observed that the only possible outcome of a design school would be a temporary fad for well-designed objects which, given the time and skill necessary to produce them, would become commodities available only to the rich. Furthermore, increasing the quality of design

work would further immiserate the design worker, as more labor hours would be required for production than could be fairly paid in competitive markets. This is the contradiction of a design education that purports to enrich the student and society: any attempt to increase the quality of design work can only end up impoverishing the design worker, demanding more work for less money, while simultaneously enriching his bosses.

An education organized in capitalism cannot afford — it indeed has a very hard time to even imagine — the one thing upon which a “real” education must depend — that is, an education that is something other than the preparation of fresh minds and docile bodies for future exploitation. This thing that capital cannot afford is the worker’s leisure to be unproductive, to be deliberate, and to think and to produce without the requirement that this work be useful to capital down the line. Of these impossible luxuries, Morris writes: “the first and most necessary of them are leisure and deliberation; and leisure is a thing which the modern slave-holder will by no means grant to his slave as long as he grants him rations; when the leisure begins the rations end. Constant toil is the only terms on which they are to be had.”

In lieu of this leisure to think and work “unproductively,” the design school — however it might wishfully imagine itself — is above all an ideological training center for the future design worker, who we might note, typifies the increasingly flexible and generalizable subjectivity demanded in late capitalism. In addition to learning demonstrable technical and formal skills, which, according to every disheartened or cynical contemporary account of the discipline, are less and less important to the enterprise of design, the design student acquires, most importantly, a way of thinking about herself as a designer in relation to the world. He is taught to conceive an imaginary relationship to what we might infer as the real conditions of life and production, both those within the school and those in the “real world”

for which she is being prepared. This is precisely the formulation which Louis Althusser made for ideology: the representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. The effect of this representation is above all to keep its subject doing what he's told to be doing, but under the illusion that he's deciding to do it by himself, by "freely" forming or recognizing those ideas in which he believes.



Louis Althusser, photographed in 1973 during a lecture given at the École Normale Supérieure de Paris.

The design school then is first and foremost an ideological factory which produces a particular outlook on the world at large, as well as, incidentally, on the world of design. We should note, following Althusser, that there's not a simple cause for the distorted and imaginary beliefs which ideology produces in our world views; there's no set of bad guys (or humanoid aliens, as in the John Carpenter film, *They Live*) diabolically spinning false stories in order to keep us all in line – as convenient as that would be to believe. Ideology is rather simply and totally an effect of exactly that structure we find ourselves inside.

There's no outside to this structure that is ideology. There are only other interiors, other ideologies. We can't just take the

door from the school to the street and start wheat-pasting and be free of our capitalist masters. The most telling symptom of ideological enchantment is in fact the belief that one is outside of its domain. Ideology always declares an outside, in which the subject understands herself as free, but ideology is always and necessarily blind to its own interior.

So what are our choices? Marx writes “We must force the frozen circumstances to dance by singing to them their own melody.” The only way out is through, to say it another way and to quote Robert Frost and Alanis Morissette. Straight out of the fucking dungeons of design school, here we come, marching in place. And while we’re here, we can take a closer look at that air that hangs around us, keeping the walls up while buffeting the lines of bodies taking their lessons in typography studios. Instead of splitting this scene, instead of concocting a parallel school, an addendum or projection, a satellite or superstructure located somewhere else, instead of a minor margin or invisible double to this institution which chews us up and spits us out, instead of an extra-curricular assembly that nobody else knows about, what if we stayed right here and dug ourselves even further inside? What if we made an opening from within and called some other people from the outside to join us in some leisure time, like Joey and Dee Dee Ramone? What if we made a new school inside the school that already exists? A space which is fundamentally interior to the institution but a space in which the rules are suspended, inverted, and thereby, all of a sudden, made legible as contradictions. We might begin to ask, in this new occupation: whose walls are these? They might as well be ours. What words might we print on them?





The Ramones and Riff Randel in *Rock n Roll High School* (1979).

1. William Morris (1888) 'Thoughts on Education under Capitalism'. *Commonweal* (Volume 4, No. 129) 30 June 1888. Reproduced in the informal education archives. [[www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/william\\_morris\\_thoughts\\_on\\_education\\_under\\_capitalism.htm](http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/william_morris_thoughts_on_education_under_capitalism.htm)].
2. Louis Althusser (1970) 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'. First published in *La Pensée*. Reproduced in <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>
3. Karl Marx (1844/1992) 'A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right'. In *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin).

UNANSWERED LETTERS  
TO LEON FESTINGER

*James Langdon*

James Langdon  
A School for Design Fiction  
% Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst  
Karl-Tauchnitz-Str. 9–11  
D–04107 Leipzig  
Germany

Professor Leon Festinger  
% The New School  
66 West 12th Street  
New York 10011  
U.S.A.

6 January 2018

Dear Professor Festinger

I wrote you a letter of invitation, dated 11 January 2018, to which you did not reply. I can't blame you. I did not tell you the whole truth and I would like to now do so. As I'm sure was obvious to you, my letter was written with a generic template. I wanted to invoke some academic credibility. I wanted you to take me me seriously. Your silence tells me that you saw through the pretense. I am embarrassed, I should have put this right sooner. But I trust in serendipity. I hope that this reaches you in a moment when you are considering your options. I am reassured by the knowledge that you could not have made the moves you have made without being restless and opportunistic.

Last night I watched a video of you being interviewed on television in 1973. I noticed you raise your eyebrows when your work was introduced as “something on the order of an arbitration between thought and conduct.” You grinned and chuckled as your interviewer promised you plenty of chance to object to that formulation. When I saw your expression, your self-assured laughter, I was reminded of something. Have you ever noticed, Professor, that in almost every photograph of the composer

John Cage; or the novelist Georges Perec (especially later in his career); they are smiling broadly, or laughing? It sounds ridiculous to say, but I think I see in their faces a peculiar spirit of the twentieth century that only a most rarefied, privileged group of male artists were able to channel. They look liberated, dizzy. They have escaped the storytelling-monkey-brained banality of 'artistic expression' and in the process found themselves just a fraction closer to truth — to reality — than most of us will ever get. As I said, it sounds ridiculous, but I am being sincere. When I saw your face I knew you were part of that special group, and that I had to write this letter.

I am enthralled by the interdisciplinary trajectory of your career. I read how your early work brought laboratory rigour to slippery subjects such as social dynamics and communication. Then came cognitive dissonance, your theory that humans are predisposed to seek reconciliation of contradictory beliefs. Momentous work, and you did it before 40! I read how you proved your theory by covertly joining a doomsday cult whose leader believed she was receiving messages from an alien being named Sananda, prophesising that the world was to end, imminently, on December 21, 1954. When the world didn't end you predicted that, despite their doctrine being disproved, the group would remain faithful to it. And you were right! So spectacularly right! Their storytelling-monkey-brains couldn't bear the discontinuity, and they reduced their dissonance by concocting even more fantastic prophesies! I can only imagine the thrill of exemplifying your work with such guile and audacity. Rather than repeat yourself from the security of academia, you turned next to other questions: visual perception, then archaeology, technology, religion ... I am not writing to recite your career back to you, but it's important that you know I am a scholar of your work. I am writing in awe of the radical swerves you have made, and to propose one more to you: I would like to invite you to lead a design school.

I wonder if you have ever given design your attention? Perhaps when you were in Antibes, in the studio of the archaeologist Jacques Tixier, learning first-hand how early humans crafted their hunting tools from flint? Well, those primitive objects already exhibited many of the affordances that we continue to subtilise in our work as designers. Or perhaps in your own laboratory, assembling and modifying technical instruments to track tiny movements of the human eye, you saw how the relation between the subject and the instrument is always producing unexpected friction. As you know better than anyone, moments of malfunction offer the most insight. In any case, I can't resist imagining what your unique mind would make of our practices. Norman Potter subtitled his book 'What is a designer' with three nouns: 'things', 'places', 'messages'. What more is there! He wrote: "It is true that, in the last analysis, every human artefact — whether painting, poem, chair, or rubbish bin — evokes and invokes the inescapable totality of a culture, and the hidden assumptions which condition cultural priorities." I return continually to this sentence, because it is such a succinct flattener. It unites the products of design in every imaginable cultural register: from those that design students tend to admire, to those they tend to dismiss. That phrase, "the last analysis", opens up an expanse of time that I think you would feel comfortable in. Pinned to the studio wall I have a line from an interview with the artist Roni Horn: "I know that most of what's out there in the world is occurring too quickly or too slowly for me to see."

Allow me now to 'set the scene' of my invitation. Or 'prime the space', as we prefer to say. Imagine this, Professor. You are a visitor at our school. You sit down at a lecture. At first it's the usual format: a single speaker monologue in front of rows of chairs, slides projected overhead. After a few minutes, in your peripheral vision, you become aware of the student seated next to you. They take out a notebook, shuffle a little in their seat, and start writing. Momentarily you glance over at them — naturally you are curious to know what they have noted from

the lecture — and what you see is confounding. They are writing directly onto their trousers! The notebook that you glimpsed is not on their lap but on their chair, they are sitting on it! Not wishing to stare you return your attention to the lecture. Some minutes later you notice someone else, seated across from you and a few rows in front. They rustle the wrapper of a chocolate bar, and then put it to their mouth, taking a bite right through the foil! Startled by this strangeness, you watch them continue to chew and swallow the chocolate and its wrapper, their demeanour not once indicating anything out of the ordinary. At this point you are beginning to realise what is going on. Some members of the audience are performers, their actions are scripted! The choreography is by the artist Sofia Hultén, and we present it as kind of ritual — unannounced to new students — at the opening lecture of each semester. There is a specific sequence of actions, believable things that a student might do in a lecture: make notes, eat a snack, hang a jacket over the back of a chair, fall asleep, and so on. But the performers are instructed to make these moves in anomalous spatial or temporal order. As you might just have experienced vicariously through my description, to witness even the most ordinary of gestures apparently break its own causal logic is profoundly unsettling. That is our first important signal. I hope that it intrigues you, Professor, even a little. We learned our sneaky methods from you.

In anticipation of your arrival we have made some efforts toward a new curriculum for designers. My colleague Anton Stuckardt and I are teaching a course on ‘Elementary Pataphysics’. It draws on the French author and artist Alfred Jarry, of course, and the quasi-scientific literary tradition that sprouts in his wake. When Jarry wrote “Pataphysics will be, above all, the science of the particular, despite the common opinion that the only science is that of the general ...”, he foreshadowed a critical pitfall for designers. To address this we depart from Jarry and introduce students to the English scientist Arthur Worthington, do you know his work? He was a nineteenth-century pioneer of

fluid dynamics. He spent decades hunched over his workbench conducting experiments to observe tiny droplets of milk and mercury splashing on contact with a flat surface. He laboured in darkness, punctuated by regular, instantaneous flashes from the lighting apparatus that he designed to be triggered by each splash. He translated what he saw into an array of wonderfully pure and symmetrical drawings: a morphology of the splash revealed through sheer concentrated effort. Later in his career Worthington pioneered the application of very high speed photography to his work. The results vexed him! His photographs recorded images far too fleeting for his eye ever to have fixated on. The splashes as they appeared to the camera were monstrous, contingent, unrepeatable: each as unique as a fingerprint. Suddenly his drawn geometries revealed themselves as fakes — artifacts of his own perceptual apparatus! His brain had interpolated these idealistic images even before his conscious, scientific self could intervene. What more poetic example can you imagine of the brain's automatic predisposition to resolve? Instead of allowing him to realise that the phenomena he wished to classify were infinite and unknowable, Worthington's brain offered his hand these elegant abstractions. And like the members of the cult you studied, he believed them! I picture his face in the moment he first saw one of these deformed photographic splashes, and what I see is not like your face, Professor; or Cage's, or Perec's! It's to his credit, though, that Worthington was able to endure this dissonance. In the canonical presentation of his work, a lecture at the Royal Institution in London in 1894, he included both his drawings and photographs. For our students, his storytelling is exemplary.

In 'The Human Legacy' you speculatively identified the moment of design's inception when you wrote: "More than two and a half million years ago some early humans had a fantastic, new idea. The essence of that idea seems simple to us today, but it was of monumental significance at that time. It was not necessary to limit themselves to using, as tools, objects that

ordinarily were naturally available in their environment. They could, instead, create objects that were not ordinarily available. If, for example, there was a need for a piece of stone with a sharp edge to cut meat or animal skin or wood, they could try to manufacture such an object.” It’s a thrilling moment of clarity, Professor. But there is one thing I have never understood about your account. You described how some rare examples of these earliest designed objects were deliberately worked into symmetrical forms, or decoratively coloured for no apparent functional advantage. In the book you seemed to find these aesthetic affordances inexplicable in evolutionary terms. If you could only spend a working day in a design school! These are matters of considerable nuance! The aesthetic labour invested in these objects must have conferred on their designers a communicative, or pedagogical, or status advantage. If I might be so bold – and I hesitate – perhaps you can learn something from us ...

There’s a striking paragraph in Graham Harman’s book ‘The Quadruple Object’, in which he writes about an ordinary British postbox as a stack of its qualities. From the incidental – the patination of one particular postbox – to the defining – its redness, familiar dimensions and materiality. I have had confusing experiences trying to employ this text as a teaching resource for graphic designers! Harman’s method of sorting out the defining and the incidental features that identify an object seems to be relevant to the practice of designing graphic ‘identities’ to represent organisations and entities. But I have consistently failed to convey this to students. That is until recently, when an inspired student, Christian Janisch, instinctively synthesised Harman’s stack of qualities in a study of an early twentieth century German Catholic priest who had dedicated his working life to pomology! The priest, Korbinian Aigner, had made hundreds of beautiful paintings of apples, published, many years after his death, in a volume displaying a most wonderful typology of varieties and titled ‘Äpfel und Birnen’ – ‘apples and pears’. Christian prepared a deconstructed visualisation of Aigner’s apples:



their shapes, colours, patterns, and naming conventions. The work was presented as a matrix of possible apple qualities, with the potential at once to define the boundaries of apple-ness, and to go beyond it – not merely into the territory of the pear, but much further, to generate speculative apples with compound names like ‘Red rocketing Hogan with crackles and lines’, ‘Green chamois exchange quoin’, and ‘White fabled rat gherkin’. They are apples – they demonstrably contain only qualities found in apples – and yet we perceive them as abstract and unfamiliar. They produce friction for our storytelling-monkey-brains.

Please excuse the length that this letter has already run to. Here I am trying to prove myself to you, anxious that you might find this invitation foolish, and yet I scan back over what I have written and find myself quoting artists, scientists, and philosophers when instead I might simply have outlined our offer to you. We – my colleagues and I – invite you to lead our school. As a token of our sincerity, we have made some provisions for your arrival.

First, your office. I read that you like to smoke. While not a smoker myself, I must admit that I find the image of pedagogical clarity emerging from the smoke-filled air of the classroom very evocative. We are presently planning a new purpose-built campus – I enclose some renderings – but regulations are now very strict in prohibiting smoking in public buildings. We think we have a clever solution: a custom-made extraction system concealed inside a backgammon table. Yes, I have done my research, Professor!

As regards furniture, Norman Potter – I mentioned him – asked a question of students in ‘What is a designer’: ‘What is intrinsically wrong about bookcases, or questionable?’ The answer – a rhetorical point for him, I believe, but probably rather cryptic for students – was that knowledge cannot be confined. In this spirit we are constructing your bookshelves in Potter’s stick furniture

style. These skeletal structures have no backs or sides, in fact no solid planes at all – the books sit on the closely aligned stick-supports, making the delimiting ‘shelf’ itself redundant. A suggestive metaphor I hope.

For your desk, a small but significant object: a lamp, designed by a colleague Rosie Eveleigh. This is our most tender offering to you, by way of homage to Arthur Worthington. It symbolises the tragic intensity of Worthington’s gaze, and the emergence of his enlightenment in a woozy moment of asymmetry. We thought alabaster would be a fitting material for the base, please do send your comments on that.

I could go on. There is so much to say but I don’t want to scare you away. Allow me, finally, to add that I fear this project will never be complete without you. Feel free to make demands and place obstacles in my way. I will gladly attempt to overcome them.

Yours hopefully, excitedly

James Langdon

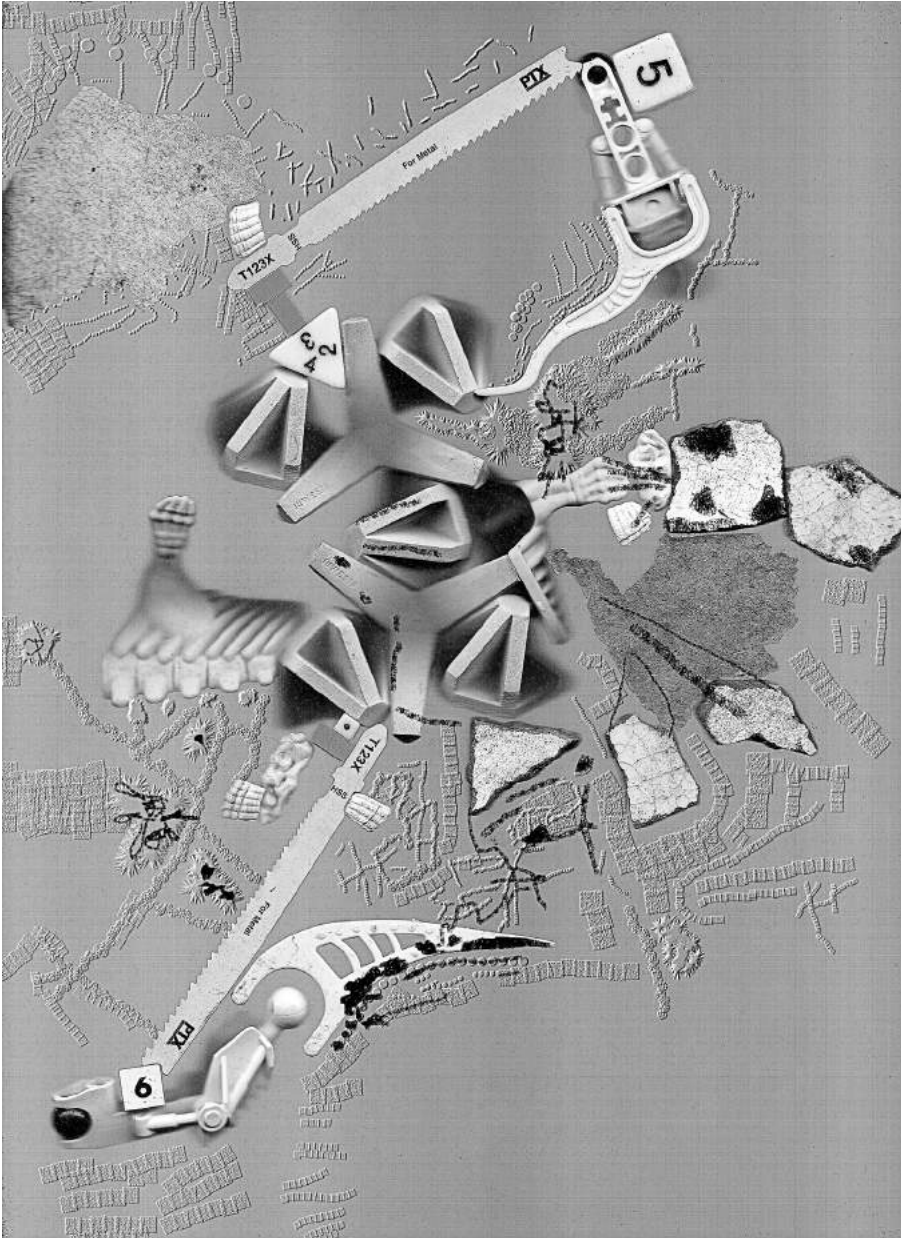
PS. I enclose some images for your information and comment:

- \* A plan of our proposed campus by Peter Nencini. This is not finalised and we would be delighted to discuss it with you;
- \* The design for your desk lamp that I mentioned, by Rosie Eveleigh;
- \* Some speculative pomology by Christian Janisch;
- \* A portrait of you, swerving, by Simon Manfield. I know I am getting ahead of myself, but I thought we might use this in our prospectus?

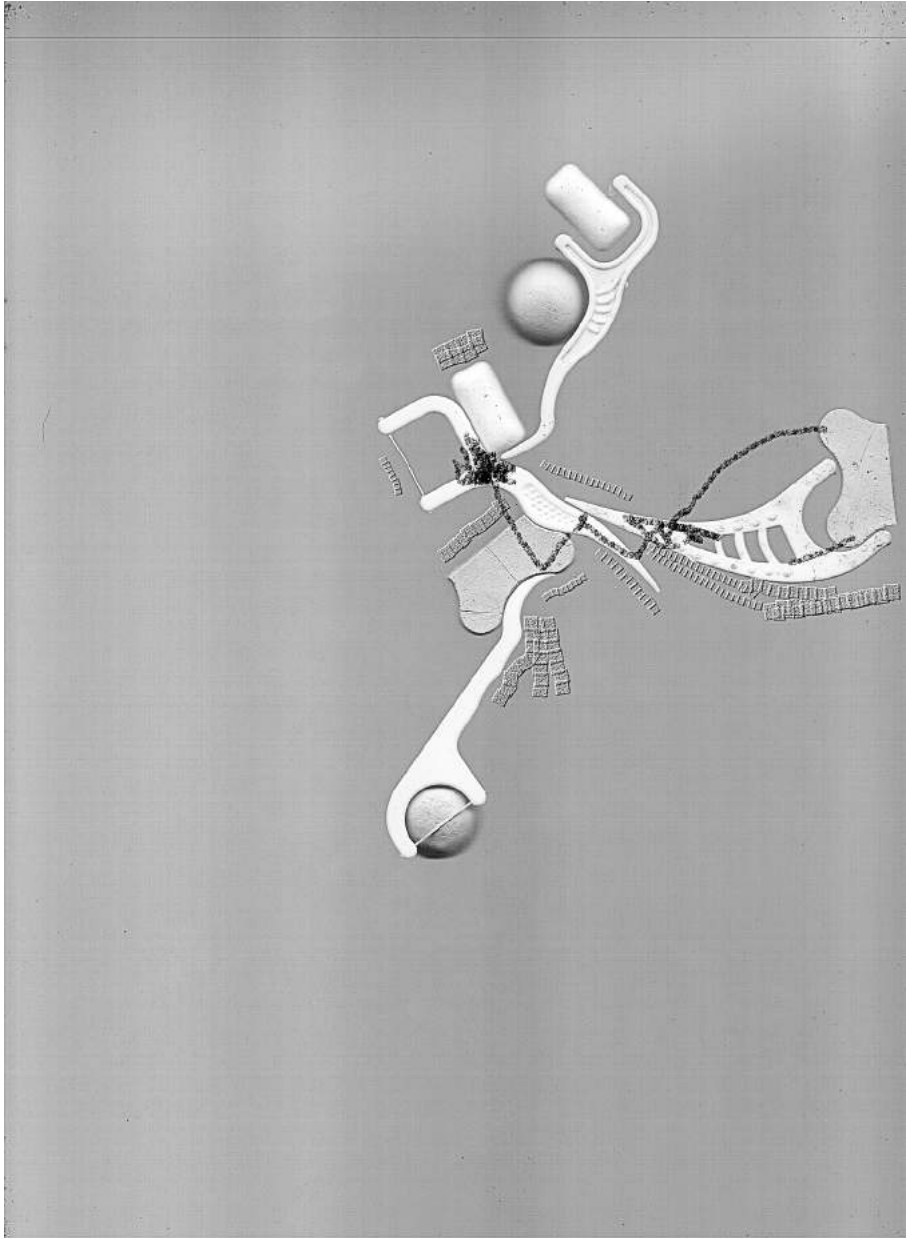


Portrait of Leon, Swerving by Simon Manfield (2017)

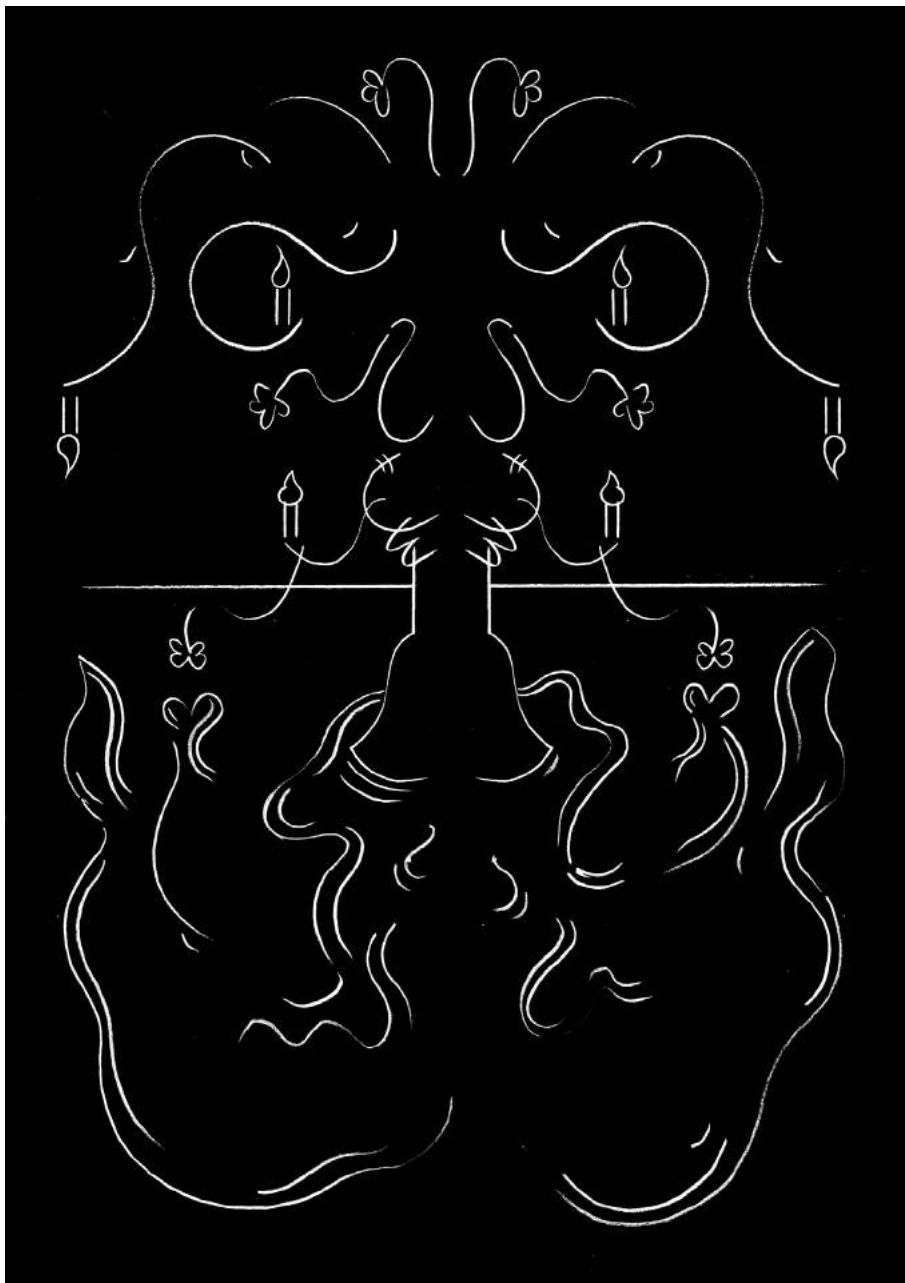
UNANSWERED LETTERS TO LEON FESTINGER



Proposals for A School for Design Fiction Campus  
by Peter Nencini (2016)



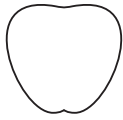
Proposals for A School for Design Fiction Campus  
by Peter Nencini (2016)



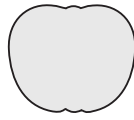
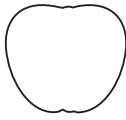
Design for Leon's desk lamp by Rosie Eveleigh (2017)



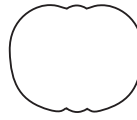
JAMES LANGDON



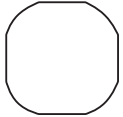
heart



a rethink pump



pumpkin



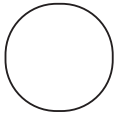
octagon



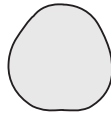
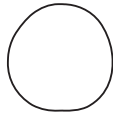
rocketing hogan



gherkin



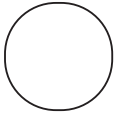
sphere



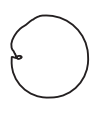
sheer paper



pear



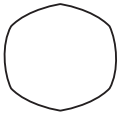
sphere



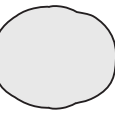
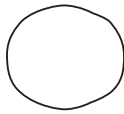
twisted sheer paper



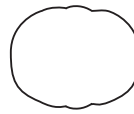
pear



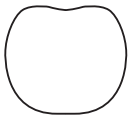
hexagon



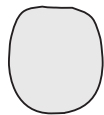
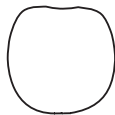
human ekingpox



pumpkin



cuboid



neighbour dick



gherkin

Examples of Speculative Pomology by Christian Janisch (2016)

# UNANSWERED LETTERS TO LEON FESTINGER



dotted flames



lined flames



brindled flames



crackled



striped flames



dots



annular flames



dots and flames



crackled



lined flames



brindled flames



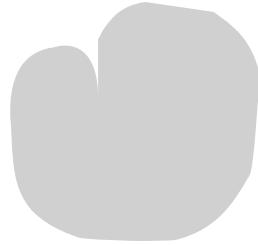
dotted flames

Examples of Speculative Pomology by Christian Janisch (2016)

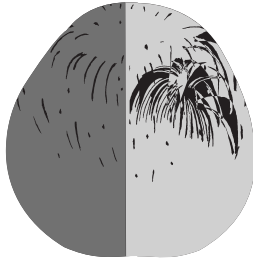




White rapid coupe with lemon annular flames and stripes



A homogenous chamois rocketing hogan



Chamois red sheer paper with lemon white flames



Red white exchange quoin with green dot-lined flames



A lemon rethink pump with red-brown stripes and dots



Lemon earth quince with extended striped flames

Examples of Speculative Pomology by Christian Janisch (2016)

# TAKING INVENTORY

*Sean Yendryś*

The following is an incomplete inventory of sorts, a somewhat first attempt, which looks to reflect, explain, and consider a series of keywords which have contributed to, and helped define the trajectory of the previous three years of A School, A Park, a graphic design summer program in Montreal, Canada. The list is presented in alphabetical order, because it was written by a graphic designer.

## A SCHOOL, A PARK

The name came from a lot of indecision towards what it should represent, and the general struggle of needing to name anything. The idea of naming it a '[...] Summer School' never felt appropriate, and seemed too definitive. The program is meant to be open enough that it can change it's intentions, needs, and format at anytime (or never at all), so a name that reflects it's own uncertainty, tension, and contradiction felt right.

## AMBITION

Having the opportunity to invite studios, designers, researchers, artists and writers from places as far reaching as Belgium, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Sweden and Switzerland, to come together in Montreal has been exciting, unexpected and rewarding. That said, the financial requirements of these invitations, in travel costs alone, has created a hinderance to the programs accessibility, and has been a struggle to weigh at what point the ambition of the program works against itself and the benefit of the participants.

## BUDGET

\*all numbers in Canadian Dollars

2016	*admittedly lost, but total budget estimated at \$8,000
	Operated at a loss of approximately \$2,500

## TAKING INVENTORY

2017:           Transportation: \$7,700\*  
                  Accommodations: \$1,300  
                  Tutor Fees: \$3,700  
                  Workshop Materials: \$3,500  
                  Miscellaneous Materials: \$500  
                  Venue: \$1,000  
                  Tote bags: \$600  
                  Photographer: \$400  
                  Money for Unexpected Costs: \$1,500  
                  \*includes a \$3,500CAD travel grant from  
                  Swiss Arts Council ProHelvetia

Total estimated budget: \$20,200  
Operated at a loss of approximately \$800

2018:           Transportation: \$5,000\*  
                  Accommodations: \$2,000  
                  Tutor Fees: \$4,500  
                  Workshop Materials: \$3,000  
                  Miscellaneous Materials: \$1,000  
                  Venue: \$1,000  
                  Tote bags: \$550  
                  Photographer: \$800  
                  Financial Aid: \$2,500  
                  Money for Unexpected Costs: \$1,500  
                  \*includes a \$1,500CAD travel grant from  
                  Swiss Arts Council ProHelvetia

Total estimated budget: \$21,850  
Unconfirmed yet if operating at a loss

## COMMUNITY

It's surrounding cafes, restaurants or bars which give you space to refuel, clear your head, and stretch your legs. It's familiar faces in the area who lend supplies when in need, and come

## SEAN YENDRYS

to events you organize. It's the afterlife of the program, where participants stay in touch, collaborate and support each other well into the future.

## ELI KERR

His initiation to offer use of the garage is what bent the program into existence, and from that point on has been an integral part in making the program function, be prepared for it's start, and to continue running smoothly each day. The majority of the real life mechanics required to keeping costs low and the program moving forward effectively, from building things yourself, sourcing furniture, materials, equipment, running errands across town, helping participants with tools, and general management of the space, all are possible because of Eli.

## EXHIBITION

After each workshop the garage is organized into a one-night public exhibition. It's used as an opportunity to organize all research, material, iterations, trials, failures and solutions into a format that can be experienced together by all the fellow participants to celebrate each others efforts, but also an opportunity for the public to visit, experience, engage, discuss and learn from the given results. In the past this been organized as a more spontaneous afterthought, but in the most recent year the presentation of a public exhibition in the space has been the only requested requirement for each of the workshops, as a final form to work towards and consider.

## EXISTING

The most difficult moment of the program was to exist at all, taking an idea of starting a program and then making it tangible. It started with finding a space, finding a set of tutors, and setting a budget. The first year was chaotic, disorganized,

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heavily underfunded and unprepared, but it also needed to exist in order for the second and third year to happen. Everyone works differently, but the most important step the program took was to put itself out into the world and see what would happen, and learn from its own mistakes.

## FORMAT

The current format divides a group of 36–40 participants into two separate but simultaneous workshops of 3-days, followed by re-dividing them for another two separate but simultaneous 5-day workshops. The intention is to give participants space and time to adequately research and develop a project in collaboration with the invited tutors running their workshop. In the past we've had smaller workshops integrated within the larger workshop programs, however at the time these were not planned adequately enough to act as a supplement, but instead became a disruption (which could at times be seen as a positive). In the future we hope to create more opportunities which overlap the simultaneous running workshops together, instead of creating a strict division.

## LECTURES

The decision to make all lectures free and open to the public, without a limit on attendance, came as a result of needing to charge for the daily workshops. We're uncomfortable with (but also understand) the economic reality of needing to charge for participation within the format we've created, so the lectures are meant as a gesture towards including the community and those without the means to pay for participation to still be included in our programming. Additionally, we find it important for all the tutors to give lectures as a means of creating a better sense of familiarity to their work or research to the participants, which in turn helps to inform their workshop and trust.

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## MEDIUM

Outcomes to workshops have resulted in participants building their own printers, starting a fashion line, running a troll farm, being a spam factory, starting a band, making a spatial and performative magazine, hosting a radio play, organizing a walking tour, starting a night club, queering typography, softening software, performing texts, visiting archives, opening a co-working space, starting a cult, and cooking banned words for 40 people. Along the way posters, books, videos, and performances have been made too.

## MONEY

The program as it currently stands does not qualify for funding through the Canada Council for the Arts, because graphic design is not recognized here as falling under an artistic practice. Though we've been approached in the past, the program also declines sponsorships, wanting to both avoid their influence in shaping the curriculum, and the potential use of the program as a form of advertising. Having the participants be responsible for the full funding of the program has so far made the most sense, though we also realize the limitations this puts on who can and cannot participate. 2018 is the first year we've attempted to introduce financial aid, having offered it to 11 participants, all at varying amounts between \$100–400 (of the \$575 fee). We don't feel this is an area we have yet resolved properly, but believe there are structural decisions necessary to work towards it (see 'Ambition' and 'Scale').

## MONTREAL, CANADA

Being originally from Montreal, it only ever made sense to organize the program there. It's both a chance to remain connected to a city I no longer live in, and to provide an alternative to the educational models I experienced as a student there. Being a

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small city (at least in the context of also being considered a major Canadian city), the same voices tend to influence most conversations, so the program is an attempt at providing what can be seen as either a supplement or an alternative to what's already quite well established there.

## MULTI-TASKING

An unanticipated outcome of organizing the program has meant needing to take on roles and responsibilities which in any other given circumstance one might feel unqualified doing, but that now has become necessary. This includes developing a curriculum, organizing schedules, keeping a budget, managing a space, asking questions at lectures, being an a/v tech, a host, a moderator, a counsellor, being approachable, social, and readily open.

## NON-DESIGNERS

Inviting tutors and participants whose backgrounds stray from graphic design has been necessary in expanding conversations on the topic. There's a line of questioning which gets excluded if everyone comes with the same history, assumptions and interests. The program continually adjusts its language and programming with the intention of increasing applications from those who may not be designers, but instead have a curiosity or critical perspective about it, regardless of background.

## PARTICIPANT

A word which at times still doesn't feel like the appropriate one, but is intended to blur a sense of hierarchy between those invited to develop workshops and those intended to work through them. Those selected to participate are just as important to the overall development of the week as those teaching, and it's necessary we treat them with the same level of respect and ability to engage and challenge the program, the tutors and each other critically.



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## PARTICIPATION FEES

2016: \$225 CAD, 2017: \$550 CAD, 2018: \$575 CAD

## PHYSICALITY

Regardless of medium, topic or project, we emphasize a physical connection to the act of making. Projects should be printed, put-up, torn down, reapplied, covered, built, destroyed. Ink should spill, projectors sit on the floor, on toolboxes, and move around the space. Participants should go for walks, make a garden, perform, hold hands, sit in a park, work together, work apart, work together again. Iterate ideas by making them real, rejecting them, revisiting them, refining them, reprinting them, rebuilding them.

## PRACTICE

The program asks participants to consider and question their own personal practice, through the process of working within that of the tutors. The tutors are asked to develop a week-long workshop which responds to a curiosity, research topic or method of working within their own practice, that participants can engage closely with. The aim in having multiple workshops at once, and consecutively, which results in the form of an exhibition, is in hopes of granting participants a wide range of experiences in what a practice can be. In some cases participants may embrace elements of what they've seen, and in other cases may reject things, but regardless the hope is the experiences they've had are new and can help inform how they view their own work.

## SCALE

Previously, while living in Brooklyn, I organized lectures in my apartment as a means of hearing from people who happened

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to be passing through the city. These would be free, immediate (i.e. announced within 1–3 days of happening) and casual. Not including my roommates, anywhere from 6 to 40 people have attended. The stakes felt low and manageable, and if no one came we could just drink beer together. Not living in the same city the program is organized in has created a different sense of scale to the project, one which has made it more of an annual event that requires a greater sense of logistics and commitment to functioning. It's likely there's an in-between, one we haven't yet managed, but as the project has grown each year, an attempt to re-scale into something that can be more spontaneous and intimate, feels exciting.

## SELF-ORGANIZING

Being the only organizer of the program started out of circumstance rather than a conscious choice, and has continued this way due to a general lack of organization in taking the time for building a proper definable team. Though being the only organizer has forced a hyperawareness in decision making, self-critique, and attempting to ensure a variety of voices which challenge my own are invited to teach and participate, it has similarly become clear that in order for the program to evolve and truly develop into an alternative space it requires a diverse set of voices at an organizational level.

## SELECTION

After selecting primarily based on submitted portfolios in our first year, it showed us that having a good portfolio of work didn't necessarily translate in being a better contributor to the program. Selecting a diverse group of people with far reaching and diverging backgrounds and experiences, with a sense of curiosity and openness to engage with others, challenge the brief and themselves became significantly more beneficial. In subsequent years the letter of motivation has become

the primary factor in selecting participants, and has led to a stronger program and more unexpected results from everyone.

## SPACE

The auto garage has become just as integral to the identity of the program as any other quality. On the first day of each year the garage comes to us completely empty, both showcasing the lack of tangible resources of the space, but also hinting towards the possibility of doing and making anything in a physical space that does not feel overly precious. Participants and tutors are encouraged to work both in direct contrast to and be influenced by the potential which the conditions of the space offer. The space changes each day, retaining marks of its use, housing found materials and rejected scraps, holes are made, and things get hung, pasted and nailed to the walls.

## SUPPLIES

Restocking the single-stall bathroom with toilet paper & soap, replacing garbage bags, refilling the coffee and providing enough drinkable water for 40 participants each day is just as integral to the functioning of the program as buying reams of paper, replacing toner cartridges and providing supplies for projects.

## TEAM

It's impossible for a project of this scale to function or exist without the support and contributions of many who donate their time, energy and feedback along the way, this includes help building tables, transporting chairs, offering couches, coding the website, translating texts, printing bags, providing advice, and far more. Those who have contributed to such include Colin Rothfels, Daphné Boxer, Max Harvey, Julia Novitch, Tim Ripper, Sarah Discours, Marco Land, Nicole Killian, Claire Tousignant, João Doria, Duc Tran, Bardhi Haliti, Vigan Hoxha, Serge

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Rompza, Johannes Breyer, Robert Janes, Edwin Isford, Elise Windsor, 820Plaza, and Vie D'ange.

## TRUST

Trust participants to be motivated, curious and engaging. Trust that they have joined for a reason, whether well defined or not. Trust the tutors to develop prompts, structures and formats which are surprising, personal, empathetic and challenging in ways which benefit the participants, themselves, and the program as a whole. Trust that when the tutors and participants come together, the program will develop organically in ways you could never anticipate, and that this is a good thing.

## TUTORS

- 2016: Charmant & Courtois (Matthieu Dionne, Alexis Coutu-Marion, Florian Pétigny), Serge Rompza, Louise Paradis, Sean Yendrys (with additional lectures from Biba Košmerl, Nejc Prah, Albert Ferré & Andrew Goodhouse, Michèle Champagne, and Alessandro Colizzi)
- 2017: Atlas Studio Zurich (Martin Andereggen, Claudio Gasser, Jonas Wandeler), Hardworking Goodlooking (Clara Balaguer, Kristian Henson), Charmant & Courtois, Erin Knutson & Chris Dorland, Sean Kuhnke & Emmy Thelander
- 2018: Display Distribute (Ming Lin & Elaine W. Ho), Laurenz Brunner & Geoff Han, Girls Like Us (Jessica Gysel, Katja Mater, Sara Kaaman), François Girard-Meunier & Ingrid Rousseau

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## UNCERTAINTY

The program is constantly in a state of questioning itself, it's intentions, it's format, it's impact, it's accessibility. We have not reached a tangible final answer to what a program should or could be, but instead use the program as a format for experimenting and questioning, learning from both tutors and participants alike, with a goal that no two years, and no two workshops are the same, because no two participants or tutors are the same either. There is no way of knowing the success or impact of any moment in the program until it happens, and even then can't be adequately gauged without dialogue.

## VULNERABILITY

Organized initially with the intention of being an alternative space for Graphic Design (capital GD), through the influence of the participants it became clear that for many this was an alternative space in general, one that just happened to host a shared topic. Participants who join place themselves in vulnerable positions, hoping they can be open for the first time to engage in a meaningful way with how their interests, background, identity and experiences shape the way they work. Ways which they may never have felt comfortable or supported enough to do in the more institutional spaces where they work or study. This initially unexpected realization has contributed significantly to how we consider our programming, and more importantly the responsibility that we have to the participants.

## WE / I

The switching use of 'we' vs 'I' throughout this text and in general discussions of the program comes from an attempt at both acknowledging the necessary group effort in organizing a project of this scale, paired with my own personal anxieties, doubts and biases which may contribute and influence the larger whole.

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Exterior view of the garage, cleaning screens of pre-made shapes for Emmy Thelander & Sean Kuhnke's one-day screen-testing workshop. Photo: Edwin Isford, 2017.



Group discussion outside during 5-day workshop with Laurenz Brunner & Geoff Han exploring the topic of erasure as an active agent in artistic production through the individual participants own areas of interest and methods of working. Photo: Elise Windsor, 2018.



Participants and visitors grouping outside of the garage before the start of a lecture. Photo: Elise Windsor, 2018.



In-session troll farm for the 5-day "Troll Palayan" workshop by Hardworking Goodlooking, which looked at memes, group efforts and working conditions as contributing models towards activism and influence. Photo: Edwin Isford, 2017.



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5-day workshop with Girls Like Us Magazine, which included collaborative exercises such as meditation, queering typography, and softening software; a walking tour with Lucas LaRochelle of Queering the Map, and a research visit to the Quebec Gay Archives, all culminating into “Soft” a spatial and performative magazine.



Group discussion during 5-day “Spam Factory” workshop with Atlas Studio Zurich, asking participants to design, hand-stencil and silkscreen one poster per day, which responded to a variety of topics relating to spam, including health, money and sex. Photo: Edwin Isford, 2017.





Maxime and Marie-France setting up a handmade paper stencil to be screenprinted, during their workshop with Atlas Studio Zurich. Photo: Edwin Isford, 2017.



Performance by Brian Broker and Bo-Won Keum, for a 3-day workshop with Chris Dorland and Erin Knutson, asking participants to interpret the prompt of building their own printer. Photo: Edwin Isford, 2017.

# THE SOUTHLAND INSTITUTE

*Joe Potts*

The Southland Institute (for critical, durational, and typographic post-studio practices) was originally conceived as an unaccredited interdisciplinary post-graduate typography program, an attempt at offering a forum for sustained and rigorous inquiry built on an underlying economic premise of being genuinely affordable for students, and compensating faculty fairly and sustainably for their contributions. All of these things remain at the heart of the Southland Institute, and the project has also evolved to be a more diffuse apparatus for conversation around ideas and conditions of higher education in art and design in the late 2010s. This conversation between Southland Institute founder *Joe Potts* and the editor of this book, *Jacob Lindgren*, should be considered in this context, and is an expansion of prior Southland Institute conversations that have appeared on CalArts' *inform.design* and the Walker Art Center Gradient blogs.

*Jacob:* Expanding on the relevance of Paul Elliman's essay in *In Alphabetical Order*, specifically its mention of using available resources and networks (the internet essentially) to inform the creation of a school/creating discussion, could you expand on how The Southland Institute takes advantage of such things? This seems particularly relevant (and not coincidentally of course) to Southland's presence on the web/*Are.na* as a repository for these things. (In which case is the "chat rooms" metaphor — as mentioned by Paul Elliman — forum, discussions, etc. only something that can occur during the physical meeting of participants)?

*Joe:* That essay, "Other Schools" is a nice place to start, I think. A lot of its questions and ideas are very much embedded in the Southland DNA. It's only about 3 pages long, but lays out a number of proposals, questions, and open-ended ideas about what a school is, what a school could be, the role of architecture or its absence in structuring a learning environment, and the potentials, as well as

potential pitfalls, of the internet as a supplement to, as well as a check on, “the over-rational principles of education.”

The “Outer Schools” section of the Southland Institute website is a small attempt at gathering some of these explorations in alternative educational models made by others worldwide.

It’s interesting re-reading that essay two decades on, when enough time has passed for many of these suggestions to have been attempted in various ways by various folks, and for the internet to (d)evolve to where it is now. It’s amazing how pre-scient and forward-thinking it was and is, in both its optimism and its wariness (“A systemic energy that can seem only a click away from Dantean inferno...”), the development of a bot infested social media listening to conversations in order to sell you things that you can “pay with your face” for; trolling; the horrorshow of twitter... the internet-as-inferno is certainly alive and well in 2018.

All of this is to say, hopefully in a way that answers your question, that while I wouldn’t go so far as to say that discussions can only occur during physical meeting of participants, I think the way that the internet aspect of the Southland Institute is intended to work is as a supplement that facilitates discussion outside of itself. There’s not a mechanism for people to connect within the site itself. Are.na starts to function in more of a connective way, where you can share, group, connect, etc. but it’s interesting that for all of that connectivity if you want to actually start a conversation with someone that you meet / connect with there, you ultimately need to reach out to that person or persons in a way that is external to the Arena platform (unless there’s a functionality I haven’t yet been exposed to).

There’s something interesting as well about this notion of the website, and what it enables. At this particular moment, while the Southland Institute is looking for the right space, and for

the resources to make that happen, the website ends up being, in a sense, the architecture of the place—the thing that feels the least contingent on external conditions.

I think in the years to come it will be continue to be important for us to contemplate how these tools (i.e. the internet, social media, etc.) can be used constructively and more in the service of the connection that they promise but often fail to deliver. And so I think there's an element of that in the Southland Institute, particularly its web component, which is: how can we provide tools and start conversation, but maybe it's about getting the ball rolling there, and then letting that conversation, or at least a significant portion of it, play out outside of the digital space.

*Jacob:* To quote the Southland prospectus: It is also intended to be a forum for inquiry into the processes, potentials, and complications of education and its attendant structures and systems. Are these attendant structures and systems inherently present in Southland Institute (which ones)? If so, or also if not, what sort of steps have been taken to avoid or embrace their inclusion?

*Joe:* In practice, many of these 'attendant structures and systems' that we're interested in inquiring after, come with a larger budget and resources than we currently have at our disposal, but to name a few: we are particularly concerned with the economic arrangements of institutions of higher education, particularly in the private sphere. We're talking about simple math here, really. Let's take some actual numbers from a school that I won't specifically name. Tuition there per term is \$20,704 for 19 credits. That comes out to \$1089/credit, or \$3269 per student for a 3 credit class (which is a 5 hour studio). If you figure 15 students per class, that's around \$49,035 per class that the school is bringing in. Many classes there are taught by adjunct instructors for around \$4500/class. At that rate if an instructor taught 6 courses a year there, they'd be making \$27,000. If they overloaded to 8, that number would go up to \$36,000.

Certainly the school has overhead, facilities, and administrative costs to contend with, but at the end of the day, to be offering the person teaching the course less than 10% of the revenue it brings in seems worth examining. While these numbers certainly makes sense from a corporate, managerial, “value engineering” perspective, there are some deep problems with the equation, particularly in a city where it’s not at all unusual for a one bedroom apartment to cost \$2000/month. . This is a specific instance, but it illustrates a ubiquitous phenomenon. And it’s justified by all of them by pointing to “peer institutions,” all of whom employ similar practices.

In addition to these practices surrounding adjunct faculty, another structure and system that we’re interested in inquiring about are full-time practices, the movement towards non-tenure track full-time faculty hires, and the linguistic, euphemistic explorations of what to call these positions: “NTT” (non-tenure track), “RCPT” (research, clinical, practice, teaching), “assistant professor of the practice,” “assistant professor of teaching,” etc. and creating these new titles and positions that forego job security, sabbaticals, any sort of long term commitment on the part of the institution, and stack teaching loads to the point where maintaining a practice, nevermind a life, outside the institution is effectively impossible.

I had an interview recently for one of these positions where the hiring panel asked something to the extent of: “During the year you will be regularly expected to work upwards of 60 hours a week. It’s very important to us that you maintain an active practice in addition to your teaching and committee work. Can you describe how you plan to do this?”

There’s an administrative strategy that I’ve now heard several times, which aims to sidestep this entire conversation by redirecting away from the structure of hiring practices and towards the curriculum itself, and the notion that it should be all about the students and their education, and that pursuing this line of

inquiry implies a self-interested faculty who, in the very asking of these important questions, are selfishly diverting their attention from the students.

But even if we allow the structural question of faculty salaries and arrangements to be sidelined, and focus financial / structural attention on the students themselves, there's also a problematic reality playing out. Many of the students may be surprised to learn that to pay off \$100,000 of debt in 10 years, they'll be looking at \$1300+ / month of payments. The situation appears to be getting even more unforgiving under the thumb of the current administration. My own loan "entrance counseling" as a student consisted of a 15 minute talk by a financial-aid employee making sure we knew that these were loans that needed to be repaid, and then "exit counseling" the day before graduation consisted of a similar reiteration of this fact, combined with the footnote that income-based plans were available. What they did not cover at any time were the actual long-term costs of a person availing themselves of the ever-tenuous income-based options, and the effective permanence of a massive debt that has thus far proved to be impossible to make headway at paying down. If administrations are genuinely concerned about long-term student success, I would propose that all students, as part of their financial aid packages and entrance counseling, receive a realistic breakdown of their monthly loan servicing costs after they graduate at the levels of debt that they are taking on.

So from the perspective of both faculty and students, we're genuinely curious about who is benefitting from the current arrangement. Hence one of the questions at the core of the Southland Institute's workshop: "What would it look like to create a program that enabled and encouraged rigorous and sustained study and practice without incurring long-term debt, and in which faculty were paid fairly and sustainably for their contributions?" So these are some of the major 'attendant structures and

systems' that we'd certainly like to inquire about. There's not the kind of money flowing into Southland at the moment to be able to enact the kinds of alternatives to this that we're envisioning, but embedded in the founding principles of the Southland Institute is the notion that these things can and should be discussed. They should be discussed amongst all involved in the exchange, and that there's an opportunity for that conversation to be an integrated part of examining how a school / organization / institution is built. Articulating this goal, making it visible, and asking the question straight out of the gate "could there be another way" feels, hopefully, like a giant step towards creating some kind of viable alternative out of this inquiry.

*Jacob:* With regards to attendant structures again, as someone with feet in both worlds, is there anything inherently at odds with the approaches taken by self-organized schools in comparison to larger institutions, or is there space for the latter to learn from the former?

*Joe:* I don't think there's something inherently at odds with it. From the beginning, the Southland Institute has been interested in extracting concepts, pedagogical approaches, conversations, and rigor from larger institutions that we admire, and attempting to: A. collage them into a program that draws from (to quote our literature) "the tools, processes, histories, and discourses of typography and critical art-making" and B. to do so in a way that sidesteps the institutional slide into corporatization that shows no signs whatsoever of ameliorating itself.

So along these lines, we definitely have much to learn (and have learned much) from them. Whether or not they have space to learn from us remains to be seen. I have a hard time envisioning the implementation of the kinds of things I'd like to see them learning from us. It may be a skeptical point of view, but I often feel they're too far gone down the path they've been on for the last 30 years. The goal has always



been equal parts curricular and structural. In my experience, the larger institutions are very interested in talking about and experimenting with the curricular aspect, and not so much with the structural aspect. To my mind what's genuinely radical about the Southland Institute is that it looks to invigorate the former by completely reconfiguring the latter.

Another goal of the web component of the Southland Institute is to be a supplemental resource for current, future, and potential students at existing institutions, and also to empower students to inquire about, because at the end of the day, it's students and potential students who actually have the leverage to shift things.

*Jacob:* Is there a risk of (newer, smaller, unaccredited) institutions adopting these techniques in an ingenuie or naive way?

*Joe:* I'd say it's more a guarantee than a risk that certain institutions will attempt to perform some version of 'the institution' without having the core competencies /vision comprehension to do it properly. The thing is, this is already happening at existing institutions, even accredited ones. It will undoubtedly happen at the fledgling institutions as well, sometimes even with ones whose hearts are in the right place. How to monitor this is another question altogether, that raises the prospect of how to legitimize the ones that are doing things well, which brings us back to the notion of an accreditation of sorts. And as the accreditation process is something that we're interested in examining closely, this is something we're definitely curious about.

*Jacob:* How is Southland's graphic design curriculum (especially, but also institutional structure/organization) embodying of the "Conditions / Need" listed on its website?

*Joe:* The conditions / need portion of the website reads as follows:

The aim of the institute is to activate and explore the points of contact between disciplines and media, and to create a space for extended development, exposure, and conversation, without the heavy debt burden that often accompanies such study. The institute arises in response to several gaps that we perceive in the current landscape of higher education:

- \* a gap in dialog between departments and discourses at existing institutions of all sizes.
- \* a lack of programs that actively integrate strategies and pedagogy from both graphic design and post-conceptual art.
- \* a need for more programs that enable and encourage rigorous and sustained study and practice without incurring long term debt.
- \* a lack of institutions in which faculty are paid fairly and sustainably for their contributions.

The first two of those points are curricular, and the latter two are structural. In response to “the gap in dialog between departments and discourses at existing institutions of all sizes,” we’re trying to close that gap through exposure. The reading list on the prospectus is a good example of this. Obviously we can’t do everything, so we’ve limited the scope, but the idea of a typographic curriculum that embraces literature, architecture, urbanism, landscape studies, experimental film, photography, and strains of late 20th / early 21st century art history and theory suggests a number of compelling ways that these things might cross-pollinate, with the connective tissue between them being typography, documentation, and publishing.

There’s a Robert Bringhurst quote that I put at the top of my Typography 1 syllabi, where he says: “Typography is the craft of endowing human language with a durable visual form, and thus

with an independent existence ... As a craft, typography shares a long common boundary and many common concerns with writing and editing on the one side, and with graphic design on the other; yet typography itself belongs to neither.” I like this thinking about typography very much, and the idea of a long common boundary that it shares, and part of what the Southland Institute is attempting to propose is that this common boundary isn’t just between graphic design and writing / editing, but that typography, in fact, shares a long, meandering, common boundary with nearly anything that the printed word is employed to communicate.

Addressing “The lack of programs that actively integrate strategies and pedagogy from both graphic design and post-conceptual art”: I attended CalArts, a school with a long history of rigor and innovation in many of its departments, and a core mission that “the arts” contained within it would cross-pollinate each other. But in practice, while this cross-pollination was definitely possible for someone motivated, aware, and willing to seek it out, and to a degree would happen socially, it was not at all built into the various curricula, and as someone who made an effort to take courses in different areas and move between programs, the lack of awareness and level of disinterest and often dismissal regarding things that occurred outside a given metier was surprising.

So in making it a priority to bring people on from various sides of the ‘common boundary,’ whose practices are expansive, inclusive, and outward looking, we’re hoping to create a more active integration between disciplines.

*Jacob:* How would you characterize the difference between being taught and learning?

*Joe:* Being taught is passive, while learning is an active pursuit. As a teacher, and also as a student, the most disappointing

people in an educational situation, be it a class, a workshop, a lecture, etc., are nearly always the ones who are looking to “be taught something.” I think it’s fair to say that it isn’t the Southland Institute’s interest or goal to teach anyone anything. It’s to provide a space and a structure for learning, exposure, and growth to happen. It’s a place to ask questions that none of us might know the answers to. This is why there isn’t really much in the way of a set curriculum, and it’s left up to the faculty / tutors / residents / participants at any given time to bring things to the table and shape the course of any given year.

*Jacob:* In your conversation with Jon Sueda on the Walker Art Center’s Gradient blog, you said, “The Southland Institute also asks what would happen if a study of the connection between a school’s curriculum and its institutional structure were themselves part of the educational experience.” How does this sort of meta approach function without becoming too self-reflexive or rehabilitating?

*Joe:* That question is a great one, and at this stage I don’t have a concrete answer for it. Maybe the best inoculation against the kind of navel-gazing that might be at risk of happening in a meta-institutional situation would be an awareness of that risk. I also think that a clear articulation at the outset of the goal of outward engagement and involvement with a wide variety of aspects of the world can hopefully serve as a counter-balance to becoming overly inward-looking. I’d like to think that having the self-reflexivity be just one part of a larger conversation could actually open things up.

*Jacob:* You also said, “What happens if part of an education that concerns itself with form, and the underlying structures of things, is about understanding and making visible the form(s) of the education and the educational institution itself.” What an incredible thought! I can relate to having a similar goal for this book, especially in the sense of wanting most for it to begin

asking certain questions and its finding answers being secondary. This is a question I've asked in relation to that thought concerning the book, and would ask you as well: what significance or opportunity does graphic design have as the medium through which this is investigated, as opposed to a self-organized school of art, film, or dentistry that aimed to do the same?

*Joe:* One of the amazing things about graphic design, and a big reason that it makes sense as a medium for this educational experiment to happen is how wide-ranging it is, how inclusive, and how simultaneously central and marginal it is. And typography, in particular, as a discipline, has the sort of incredible paradoxical quality of being both extremely ubiquitous while also being quite obscure. I'd argue that you could easily count on one hand the number of rigorous, typographically focused programs in the U.S., and many of these are at elite private schools. I think that lack of saturation creates an interesting context and opening for something like the Southland Institute. Graphic design and typography, and aspects of those pedagogies form the underpinnings of the idea of the project, and there are a number of reasons for this. I think these tools and approaches are a terrific point of departure and return for a wide ranging set of practices that include, but are not limited to, the concerns that I mentioned earlier that are contained in the prospectus reading list. That idea of Bringhurst's that I mentioned before of the long common boundary that typography (and by extension graphic design) shares with all of the things that it shapes, frames, documents, and presents. Combining that with some of the discursive tools of post-conceptual / contemporary art creates a potential space for the development of interdisciplinary practices that push against the limits of the structures, containers, and institutions that we know.

*Jacob:* How important is it that Southland Institute is identified as a school? Is it?

Joe: In at least one conversation last year, someone who in other ways was generally supportive and enthusiastic about the Southland Institute was adamant that calling it an ‘institute’ was wrong, that it was overreaching, presumptuous, out of line with the scope and scale of what it was or could be. “Center, workshop, society, school, forum, archive, library, union, association...” these could all be potential linguistic containers for the Southland project. But I believed then, as I do now, that the definition of ‘institute’ is fitting:

- \* per Cambridge: an organization whose purpose is to advance the study of a particular subject.
- \* per Oxford: An organization having a particular purpose, especially one that is involved with science, education, or a specific profession
- \* per Merriam-Webster: an organization for the promotion of a cause : an educational institution and especially one devoted to technical fields

: a usually brief intensive course of instruction on selected topics relating to a particular field

All of these seem apt. It’s also quite nice as a verb: “ to introduce or establish (a scheme, undertaking, or policy)” Suggesting at once establishment, but also beginnings.

The project by its nature, is intended to be in flux.

So to get back to your question, I’d say that the Southland Institute, at its top level, is an umbrella for an expanding number of undertakings, and is not exclusively a school. However, it’s also quite important that the part of the Southland Institute that IS a school, the workshop component, is identified as such because of where we are positioning ourselves. We are

expressly and explicitly offering an alternative to structures and systems that are problematic, and trying to do so in a real way. In that sense, I think it is important that we position and identify ourselves in this way. We believe in schools, and schooling, and education, and even, optimistically, in the potentials of institutions, at their best, to offer structure, stability, networks, etc. If the Southland Institute is to propose a viable structural alternative to existing ‘schools,’ For now at least, it needs to be a school itself. The proposal of a viable alternative is at the core of what the Southland Institute is about.

*Jacob:* What are your thoughts about the connection between “gap in dialog between departments and discourses” and increasing classification of peripheral/non-traditional graphic design as \*not\* graphic design.

*Joe:* A general disinterest in the precise boundaries around what is and is not graphic design is probably reflected in the language of the parenthetical “(for critical, durational, and typographic post-studio practices).” Hopefully this language includes certain kinds of graphic design practices, but hopes to infuse them with something more. If people want or need to classify it as \*not\* graphic design, that’s totally fine. And if it’s important to people in the program to argue or make a case for inclusion in a tradition they’d like to be a part of, they’ll have the tools to do that. But for the most part the marginal, ambiguous, complex, multivalent practices that are difficult to name or classify are precisely the ones we are the most interested in.

*Jacob:* Parallel School’s name results from the idea of a school/(anti-)institution/group occurring simultaneous to other institutional learning structures, but auto-criticizes this definition as actually being something more like a Diagonal School, as many of the people involved have been conditioned by large institutions and still have connections to them, if not because they learn and teach there. Is Southland Institute parallel or

diagonal to the educational structures it (intentionally or not, at differing levels) stands as an alternative to?

*Joe:* This question has me thinking about something that's been bouncing around my head for a while now. Certainly the trajectory of Southland is deeply connected to these larger institutions that we've been conditioned by. I like the self re-assessment of the directional metaphor that you mention that the Parallel School has articulated, the moving from parallel to diagonal as a more apt description of the relationship speaks to a number of things that feel important within these spaces that we're trying to carve out for ourselves.

An idea that I like a lot, which contains some of these notions of geometries of moving, intersecting parts,—of the parallel and the diagonal— is that of a sound wave, or rather multiple waves that modulate each other. The idea of something in motion; sometimes approaching, sometimes diverging, sometimes parallel, sometimes crossing directly through this other thing, this other wave, and that as this happens they modulate each other... they fundamentally change the texture and timbre of one another, in ways that makes both of them more complex, deeper.

This is the way that I would describe our relationship to these existing educational structures. We're very much in dialog... we move towards them, through them, with them, away from them, parallel to them. We certainly oppose some of what they're doing, much of which is behind the scenes, and related to finance and the way that both students and teachers are exploited by the institutions. But of course there's also much that we admire about them. We learned a lot of things there.



RECOMMENDED SHORT-FORM READING  
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INSTITUTE/RECOMMENDEDREADING.HTML](http://www.southland.institute/recommendedreading.html))

- \* Gertrude Stein: Composition as Explanation. (1926)
- \* Merle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art: Proposal for an Exhibition, "Care" (1969)
- \* Rosalind Krauss: Sculpture in the Expanded Field (1979)
- \* Benjamin Buchloh: Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art. (1982)
- \* Lorraine Wild: That was then, and this is now: but what is next? (1996)
- \* Paul Elliman: "My Typographies," "Other Schools", "The World as a Printing Surface". (2002)
- \* Andrea Fraser: From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique. (2005)
- \* Irit Rogoff: Turning (2008)
- \* David Reinfurt: "This stands as a sketch for the future. Muriel Cooper and the Visible Language Workshop" also an interview with Matthew Shen Goodman in Art in America, (March 25) (2014)
- \* Harry Dodge: The River of the Mother of God: Notes on Indeterminacy, v.2 (2014)
- \* Till Wittwer: "Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish, Said the Academy and Fed Us to the Lions. Or: Starving With a Lot of Love in Your Stomach." Public Lecture, Parallel School Brno, Saturday, September 20, 2014
- \* Bernhard Cella, Leo Findeisen, Agnes Blaha, eds., "Printed Space as a Legacy of Conceptual Art", in NO-ISBN, on self-publishing (2015)
- \* David Bennewith: Taught, in Reprint Karel Martens, (2015)
- \* Harsh Patel: the western graphic design curriculum musn't continue to resist diversity (2016)
- \* Jeannine Tang: On the Maintenance of Maria Eichhorn - Aktiengesellschaft, (2016)
- \* Izzy Berenson and Sarah Honeth: Clearing the Haze: Prologue to Postmodern Graphic Design Education through Sheila de Bretteville, (2016)

DECOLONISING DESIGN EDUCATION:  
ONTOLOGIES, STRATEGIES, URGENCIES  
*Decolonising Design*

## INTRODUCTION

Today, the role of materiality and design in determining social, political and economic conditions of living beings is undeniable; thus it is increasingly discussed in several areas—from the social sciences and humanities to the arts and the formal sciences. However, such significance of design[ing] has yet to be thoroughly elaborated in contemporary Design Studies. As a field that urgently should—but still does not—sufficiently address the complexity of design histories, the very practice of design[ing] is firmly situated in historical yet urgent issues such as power relations, social inequalities, global capitalism and coloniality. Theorist Susan Stewart (2015, p.276) stresses the lack of interest in historicising design by arguing that “the excision of history from design thinking isolates the understanding that informs the design act from any understanding of the temporal trajectories in which it participates.” This critique is directed to the majority of the world-wide design education programs that are predominantly dehistoricised, biased and oversimplified. From the beginnings of their undergraduate education, design students are taught to think of themselves as problem-solvers, tackling design briefs with short timelines, where a solution lies close at hand, removing their ability to dedicate time for research, understanding and proper engagement with a project in its historical and conditional complexity. Education of this kind every year brings about new generation of designers whose fabricated worldviews are materialised in designed things (i.e. artefacts, spaces, communication technologies, codes) that likely sustain and mostly reinforce structural inequalities.

In this paper, we discuss these issues and our perspective on the challenge of educating designers not to provide a service, but to imagine an *otherwise*; beyond the suite of knowledge acquired through their education under the rubric of the ‘modern/colonial world-system.’ (Mignolo, 2000). We argue that in Westernised universities, much of what students know requires unlearning if ‘we’ are to critique or redirect the imperial epistemology of

modernity ‘we’ were inducted into. Because of the nature of multiple present and future challenges including increased political turmoil, material production of social stratification and eminent environmental crises at hand that threaten human existence and natural habitats, the endeavour of *decolonising design* and its education must embody an imperative to act with the urgency of the lack of time. Simultaneously, we must relearn to design across long spans of time, in order to avoid repeating the short term thinking that lies at the origin of current environmental struggles. In the meantime, we must delve into, understand and unfold every problematic aspect of today’s design practice, research and pedagogy in order to finally counteract them.

### THE PROBLEMS OF DESIGN EDUCATION TODAY

As decolonial theory has been telling us since the mid-twentieth century, the condition of modernity has concealed, destroyed and denounced all other forms of thinking. Design’s modern condition has marginalised design practices elsewhere, denying people located outside the Global North with the ability to speak about design in their own language, rendering them incapable of producing ideas but as mere consumers of them. Design champions itself as the universal problem-solving discipline, and like many fields, its historical canon is composed of white males that represent 12 percent of the world’s population, and whose experiences are valid in understanding and designing for the rest of the world (Grosfoguel, 2013). Moreover, the introduction of design within universities across the Global South has been through an almost uncritical, blind-borrowing of curricula taught at institutions across Europe and North America. This blind-borrowing means that curricula teaches designers in the Global South to think of their design practices as inferior; visible through English as the *lingua franca* of design, through the adoption of a functionalist model of designing in the style of the Ulm and Bauhaus schools, and in the obsession designers have with the international recognition and playing a game of

catch-up with the West. But it is most clearly illustrated in the divisions of history and typography courses. In the Arab world for example, there exists, in public Arab universities, course divisions such as Islamic Art and History of Art, History of Modern and Contemporary Art, Typography (Latin) and Arabic typography. Why then, is there a course in Arabic typography or Islamic Art and History of Art, within a university located in the Arab world? Why is it not simply Typography or History of Art? Why is Latin favoured over Arabic? Is so-called Islamic art not capable of being modern or contemporary? Is Arabic or Islamic so alien that it requires its own special study even amongst the people who are Arabs and Muslims themselves?

These divisions are aided by the sheer number of what the decolonial theorist Ramon Grosfoguel (2013) terms the *Westernised University*. Since the 1990s neoliberal reforms have introduced a number of private universities region-wide, and most, if not all, teach in English, and fall under the Westernised university category. The Westernised University can be found anywhere globally, and it features the same curriculum, the same authors and disciplinary divisions as any university in the West (Grosfoguel, 2013). These institutions promote or diffuse Eurocentric knowledge to produce Westernised elites in the so-called non-West that act as intermediaries between the West and the so-called non-West. Furthermore, within Westernised universities, the canon of thought in all disciplines is composed of works of males from five Western countries (i.e. USA, Italy, Germany, England and France), and these structures have become “commonsensical” (Grosfoguel, 2013, p.87).

Therefore, the Islamic and Arabic descriptor in the courses mentioned earlier demonstrate the power of design’s ‘universal’ language. Universal is Latin: it renders everything else as non-Latin because it is not part of the canon. As typographer Robert Bringhurst (2015, p.90) argues, typography is a practice that “was once a fluently multilingual and [a] multicultural

calling” but the last hundred years has seen an increase in “typographic ethnocentricity and racism [...] and much of that narrow-mindedness is institutionalized in the workings of machines.” For Bringhurst (2015, p.142), “[e]very alphabet is a culture. Every culture has its own version of history and its own accumulation of tradition.” There are alphabets that have histories longer and more intricate than Latin, and “typography and typographers must honor the variety and complexity of human language, thought and identity, instead of homogenizing or hiding it” (Bringhurst, 2015, p.89). Categorising Arabic as non-Latin implies a hierarchy, an outdated method that ignores the multilingual audience (Pater, 2016). While recent advances in technology and desktop publishing have rendered the creation of special characters easier, the non-Latin category remains in place, and machines continue to be embedded with this binary.

A more recent example that ignores realities is the rise of the ‘doing good’ movement in design (social design, design activism, humanitarian design, design for social innovation). While social design, for instance, has brought about an important questioning for designers and an interesting starting point, it has done very little in the way of transforming design education, thinking and practice. Despite these efforts and new found importance attached to design, designers remain uncritical service providers, and as such ‘design’ is confined to design thinking, used merely as a competitive business strategy. Social design instead has reinforced design’s middle-class origins, where designers, who are often from middle-class backgrounds, often raise the issue of responsibility, and have an impulse for making things better—an expression from a position of privilege. And so designers come in to find problems in neighbourhood vastly different from their own and fix them—using hasty methods from human-centred design toolkits—rather than a deeper, more immersive process of observations, research, fieldwork and building trust with the community they find themselves in.

Rather than spark conversations about seriously rethinking design and design education in the Global North, what social design has influenced is designers in the Global South who emulate these practices and implement these ideas. In the Arab region for example, largely middle class design students are looking to ‘serve’ the needs of poor communities composed of people with very different backgrounds from their own, or to design for refugees, where countries like Lebanon and Jordan have over one million refugees living there. Designers aim to provide a ‘voice’ for the disenfranchised, using aid discourse, and maintaining dominance over the production of knowledge by using these communities for their school projects. Designing for refugees has become such a trend within social design in the West, and these ideas have travelled, offering mere technological fixes rather than addressing the imperial histories and neoliberal restructuring that underpin them (Johnson, 2011). Some initiatives in the Arab world are referring to such refugee movements as if they are unique to this era and to the region, disregarding the region’s history where mass migration has always played a role. Moreover, a number of projects and events contain buzzwords similar to social design projects in the West—words such as ‘transformative’, ‘innovative’, ‘future’, ‘community’, ‘conscious’, ‘creative’ and ‘impact’—similar to words found in reports from development and aid agencies. As we can see, these ideas and methods, disguised as ‘universal’ have travelled, carrying with them the structures of Western thinking, and continue to reproduce the cycle where universities in the Global South are reliant on knowledge produced elsewhere. This renders both designers from the Global North and designers from the Global South constantly being unaware of the position they are looking and designing from, which prevents them from making sense of their socio-material world. But can we overcome this problematic?

UNDERSTANDING WHAT A DECOLONISED  
EDUCATION OF DESIGN MEANS

If the answer to the foregoing question is yes, we must then ask: can design education in the university achieve this? Can the modern university still be a place of designing the re-designing of humans; of other ontological conditions? If it cannot—which in its current form seems likely—what other spaces and educational practices could emerge instead?

What we mean by ‘ontological’ is that what we design, designs back on us, designing the very being of our world (Fry, 2009; Willis, 2006). And it seems, for the Global North at least, what is required to get to viable futures, is to redesign the being-in-our-worlds. This is why, decolonising design education is an ontological statement. This is why decolonising design then, goes to the heart of our current ontologies in the West; to the darkness of Modernity, to reason. As the decolonial thinker Walter Mignolo (2011) posits, colonialism is the ‘darker side of modernity’. A darkness in which, we now know because postmodernity told us, is in the end of times; yet, no new visions are in place.

Therefore, one of the urgent visions we argue for is to decolonise design education and its institutions for the sake of the continuation of our species and other living beings in the face of structural unsustainability. Yet the subject and object of decolonised design education is not only designer-to-be, but also human being at large. Then, there come some questions to keep in mind: What is the form of the human being to be re-designed and what is that human then to design, and how many worlds in and outside the sphere of that biophysical animal, will coexist? And what role does design education in the university have to play in this re-designing? In the pursuit of possible answers, we are cognisant that the re-making of the university will not happen overnight, but it urgently needs to unfold and extend



over an indefinite period of time. To be able to do so, proponents working on that project require giving over to a condition beyond the modern rational appetite to become, and give in to a becoming, an always moving, a working with what remains while never arriving anywhere new.

At the same time, those proponents are faced with the imperative of acting swiftly in the establishment of ontological designs that perform directionally toward viable human futures before we accelerate to catastrophe. Some design educators are trying it out. Some are trying to articulate this quandary with their students. In other words, some are resisting to think about life in a nihilistic kind of way and helping their students resist thinking in this nihilistic kind of way—as at the end of human times, and instead trying to drop in and confront design education differently.

However, there is a trap. Design supposedly has the tools and sensibilities to perceive ‘making futures’—after all making is central to design. However this ‘making’ is often reduced, misinterpreted or misrepresented as a techno-evangelistic saviorism. Designers are, unfortunately, great at making things, but incompetent at designing with complexity in long spans of time—that is, at designing ontologically. Thus, we make artefacts without trying to change, or at the very least, reimagine, the systems within which those artefacts operate. We lost the ability to see artefacts as ontological things to rationalism coming out of the Enlightenment. You only have to see how excruciating it is when you, for instance, ask first year design students to map systems and complexities in a relational form rather than a linear descriptive form, on paper (Schultz and Barnett, 2015).

This all leaves students pretty scared, pretty scared of touching time, of looking forward in time—their chronophobia sets in. They become nihilistic—they retreat and decide it is best not to touch any complex issues, and just let the

catastrophe accelerate (Srnicek and Williams, 2013) and unfold and pick up the pieces on the other side. From this setting, students from the Global North, at least, find themselves unable to deal with time, complexity or flux; yearning to retain reason, to find a familiar lifeboat while lost at sea, not wanting to give over to the deep unknown ocean ahead and break away from reason. What this means is that design education annuls any critical mass accumulating as a change community designing global transformations required in the time we humans and other lifeworlds may have.

What we have outlined so far registers what is needed in decolonising design as big, real big, and can be summarised on these three points:

- ① Decolonising ‘just’ design is an insufficient, possibly futile exercise if the focus is not on the fact that our sheer existence as a species is under threat, yet it is precisely decolonising design that is required to break free of the shackles of the matrix of coloniality threatening humans and other lifeworlds existence.
- ② Decolonising design is no smaller a task than locating the means by which designers can be decolonised, enabling an aptitude to prefigure, project and redirect the ontological ‘nature’ of human beings. A politics no smaller than the Enlightenment yet it is exactly the Enlightenment’s hegemonic ambitions that decoloniality must reverse (Fry, 2009).
- ③ Designers are faced on the one hand with working with what remains in the maelstrom between modernity/coloniality and not aspiring to prefigure another utopian new, while on the other hand designing with the imperative of acting swiftly in the establishment of ontological designs that perform directionally toward viable human futures. In this regard, decolonising design is not merely an epistemological problem. It is

an *onto-epistemological* discussion (Barad, 2007) considering what design is outside of the modern world-system, given that contemporary design is a product of, and inextricable from, modernity.

Design education is faced with the task of holding these caveats as central to the development of their pedagogies. This means that decolonising design education can only begin with an identification of the education in error already incurred by those students and a systematic process of unlearning; unlearning the ontologies, methods and reasonings this very modern/colonial system has long been imposing. It should be centrally focused on finding ways to help students recognise that much of what they know from the imperial epistemology of modernity they were inducted, for the Global North, to which Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1998, p.54) amounts to the banking concept of education, which he believes acts to “minimise or annul the student’s creative power”, needs to be abandoned.

Decolonising design education requires finding ways to learn how to see what there is to see in situ. From this vantage point, no longer would it be incommensurable to ‘see’, such as those imperial invaders carrying the epistemology of modernity could not. Nor would it be at all acceptable to ‘see’ but turn a blind eye as the rest of those invaders did.

### MOVING TOWARDS PLURIVERSALITY

We can see and find those ways, though—thoughtfully and strategically, in a few ways. By breaking into the institute and trialing design education *otherwise*. By breaking up what needs to be destroyed in these institutes that perpetuate the imperial epistemology of modernity; and breaking out of the institutes and being embraced by new platforms that embrace pluriversality as the only universal project. After all, we only need to think of how local knowledges and age-old technologies of colonised

peoples were first spurned and destroyed, then appropriated by the West and adopted into the institute as deliberate processes of erasure of histories and epistemes. A university that provides the space for this breaking and re-making to occur is one that has managed to move beyond the epistemology of reason and toward pluriversal ontological shifts in being; which would be named, in other words, as *pluriversity* (Boiding, Cohen and Grosfoguel, 2012; Mbembe, 2015; Mignolo, 2011).

The question of universality versus the question of pluriversity then emerges as a fundamental tension in the process of decolonising design (see Escobar, 2015). The imposition of universal visual, auditory, and semantic languages is a key component in the perpetuation of the colonial project; it is a strategy for the homogenisation of systems of thought and modes of acting, as well as for the imposition of aesthetic regimes. It is through the imposition of such languages that non-Western materialities and subjectivities, systems of knowledge, and culture are expropriated, leaving Western Europe as the sole narrator of history.

In this sense, the epistemic violence visited upon colonised peoples is enacted by design—that is, it is both a deliberate project of coloniality, and that it is enacted by the design as a discipline. Now, while the decolonisation of design education does, inevitably, need to address the necessity for inclusion—of material practices and of the bodies performing said practices, it cannot stop there. It cannot be merely an issue of representation or exclusion, often translated as lack of diversity. When only seen this way it negates the more important issue of who is able to speak; an issue of marginalisation in institutes all too often harbouring privilege of dominant groups. Rather, it must unravel a whole new set of questions about the systems in which material practices situate themselves, in order to be framed as ‘design’.

So we must understand that the word decolonising is not a qualitative modifier to what ‘design’ is, in the same way that

‘product’, ‘graphic’, ‘digital’, ‘service’, ‘speculative’ and ‘participatory’ might be. There cannot be a decolonising design which merely ‘cleans out’ the colonial bits and pieces of the field and delivers, much like a service or a product, a guilt-free decolonised version of what design supposedly is. Decolonisation cannot be briefed, prototyped, user-tested, or mass-produced. In fact, to begin the work of decolonising design implies, in different fronts and with different tools, challenging what it is that design defines itself with, in order to deconstruct it, and build it anew. So, in order for us to address the coloniality of and in design, we must challenge the idea that constitutes design as a specific set of material practices which is, in its core enunciation, distinct from non-Western material practices—those defined by the modern epistemological apparatus as ‘craft’, ‘tradition’ or ‘non-design’. It does not suffice, then, to merely ‘include’ the practices that were relegated by modernity to be ‘non-design’, because these will inevitably be inserted within the very same systems that vouch for their exclusion in the first place. They will be ingrained into the colonial/neoliberal model and therefore contribute to its own perpetuation.

A rejection of universalist models, then, implies a rejection of universal, or universalising, languages, too—the languages of the twin projects of coloniality and neoliberalism. The Zapatista movement in Mexico—a movement of decolonial and anti-capitalist indigenous resistance—has long worked towards building what they call a *mundo donde quepan muchos mundos*—that is, a world where many worlds fit (EZLN, 1996). At its core, the Zapatista formulation points towards a rejection of colonial hierarchies; of bodies and subjectivities, yes, but also of the mundane artefacts that inscribe these bodies and subjectivities in the world. Moving away from a universal notion of design requires that we, as designers, understand that there are many ways of addressing problems and issues that are, in their nature, plural, and more than that, that also reflect plural worldviews. We must design not universally, but rather pluriversally.

After all, the hierarchisation of subjectivity that characterised the European project of domination was not merely expressed through discourse, but rather found its way into the material trappings of daily life. In that sense, it is again useful to think design in its ontological enunciation, that is, the discursive relationship that enables certain artefacts to exist in direct relationship with, and to the exclusion of, other designed things. The dichotomy between bodies coded as human, and those coded as not-quite-human becomes quite clear when we look into artefacts designed in relation to these distinct bodies—Staffordshire porcelain versus the Brookes slave ship: the fragile porcelain vessel, designed to appease the aesthetic sensibilities of European slave owners, in contrast to the rough maritime vessel, designed to facilitate the kidnapping and enslavement of those who will be condemned to serve at that very table. One object enables the existence of the other rather directly (see González-Ruibal, 2015; Eribo and Phillips, 2016). The Brookes ship and the Staffordshire plate are not merely representations of the system that engendered them; rather, they produce and perpetuate this very system.

Thus, the process of designing is a fundamental actor in assigning the right to be ‘human’ to a certain part of the world while at the same time dehumanising the other; designed things create and perpetuate differences amongst bodies, and enable different agencies of these bodies upon the world, thus re-inscribing the very action of their design. Though the examples given above are a few centuries old, their imprint in the world remains; like a curse, the exclusionary systems in which they were implicated continue to work toward the dehumanisation of certain populations. The objects and the technologies may have changed; the core system has not. Therefore, border walls, passports and temporary shelters, all become mere commodities, ripe for designers to exploit; assets upon which designers may act without effectively changing their conditions of being as such, that is, a border wall remains an architectural device for

separation of territory; a passport remains a device which curbs movement; a temporary shelter remains a subhuman dwelling for populations deemed as not-belonging, and so on.

Our approach reflects the Zapatista ideal of creating plural worldviews. This requires us to move away from the idea of design as a ‘universal model of problem-solving’ to focus on the political aspect of now, the local implications of more insidious ‘global designs’, and the agendas that they, as people who are able to design, may be empowered to solve by themselves. Such an approach inquires the causes of oppression as matters for reflection, fostering a political engagement that constitutes the necessary foundation for emancipation. Freire (1998) warns us that emancipation and liberation cannot, however, be imposed; rather, they must emerge as a result of a mutual process of *conscientização*—that is, the process of caring for one another, and gaining conscience about the self and each other’s humanity. So a decolonising of design education does not mean to ‘teach’, nor to design ‘with’. It means, rather, to think with, to find different languages for describing the world, and to find out, collectively, ways of intervening on these narratives and trigger critical thinking in action, of which design may or may not be its praxis.

Self-reflexivity, critical thinking and political action are attitudes that are evinced in the process of learning together, and assuming a common ground from which we all begin, and trace our own localities and situatedness and how they align with our thinking. A decolonisation of design education implies a dialogue with students, it implies that we need to find ways to challenge consensual realities, and nurture a tolerance for the ambiguous and contradictory. Feminist writer and theorist Gloria Anzaldúa (2012) calls this mode of thinking a form of ‘border consciousness’, one that navigates through worlds in their difference, and fosters the emergence of a pluriversal mode of learning. The educator has to perform this border consciousness, negotiating with the students how these pluriverses come

in and out of focus. In Anzaldúa's (2012) words, educators in this model *cambian el punto de referencia*, or change perspective, and in so doing offer new ways of reorganising reality and building provisional, new worlds. This form of envisioning things *otherwise*, and doing so in a slower, localised, micro-political, and more importantly collective way, is what gives the power of educating (and designing, for that matter) back to the students themselves so they find what it is that designing might do for them—if anything at all.

We see this as the beginning of a larger project, one of fostering the conditions in which those who have been and continue to be affected by coloniality can reclaim what disciplines such as design, built upon colonial foundations and in themselves producers of coloniality, have stolen or erased; one of collectively redefining what design is, and what the materialities of the artificial world entail for us as humans. In our view, this starts with tearing apart the pedagogical model of 'design as universal problem solver' and move towards dialoguing and finding a different way of framing design questions, that takes pluriversality and locality as its locus of enunciation—'the grounds from which we speak', to echo Anzaldúa (2012). Of course, this does not mean that a decolonisation of design and design education will give us the solutions to the problems engendered by coloniality.

Design alone cannot address what is, in the end, a broader issue rooted in practices and beliefs that constitute the organising principles of western modernity. As said earlier, it is a slow, and perhaps neverending process, but it needs to become in itself a praxis. So this new praxis must assume many forms and speak different languages—the philosophical, the marginal, the political, the designerly—and, more importantly, must happen in spaces that include but should never be limited to the university, and engage students from other disciplines than design as well. It is a matter of radical, cultural action, and a matter of care.



This, to recall Anzaldúa (2012) again, is what will foster new practices—be they design or otherwise—that support transformation of the conditions that make us human.

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INTERRUPTING TIME ... “FAILING  
LIKE THIS, IS A GREAT SUCCESS”

*Parallel School Cali*

Parallel School Cali took place in the capital of the Colombian Pacific region. Cali, known for its diversity, is permeated by the Afro-Colombian and indigenous community and has a broad cultural background that marked the whole country. An example would be the self-organized space “Ciudad Solar” from the 70s, where artists, writers and filmmakers such as Óscar Muñoz, Luis Ospina and Andres Caicedo among others, created a cultural precedent in Colombia. By choosing the city of Cali we wanted to move away from the economic centers dictated by the West such as London, Paris, Berlin... and decide for Cali to be our center for one week.

Over the course of six days we occupied a number of spaces in the city, such as Lugar a Dudas’ documentation center, the La Gruta square, a baker’s workshop, the city center’s streets... in order to reflect, discuss and talk about education and collective construction.

We created a space, where we could ask ourselves about the possibility of carrying out a school proposal through experimenting with methodologies generated by the collective itself. Local artists, curators and researches with trajectories linked to alternative education projects, art, publishing and social action groups were invited in order to fuel our debates. There was a strong willingness to react to the local historical and political situation that we experienced around us. Education must permeate and must be permeated by all areas of society.

“I have the feeling that the activities are generating [...] spaces for a fantastic construction of reality. In Colombia we are living a very special moment [...] on 10th December 2017 the Nobel Peace Prize is going to be delivered to the President of Colombia for his negotiations with the FARC. On the other hand, during the last two weeks, different armed groups have begun to massacre leaders of social collectives and indigenous associations. There is a situation that is really critical. So, I need to question if at

Parallel School we can give ourselves the luxury to generate bubbles in this type of spaces (such as our artist residency “Lugar a dudas” in one of Cali’s richer and safer neighborhoods), because there is a need, an urgency to take action, to understand the contexts and the real situation that is going on here. These bubbles are totally decontextualized from a number of real situations that are already taking place, and which, on the other hand, are privileged opportunities to get in touch and in context with the way in which Colombia’s current history is being constructed.”

– Víctor Albarracín (Curator at Lugar a dudas)

One of the concepts that we introduced from the beginning on was “conflict”. We believe that generating critical thinking is a fundamental part of the decision-making process and necessary to position ourselves in our daily life. Understanding criticism as a tool, being active when it comes to decision-making and generating debates, recognizing and appreciating the differences of each of the collective’s members and self-organization as a learning process is not an easy task, nor does it give immediate results.

“It seems to me that it is important to analyze this type of horizontal relations and the degree of difficulty that is involved, considering that not all participants have the same persuasive power and discursive positioning. How to include, for example, those, who have an idea but are not so good in communicating it, generating consensus or do not have the same rhetoric tools to get their positions through? How to establish horizontality between [...] those, who know more about a subject and those, who do not know about it? How to generate horizontal relationships in dissimilar contexts, where the positions seem to be similar, but through their context and historicity

have certain nuances? [...] This leads me to think that in everyday interactions it is impossible for power relations not to be present, because power cannot only be seen as repression (say in this case the negative factor), but also produces truth and knowledge (power as a producer).”

– Stephany Hernández (Participant, Philosopher)

Finally, the exercise of collectively creating a methodology, in order to plan and carry out the six days, lead us to subvert the structure and parameters proposed by the original model of Parallel School.

“I think, we should have a strategy to do an exercise on losing one’s individuality, to seek “the collective” and to find us there. [...] At some point we will have to abandon the idea that each of us had in mind when joining Parallel School. [...] It is about creating a temporary and spontaneous micro policy that forces us to be together under common interests.”

– Mónica Zamudio (Participant, Member of “La Agencia”)

“Making use of the opportunity and taking time” was the engine that activated a set of drifts, conversations, encounters and disagreements that we came to understand as a form of resistance. We very much felt the urgency to interrupt the neoliberal everyday life, in which we find ourselves submerged, and question its speed, permanent productivity, constant consumption, individuality, violence, noise and success.

... and to take the time to approach the person next to you, to empathize with others, to observe, to think, to speak, to walk, to do, not to do, to be productive, not to be productive, to fail,

## INTERRUPTING TIME

to experience, to risk, to move, to appear, to disappear, to unite, to interpret, to translate, to know, to ask, to communicate, to loose ourselves,...

To us, education is one of the most relevant areas from which to act in order to originate change.

We walked along 8th Street to the Alameda Market. We learnt to make “Pandebono” at the La Aragonesa bakery. We invited several local artists, such as Ericka Florez and Yolanda Chois, to talk about their collective processes and their relationships with territory. We went to dance salsa. We received Maria Teresa Matijasevic, who talked to us about acknowledgement and the state of education in rural areas within the context of official educational politics in Colombia and comparing them to alternative educational models. We very much enjoyed the experiences and dynamics shared with us by Monica Zamudio and Sebastián Cruz of La Agencia / Escuela de Garaje (Garage School). We had meetings in public spaces. We occupied and used Lugar a Duda’s documentation center. We cooked and ate together. We lost ourselves and questioned what the relevance and social impact is – of providing space and time for 16 people, gathering for about 12 hours a day and thinking about education.

– Abstract of the publication “Cualquier lugar... Ningún rincón perdido... Como ganar espacio” (Anywhere ... No corner’s lost ... How to gain space), Lugar a dudas, Cali, 18 December 2016

## ABOUT PARALLEL SCHOOL

Parallel School is a project that proposes the possibility to create and carry out self-organized education in the context of art and design mostly outside the official academic environment.

The initiative is thought to be an alternative to existing forms of education, from where it is possible to think about new methodologies of self-organization, sharing knowledge and collective work.

Parallel School was founded in Berlin in 2009 as a way of exchanging ideas and with the intention that everyone interested could reproduce it in other places. Paris, Moscow, Glasgow, Brno, Leipzig and Lausanne are some of the cities where Parallel Schools have been held. The project's aim is to gather people out of different contexts and disciplines in order to work in an autonomous way and in an open structure designed by the same collective. One of this proposal's main purposes is being able to question and reflect on education. Parallel School takes place during a period of one week. In the spirit of self-education, every participant provides a workshop and a topic to discuss and shares it with the rest of the group. Therefore, everyone is student and teacher at a time. This format allows to actively experiment with self-education instead of only theorizing and discussing about it.

... and why we wanted to do one

For us Parallel School has been an opportunity to form part of an international community of students and professionals within the context of art and design that rethinks the current conventional models of education. We believe that decentralizing the act of teaching and learning – that is to say hierarchies or geographic location – confronts us with a situation in which we can generate and discuss new methodologies while sharing knowledge. The circumstance that Parallel School until now has only been held in European countries motivated us to take the project and bring it to a different social and cultural context in order to approach and share new topics and perspectives about education.

During the last years the “crisis” in Europe has been an ideal excuse for developing and increasing neoliberal politics. In the case of education a vast majority of art and design schools have undergone processes of privatization and commodification of knowledge. Education responds more and more to market canons and learning methodologies are coming closer and closer to the creative processes of big multinational companies instead of the critical and autonomous spirit of humanity studies. Academic and creative outcomes are increasingly converted into strategic products, responding to the requirements of a competitive liberal market, where human relations are reduced to mercantile exchange.

Through Parallel School Cali we tried to create a new space — able to question itself — activating a week full of intellectual, creative and human exchange. We believe that generating critical thinking and temporary spaces of conflict form a fundamental part of decision-making processes and of positioning us politically in our daily lives. Considering that those spaces are not institutionally validated (and consecutively neither socially), they often run the risk of not being recognized or, on the contrary, are converted into fetishes. This is why we aim at generating spaces, where we can genuinely dialogue and create a temporary community open to multiple forms without the imposition of concrete results.

Furthermore, we need to mention the general state of affairs in Europe and in what way we are experiencing the apparent crisis, which is not only economic, but also one of values. The current global events in general make it difficult to understand in what way we can respond from the perspective of our daily lives and personal positions. As, for example, the fact that countries with less purchasing power and economic resources (like Greece, Portugal or Spain) have been forced into debt by leading economic institutions within the European community. Also, we are concerned about the “opening of the European borders”, which



became a euphemism and has led to xenophobic and racist discourses aiming at their possible closure. The current wave of immigration, caused by the wars and the lack of resources in the Middle East and Africa, has boosted right wing politics, responsible for a lack of communitarian hospitality. And we worry about the terror that is currently destabilizing Europe — apparently secure after years of social prosperity, now deteriorated by the crisis.

Our current political situation makes us reflect about how we can use our own (professional) knowledge to implement change. A process that is fundamental for the present and future of our society. We believe that education is one of the essential areas for provoking this kind of transformation.

This is why we proposed to put together our aspirations and ways of surviving this critical moment in Europe and the bubble in which we grew up with the history and the experiences of a country like Colombia. We wanted to discover how Colombians are able to organize their daily lives around the past and current social and political events and how it enriches or affects their work; how they maintain their beliefs, their values and how they continue doing projects, having to adapt them and question them according to their daily conditions.

The participants of Parallel School Cali 2017 were:

Leandra Plaza, Jonathan Cataño, Cristina Noguer, Ariadna Serahima, Eva Parra, Geirthrudur Finnbogadottir Hjorvar, Anita Osorio, Mónica Zamudio, Román Tkachenko, Sebastián Cruz, Ana María López, Katharina Hetzeneder, Alejandro Angel, Diego Bustamante, Adriana Ríos, Stephany Hernández.

ADS

*Signals from the Periphery*

The ads section in this publication follows up on the exhibition *Signals from the Periphery*\*, organized by Elisabeth Klement and Laura Pappa, that took place in the summer of 2017 in the Tallinn Art Hall. The exhibition was dedicated to the extended practice of graphic design and the various initiatives that have taken off in the last decade.

\**Signals from the Periphery* was an international graphic design event, taking place from July 1 to August 13, 2017 at the Tallinn Art Hall and its surrounding venues. The project brought together urgent developments in graphic design with a focus on practices that extend the field. These practices often expand into other cultural fields, while creating new hybrid forms, as well as seeking out new economic models to sustain themselves. *Signals from the Periphery* encompasses an exhibition at the Tallinn Art Hall, a satellite exhibition at the EAA gallery, an extensive public programme and a book that was published to accompany the project.

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DSC\_0147.jpg

- You have arrived into MAP section, MAP is a growing overview of locations in Amsterdam where you can find traces of Aldo van Eyck's playgrounds. It is constantly growing list therefore the amount of playgrounds which you see now on the website we research and update regularly

\* Click on red arrow

- We've been working on organising our research into a form in which we can share it with all of you. Together with Carla Peer we have developed the website [www.seventeenplaygrounds.com](http://www.seventeenplaygrounds.com) which we will continue updating with every new discovery and activity of Seventeen Playgrounds.

\*Click on [www.seventeenplaygrounds.com](http://www.seventeenplaygrounds.com)

- On the left you can find google earth view of the playground while on the right you can see our latest documentation of the same playground

\* Click on cross in the right corner  
\* Click on the LIST in the MENU

- List is an overview of the playground locations with number of elements listed on each playground  
- When clicking on **Address, District, Elements or Date Updated** you can achieve faster search

\* Click on Archive in the MENU

- Archive consists of research material on the topic of play. Here you can find texts, books, articles, exhibition catalogues - everything we collect and use in our research for playground design. We are really happy to be able to share and spread this materials with all of you.

\* Click on Seventeen Playgrounds in the MENU

\*PEACE

a-assassin (the violent answer)	condensafe/condensave	faint impression	influencers	parietal storage	source
absolute temperature	confl-ck	faint impression	information afraid	passiosmarter	source language
ability	consensual social	fake it till you name it	inspiration folder	path battle	space-able
acceptable quality level	reality	faked photograph	intentional clarity	perference	spellograph
accessible-sceptic	consensus	fast	interesting fly	peripheral observations	spleen
aculate	consignment	fast booking	international style	phantom internet	split end
adapter	content	feed dog	internet designer	presence	sprinkling
advance payment	contouring	femme fafailure	internet party website	phase cancellation	squinch
aesthetic acceptance	contradictory	femme fafuture	internet scarf	photographed	stretch and fold
afterword	controllerism	fermentation	internship	pivot	method
al dentle	cooperation auscult	ferrule	interpretation	pixel depth	structure-borne
allovisit	coprolite	filler	it's interesting	plagiarism	feedback
alphanumerical	copypride	filtering	it's always September	platform	subjective carrier
already-made	copyright	finity (as opposed to infinity)	never May	poikilotherm	subliminal labour
amateuration	cotop	fixing	Italian cuisine design	positivizing	succesks
anchor point	cotyledon	flash confusion	itsnice	post-	Sully's pie
anecdote	crab walk	flyer	kashneck	post-authenticity	super-food
anfo	cringe	crocking	key	post-own an image	superficial
anxiety	critduction	crowdfunding	kirbying	post-production	suspend mode
appif	cultural white space	curator as graphic design	kiss printing	paralysis	sweeing
arbitrary sign	curating of context	cutting	kooas	postjoy	synonym
art capitalism	data dredging	data-self	la sauce	postmodern Bauhaus	tasspar
asertenity	death (to be)	decontaminate	ladytron	potpourri design	testa
asterisk	designer as author	deluxe edition	laughabet	power time	that was one avenue
automated self	designer's advocate	demonor's kiss	lenticel	prejoy	the fold
autosemantics	dew point	definition	lettertuation	proof	the infra-thin
avoir la boco	diginoting	deluxo edition	lettuce edge	protile	the night my father
azimuth	digital familiarity	dementor's kiss	liberacture	protile	came home
backfeed	digital signature	design democracy	ligeglad	pulp modernism	The Real World
backslopping	dimensional	designer as publisher	limitacture	punctuation adventure	the unreal
balnave	skepticism	designer as publisher	linearity	quality	thesis
bastard title	discentricentric	designer's advocate	lizard brain	quickfix	time out of something
beard	discomfort	dew point	luminiesh	quoin	timer
beau parler	display face	designer as publisher	maonified	raincif	Times New Romance
being ahead is being behind	display question	designer's advocate	mad crocodile	re-branding	tin pannikin
benthos	dissemination	dew point	making decisions	reading	to go for a banana
bi-timing	drag	diginoting	malmadiaze	relative design	to go for a peanut
bibliomania	draughtsman	digital familiarity	manifesto	relolity	topsy-turvy literary
bibliophile	drunk walk	digital signature	massness	replace-word	world
black	dysplan	dimensional	match	repressum	traga trak
bololo	écartelage	discentricentric	material design	residual effects	translation
boosting	echoic memory	discomfort	material overload	responsible designer	true value
boox-i	ecollable	display face	material	retro revival	trusting instinct
branch (to)	ecstatic truth	display question	meaning	rick-rack	ultracomparing
breathing in the rhythm of the universe	edge fog	dissemination	merlage	Rietveld grey	understand
brexif	elicity	drag	metagettrash	roading	universal exhibition
budget	elistot	draughtsman	metacommentary	rusnet	unoriginal genius
buffering	embedded question	drunk walk	mewe	rustling of leaves	unresolved question
bugaboo	en Y	dysplan	micro-organism	rytweep	unsounding
burger design	epipelagic zone	écartelage	mispacement	scotoma	urgency
buzz cut	erotic	echoic memory	mlikan	seashell resonance	utay
caption	erratum	ecollable	mobile first	second look	visual communication
cash cow	event	ecstatic truth	moving information	sediment	waiting room
chabaphrai	exchange copy	edge fog	naive question	seductive wallet	walking hat
chess questioning	existentions	elicity	naos	sensitive	(spadsere-hat)
chicken scratch	expanding question	elistot	Newton(ian) rings	sef	weaponized question
child thought	expectum	embedded question	nic giraffe	self-broadcasting	well-known unknown
circumcising	experimental design	edge fog	non-breaking	selfie	wheel of fineness
language	F.I.A.T.	erotic	non-posting	serif	why
clean proof	faction	erratum	behaviour	service	wikipedia
cloud designer		event	nude media	sessile	word
cold type		exchange copy	numerical feedback	shading	wordwill
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compromise		expanding question	object language	silent space	ypo
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			overrelevant	soundless	

# See Also

An alternative graphic design lexicon written and compiled by second-year students at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam, 2017. 90x148mm, 144 pages, €10, ISBN 978-90-827569-0-6  
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# you

# glad you

# can

# see?

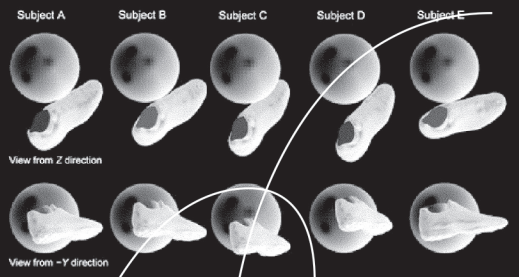
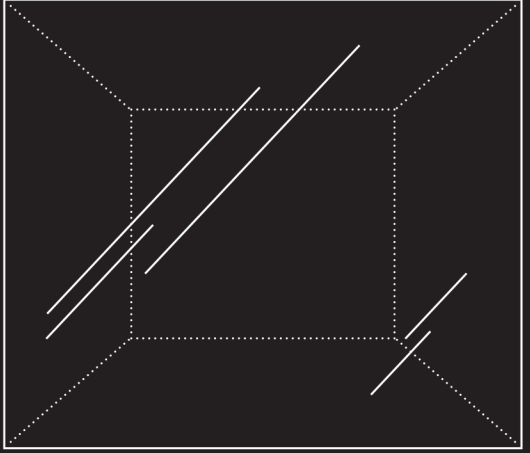
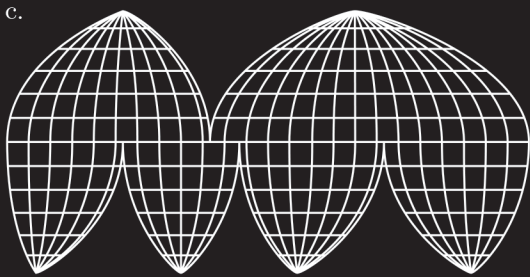
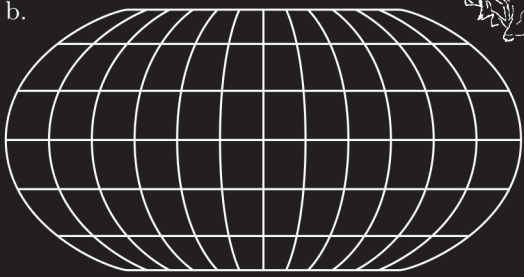
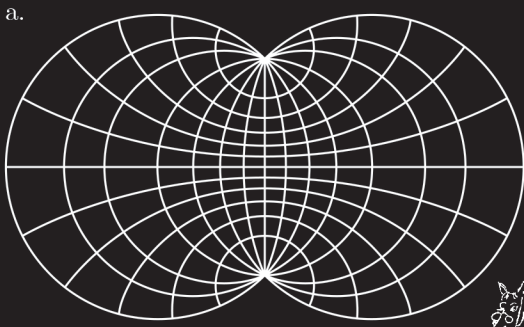


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ALEXIS MARK  
PRESENTS



ANNUAL  
REPORT



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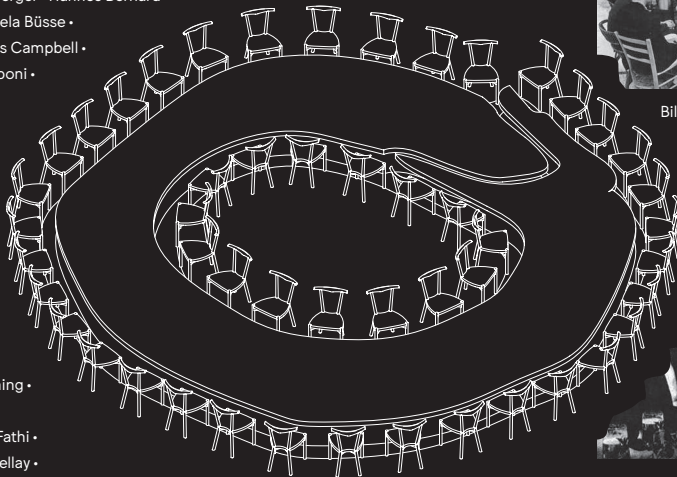
The Taste of the Brain is the story of people gathered around a table with food, tools and clay. It re-aligns the simple idea of 'commensalité', or the sharing of a meal with someone else, into the 21st century. People don't merely sit and eat, instead they create the conditions of a social moment around their food. Stories are constructed by producing objects that communicate messages, and through which meaning is evoked via the way other people use the objects that are finally made. From hand to hand, plate to plate, chair to chair, the object make their own way, travelling in the landscapes of each table, for each event. Together, the collected objects tell things far beyond the intentions of their original making / adding new chapters to the story along the way —Text by Léonore Conte.

The Taste of The Brain was grateful to receive:

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1 Paul Morrissey, Andy Warhol, Janis Joplin and Tim Buckley eating together at Max's on March 8, 1968, after the opening night of the Fillmore East theater. © Elliott Landy.



2 Realisator J. J. Abrams and the rest of the cast of 'Star Wars The Force Awakens', 2016. © Lucasfilm Ltd. & TM.



Bill Berkson, John Ashbery, John Wieners, Desmond O'Grady, Ezra Pound, Charles Olson, Olga Rudge, and Caresse Crosby for Settimana della Poesia at the Spoleto Fest., 1965. © Werner Neumeister.



4 Heinz Mack, Otto Piene, Jean Tinguely, Daniel Spoerri, Pol Bury and Yves Klein in Antwerpen, 1959. © Charles Wilp.

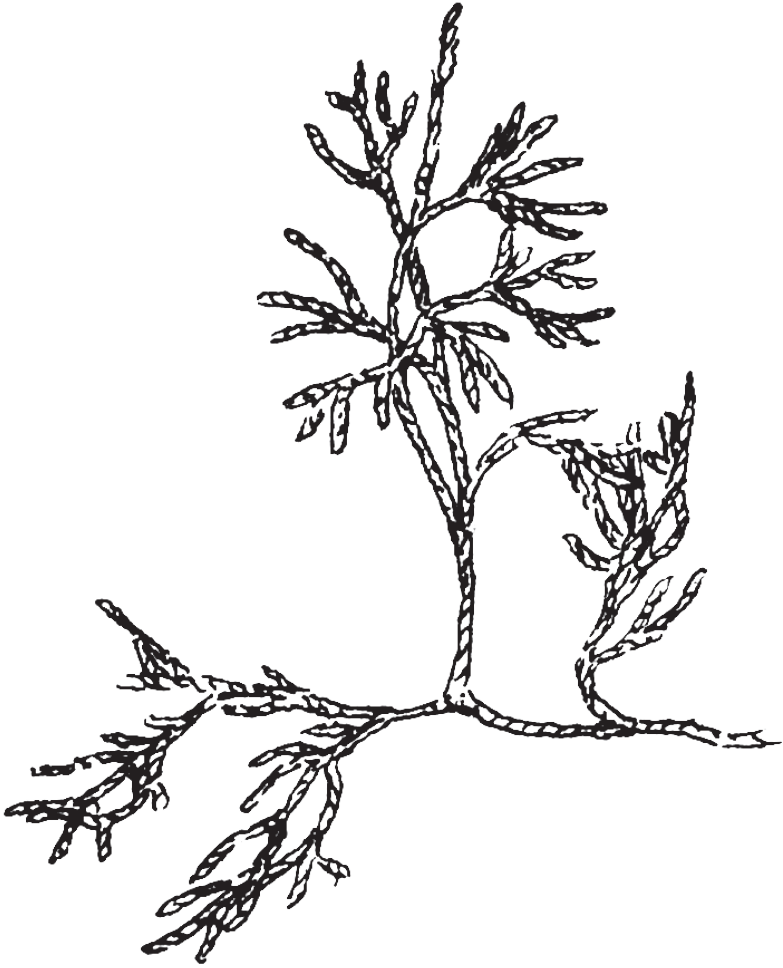


5 Japanese tea ceremony in the Eames House living room shared by Charles and Ray with Isamu Noguchi, Shirley Yamaguchi, Charlie Chaplin and others, 1951. © Charles Eames.



6 Betty Grable, Marilyn Monroe, Lauren Bacall and others for a scene in 'How to marry a Millionaire', 1953. © A.F. Archive.

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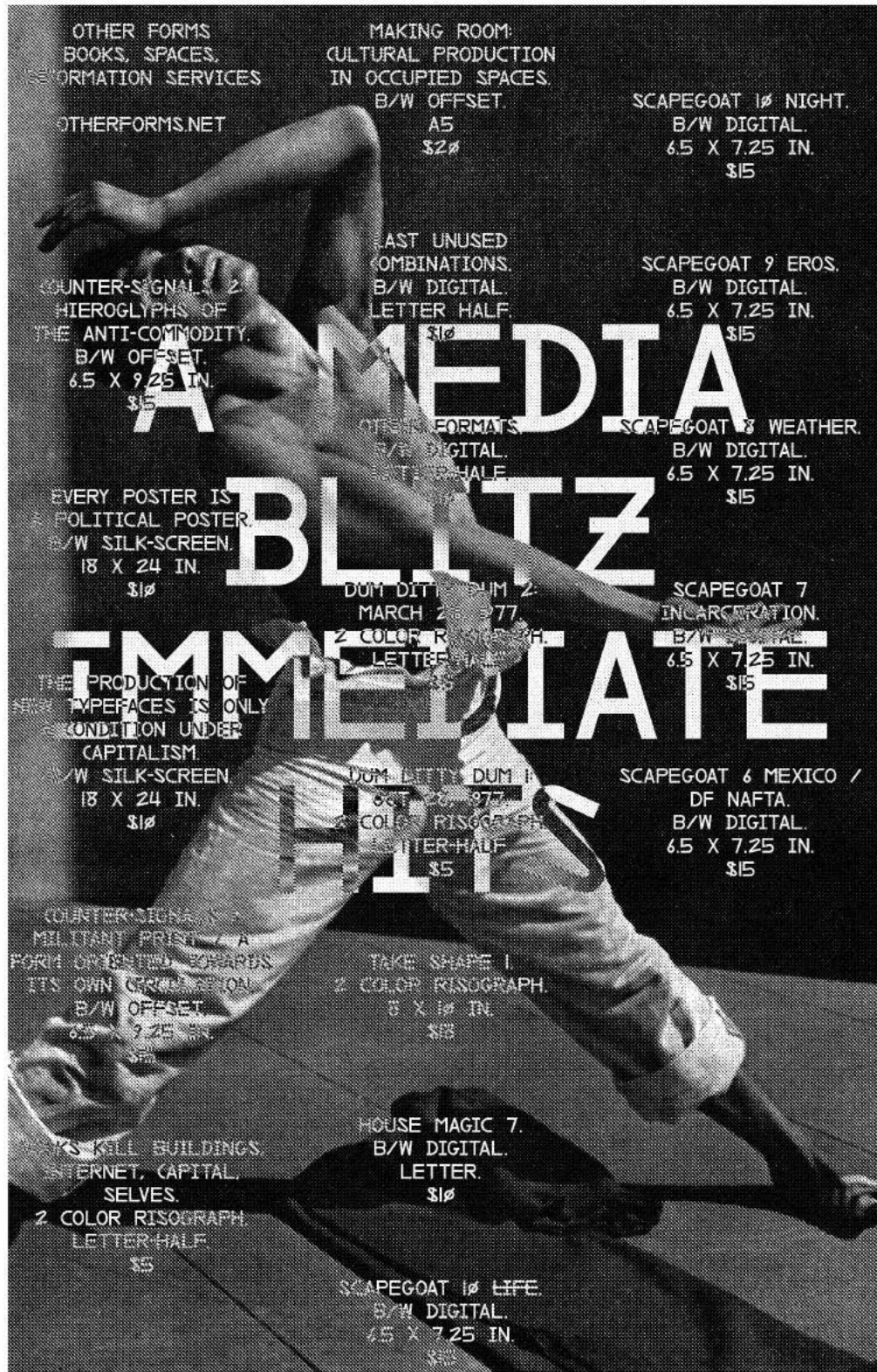
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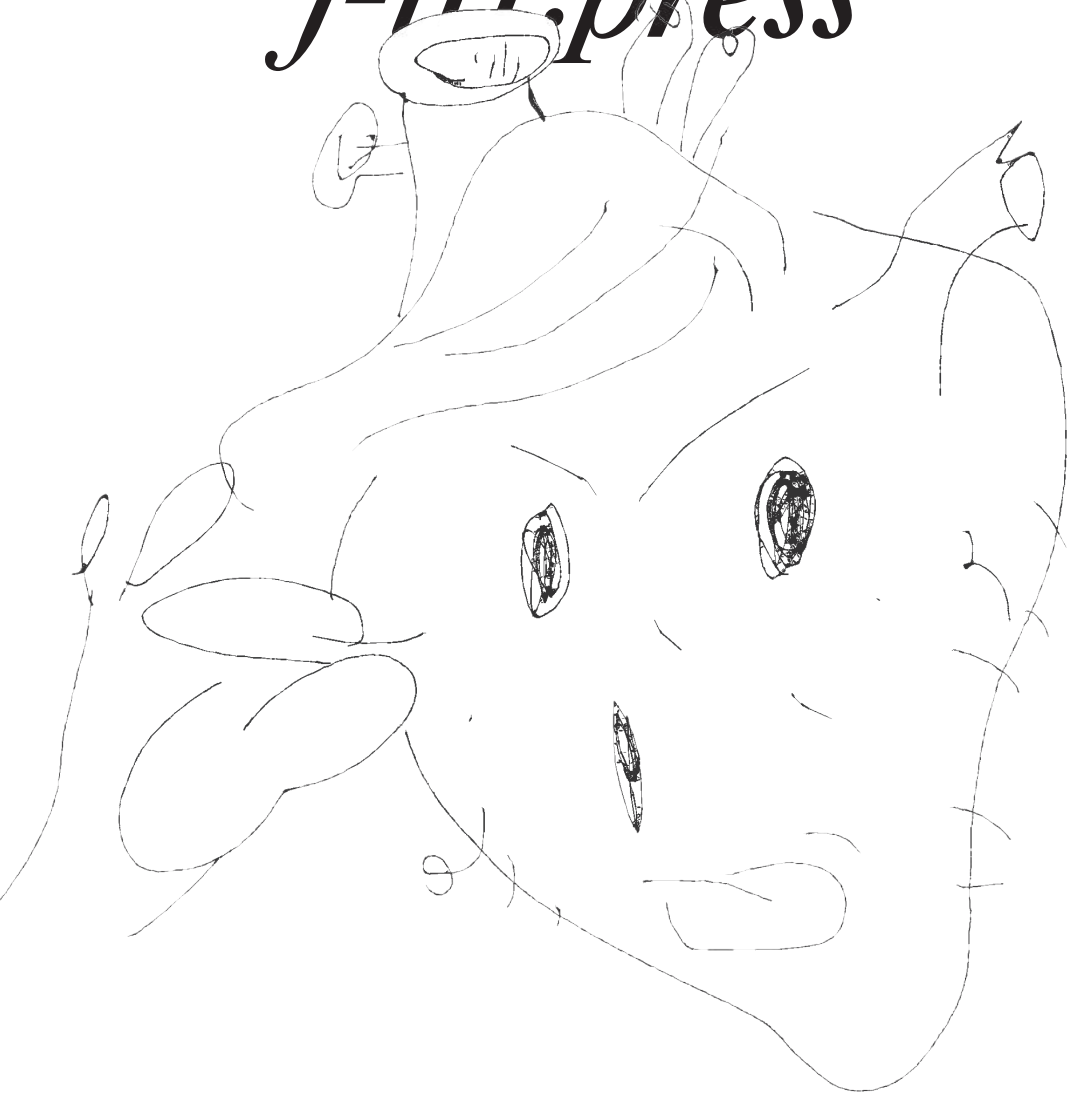


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# STRIKE AND RIOT

*Chris Lee*

A few years ago, I started teaching graphic design at the University at Buffalo SUNY (UB), a public university in the Rust Belt. Before this, I had never taught a history of graphic design course. I barely recall the one I took as an undergrad. As I was lumbering through the course with my students, I started to think about how the historiography of what we were reading was shaping their ideas of what it means to practice graphic design—What was graphic design made with, by whom and to what ends? What were its canonical practitioners concerned with and what were they not concerned with? Who and what counts as part of graphic design history and how does that history affect what these students believe they will become? These questions put into relief many of my own presumptions about what it is that I do.

Around the same time, an MFA student in the Art Department, Carl Spartz, introduced me to an article by Jennifer Wilson in the *New Yorker*, which was about Tolstoy College (College F), an anarchist college that used to be at UB. The college, whose mandate was to study oppression in America, had been run according to anarchist principles—it practiced shared governance of the school and without a policy on grading, all students would receive A's until the administration imposed a more measured distribution of grades. The students and faculty decided then that the grades would be distributed according to the rubric of “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.”

Reading the piece got me thinking about how I might also bypass grading students. The students don't want to be graded. I don't want to grade the students either, because grading is disciplinary and it terrifies them and it dulls their critical capacities. It's also stultifying, it suppresses experimentation and risk-taking, and it forecloses possibilities of new forms coming into being. Grading makes students ask me questions like “is this how you want me to make it?” I can't think of any good answers to questions like that.



What follows is a preliminary speculation on what a general reading list for a graphic design curriculum within Tolstoy College might have looked like, and what a radical theory and historiography of graphic design might be composed of—one that could very differently shape how a student imagines his or her practice.

\*\*\*

Strike & Riot is a fictional publisher of books (some that are real, some that aren't), directly and tangentially related to graphic design. Subjects range across architecture, crime, labor, poetry, pedagogy, statecraft and typography. Taken together, they speculatively compose a possible syllabus, or at least a set of preliminary notes towards a notion of graphic design that dissolves its current disciplinary boundaries as a client-oriented and (mostly) commercial practice, expanding its field of concerns and intensifying its forms of agency. These citations critically respond to design as an embodiment of a disciplinary tendency. On the one hand, design pedagogy tends to make persistent the discipline of market imperatives and organizes its labor according to capitalist hierarchies. On the other hand, this set of textual references attempts to locate a political dimension of graphic design in the history of standards and conventions, which are the very things in which graphic design trades.

What this project posits is that graphic *form-making* in a state/capital matrix of power compels the (re)production of standards that make legible (knowable and fixed) otherwise plural and contingent phenomena. Standards, as the poet Eunsong Kim reminds us, also suppress the emergence of form.<sup>1</sup> Insofar as to *design* means: to *designate*, to *assign*, to *mark out* (as in planning), to *see*, to *foresee*, to *project*, to *impose* — towards management, appropriation, accountability, and governance — design implies a dimension of (knowledge-)power and discipline. Because of their status as standardized and conventional, signs

(designations) become persistent and banal—they eventually obscure their own origins as the result of a political struggle. Indeed, as Société Réaliste remind us, “signs are born out of conflict.”<sup>2</sup>

This essay narrates and amplifies thematic, political, and formal resonances among a disparate set of titles. Taken as a whole, these titles constitute a tangential concatenation of the following:

- \* A typesetters strike over payment for punctuation at the printing facilities of the publisher Sytin & Co. (publisher of the works of Leo Tolstoy) in czarist Russia;
- \* the brief run of Tolstoy College, an anarchist college at the University at Buffalo SUNY which was coincidental with Michel Foucault’s two stints at UB’s Department of Modern Languages and Literatures (in 1970 and 1972);
- \* the chronological proximity to, and potential influence of the Attica riots on, the publication of *Discipline and Punish* (*Surveiller et Punir*);
- \* the formal resemblance of the UB’s logo at the time (by Chermayeff and Geismar) with the conceptual model of a panopticon;
- \* the resonance of both with the principles of liberalism and their formal expression in modernist design from the French Revolution to the present;
- \* the near coincidental closure of Tolstoy College, the reversion of UB SUNY’s graphic identity to a Latin crest, and the dissolution of the International Typographical Union in the early to mid-80s;

## STRIKE AND RIOT

These and a number of other resonances and tangents are assembled as an historiography that puts into relief the political dimensions of form, labor, and pedagogy in graphic design.

### GRAPHIC DESIGN / LABOR HISTORY

*Punctuation.*

by Charles A. Ruud



“The strike which started over punctuation marks and ended by felling absolutism.”

— Leon Trotsky

In 1905, the typographic workers employed by the Russian publisher and printer Sytin & Co. (the publisher of the works of Leo Tolstoy), went on strike demanding to be paid for the setting of punctuation.

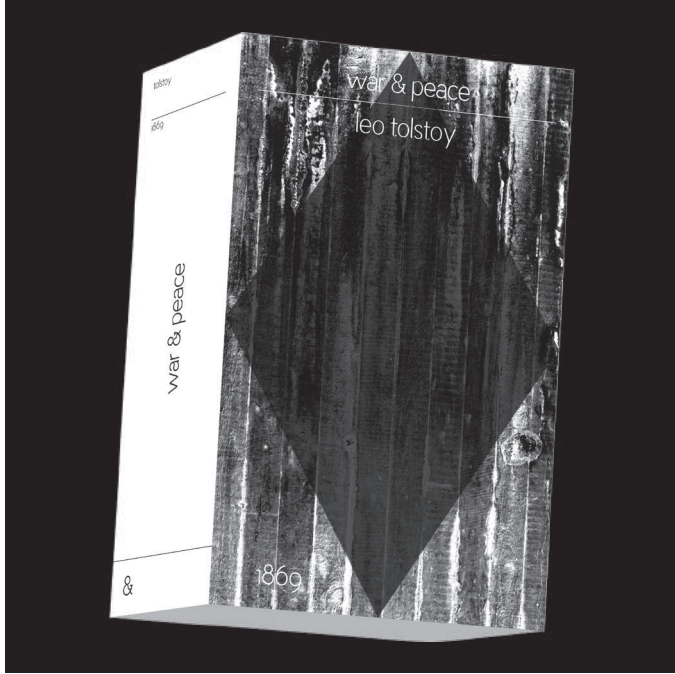


CHRIS LEE

GEOPOLITICS

*War & Peace*

by Leo Tolstoy



The Napoleonic invasion of Russia, which pursued the strategic agenda of choking off Great Britain from its ability to access international trade, forms the geopolitical backdrop for Tolstoy's epic novel. Word Count (English translation): of ~580,000 words, there are ~24 instances of the word "weight," and ~29 instances of the word "measure."

punctuation count:

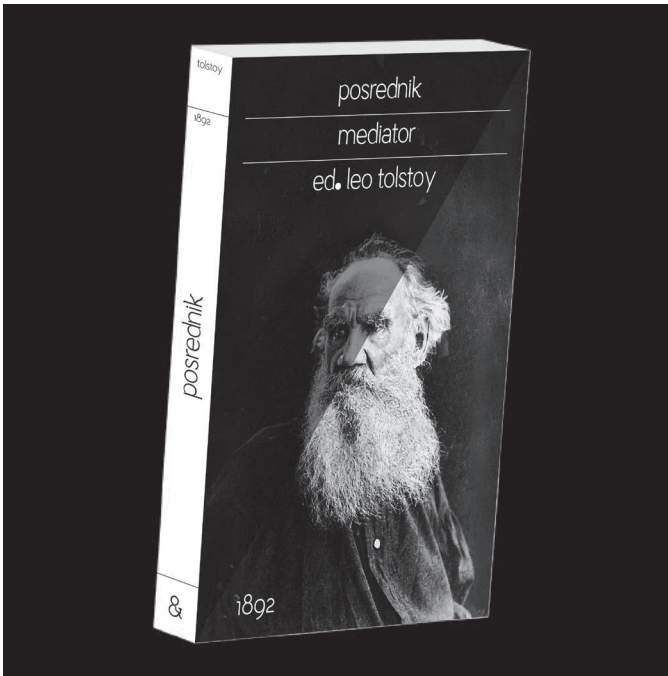
. ~31,000  
, ~39,000  
" ~9,000  
" ~9,000  
( ~630  
) ~630  
: ~1,000  
; ~1,100  
? ~3,100  
! ~3,400  
- ~1,700

## STRIKE AND RIOT

### EDUCATION/PEDAGOGY

#### *Posrednik*

Initiated by Leo Tolstoy, “Posrednik” (mediator) was an educational publisher that aimed at broad dissemination of educational content to compete with cheap popular literature. The published works ranged in content from anti-militarism; works critical of power, property, and money; vegetarianism; agriculture; home economics; as well as a variety of journals including “Svobodnoe vospitanie” (Liberated Education). Printing and distribution were taken up by Sytin & Co. when the publisher moved to Moscow in 1892.



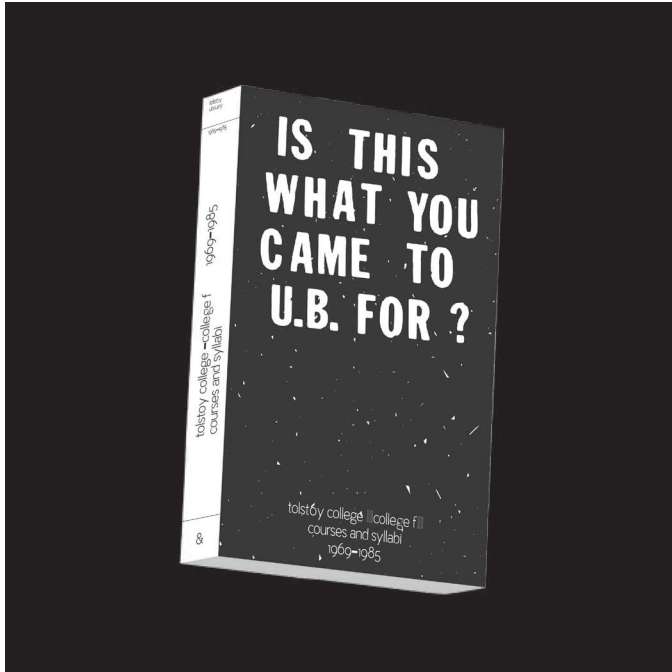
The Emancipation Reform of 1861 gave Russian serfs the full rights of free citizens (including the right to own property) and meant that they could buy land from their former landlords. Tolstoy briefly became a *posrednik*—an official who mediated land disputes between serfs and their former landlords, but resigned due to the stress caused by the role. Upon his

resignation, Tolstoy returned to teaching peasant children at a school he ran on his estate outside of Moscow.

EDUCATION/PEDGAGOGY

*Tolstoy College (College F): Courses and Syllabi*

A compendium of syllabi and lecture notes  
from Tolstoy College (College F).



Tolstoy College operated from 1968 to 1985. Under the tenure of then university president Martin M. Meyerson, it was one of a handful of experimental colleges (along with the Ecology College, the Black Studies College, the Rosa Luxemburg College, etc.) commissioned at the State University of New York at Buffalo to cultivate a campus that would be touted as the “Berkeley of the East.” Named after the Russian author and anarchist Leo Tolstoy, the college’s mandate was to study oppression in America, and offered courses like “Anarchism and Everyday Life,”

## STRIKE AND RIOT

“Gay Literature” and seminars on “Political Lives” like those of Tolstoy, Angela Davis and a local taxi driver named Stephen R. Chamberlain.

## DISCIPLINE/PUNISHMENT

### *Attica*

by New York State Special Commission on Attica



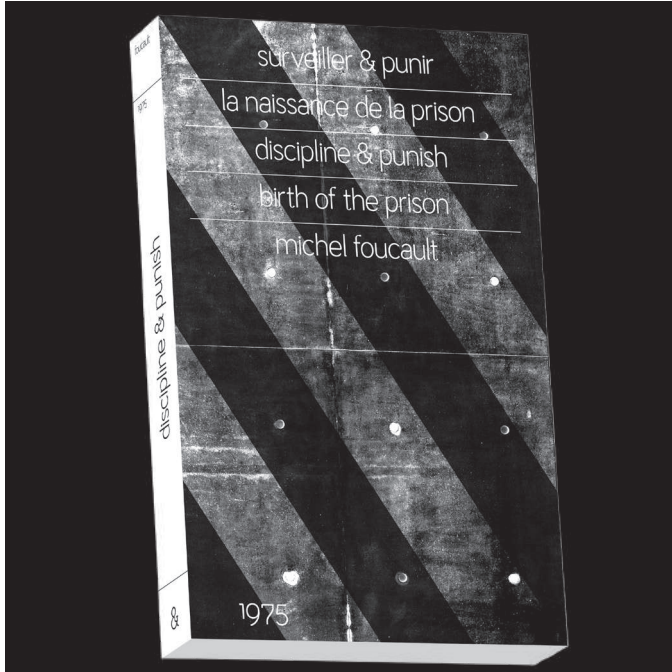
From September 9 to 13, 1971, the Attica Correctional Facility (which is just under an hour drive from Buffalo, NY) was taken over by nearly 1,300 prisoners as a protest against the inhumane conditions in which they were incarcerated. Guards and other staff were made hostages and were leveraged in tense negotiations with state authorities. However, on September 13th, the state decided to retake the prison by sending in hundreds of armed troopers and correctional officers. 39 men were killed, among them hostages and prisoners. This incident came to be recognized as one of the most significant prison uprisings

in US history and became a symbol for the struggle for prisoners' rights.

SOCIAL ORTHOPEDICS

*Surveiller & Punir*

by Michel Foucault



In 1970 and 1972, Michel Foucault served as the Melodia E. Jones Chair in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures of the University at Buffalo SUNY.

However, he had not set foot in a prison until he visited Attica in 1972, less than a year after the uprising.

A few years later, he published this book in which he famously casts the panopticon (the prison design proposed by Jeremy Bentham) as an architecture of legibility, an apparatus of governance, and an instrument of discipline.

## STRIKE AND RIOT

### CLASSICS/CRIME

#### *Crime & Punishment*

by Fyodor Dostoevsky



Dostoevsky based his protagonist, Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov on the figure of Pierre François Lacenaire, a notorious French criminal who was executed after being convicted of a double murder.

As a young man, Lacenaire completed his education with excellent results, joined the French army, and eventually deserted, becoming a criminal who was in and out of prison—what he referred to as his “criminal university.”

He defended the crime for which he was executed as a protest against social injustice. His charismatic defense brought him infamy and impressed writers like Dostoevsky.

CHRIS LEE

CRIME/POETRY  
*Criminal University*  
by Pierre François Lacenaire



Foucault casts the celebrity of Lacenaire’s criminality amongst the bourgeoisie as a mark of the shift from an illegality against the state to an illegality that is trivialized as delinquency on the one hand, and aestheticized as “...an art of the privileged classes” (304) on the other.

“...this ruined petty bourgeois, of good education, would, a generation earlier, have been a revolutionary, a Jacobin, a regicide; had he been a contemporary of Robespierre, his rejection of the law would have taken a directly political form.” (Foucault, 303)

Lacenaire was executed in 1836. In 1837, France revived the official project of universalizing the metric system, which had earlier been abandoned.

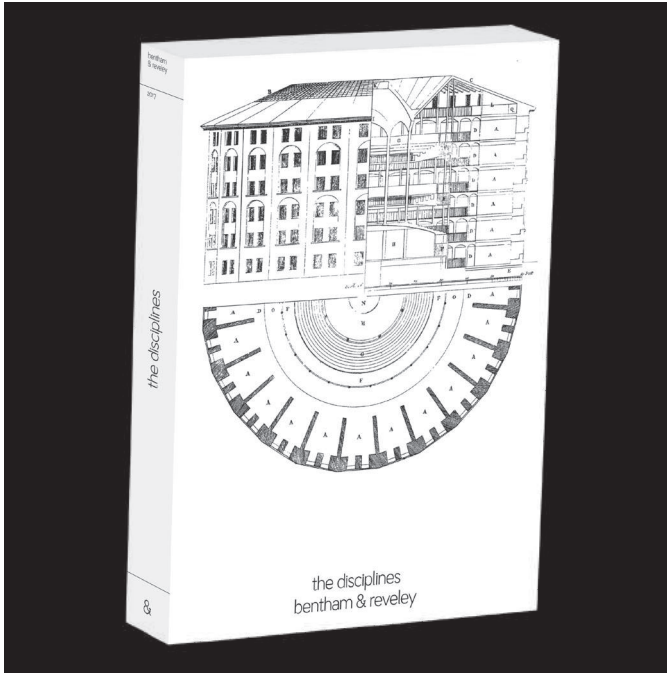


## STRIKE AND RIOT

### ARCHITECTURE/DISCIPLINE

#### *The Disciplines*

by Jeremy Bentham & Willey Reveley



The 39 case studies contained within this book map the intersections of educational and penal architecture and consider a number of modalities by which buildings “know” and facilitate the management of their constituents.

UB SUNY’s Amherst campus—the “white-flight campus”—is one such place. Its spatial configuration characterized by an absence of open gathering spaces was designed to preclude the possibility of the kind of student activism that made UC Berkeley (Martin M. Meyerson’s posting prior to his presidency at UB SUNY) famous in the 1960s.

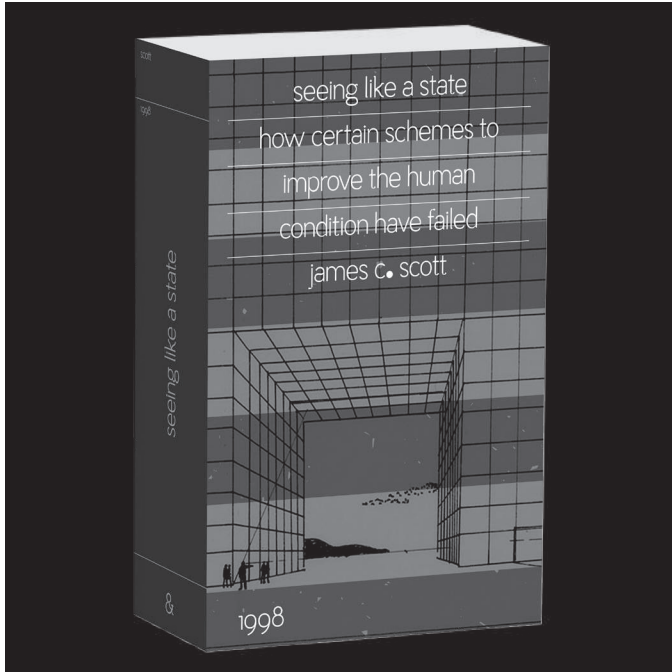


CHRIS LEE

SOCIAL ORTHOPEDICS

*Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the  
Human Condition Have Failed*

by James C. Scott

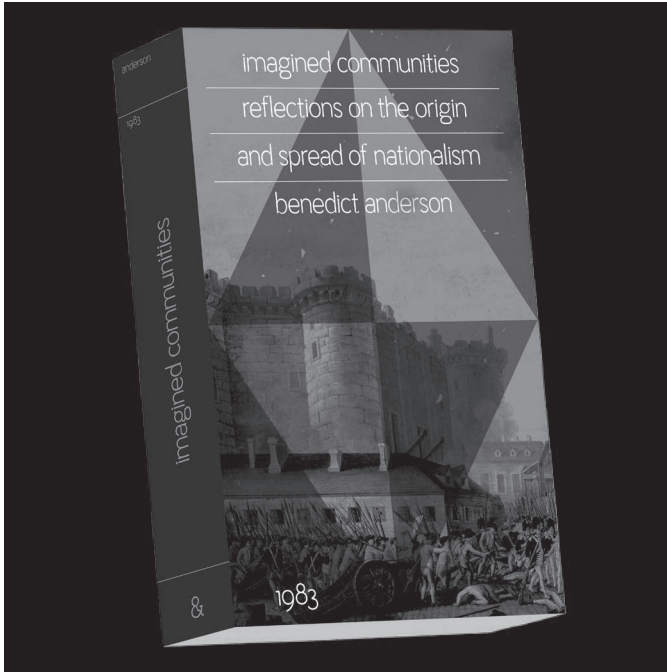


In “Seeing Like a State,” political scientist and agrarian studies scholar James C. Scott recounts several cases of well-intentioned, yet ultimately authoritarian planning schemes that have failed to relieve the struggles of collective, social life. The book indicts the hubris with which planning, in its schematic rationality and epistemological privileging of quantification and empirical observation impose a managerial gaze upon otherwise plural and contingent physical and social landscapes. Key to this managerial agency is the capacity to make these landscapes legible.

Coupled with state power, this legibility establishes the basis of the legislation of human and non-human agents—the

disciplinary gaze of the state is framed by the logic of its managerial imperatives.

POLITICS/GRAPHIC DESIGN  
*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the  
Origin and Spread of Nationalism*  
by Benedict Anderson



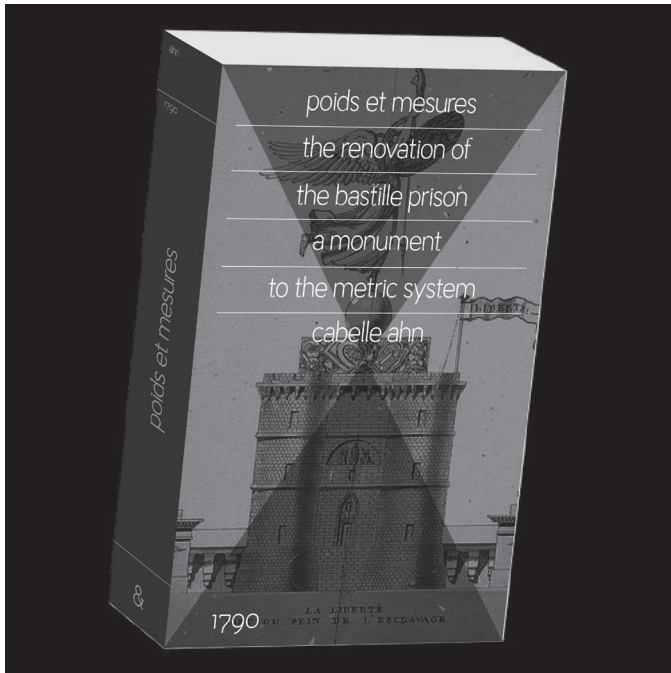
Print-capitalism is a notion seldom considered in the discourse and historiography of graphic design in spite of its profound political consequences and its foundational status in relation to the discipline. Anderson attributes the birth of nationalist movements and struggles to the effects of the artifacts of print-capitalism (i.e. typography, books, pamphlets, newspapers, etc. as they become commodities in capitalism).

These lead both to the marginalization of local habits and cultures of writing while centralizing and standardizing single vernacular script languages, as well as to the cultivation of

popular national imaginaries that inspired national independence movements in the colonies (i.e. the American Revolution) and eventually in the metropolises themselves (i.e. the French Revolution.)

## ARCHITECTURE

*Poids et Mesures: The Renovation of the Bastille Prison  
—A Monument to the Metric System*  
by Cabelle Ahn



A cadre of so-called “revolutionary architects” produced speculative proposals to replace the monumental symbols of the *ancien régime*.

Though it was never actualized, perhaps the most symbolically charged was the proposal to renovate the Bastille Prison into a monument for the new metric system.

Quoting Gianfranco Poggi, James C. Scott reminds us that for the French Revolutionaries, “The centuries old dream of the masses of only one just measure has come true! The Revolution has given the people the meter.”

The public embodiment of the liberal ideals of the bourgeois state, in the physical formal artifacts of the metric system (i.e. *le mètre étalon*, the standard meter as an empirical objective thing), challenges designers to consider the ideological dimensions of material and form.

This monument to the new system of standards (a “social pact”) would have commemorated the legalization of an ostensibly objective system of weights and measures in France.

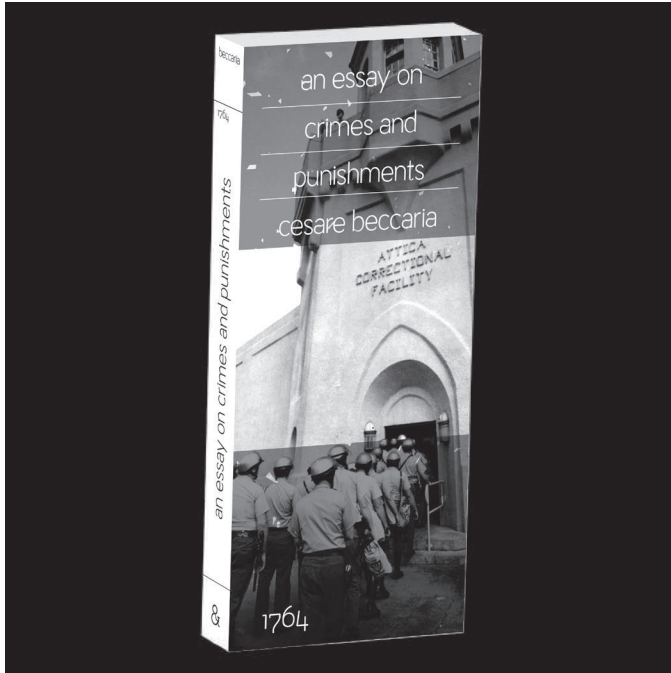
On May 8, 1790, the National Assembly of the nascent French Republic tasked the Academy of Science with the creation of a system of weights and measures to be based on units derived from impersonal, natural phenomenon.

Five years later, on April 7, 1795, the Assembly moved to officially adopt *le mètre*, giving rise to the modern day metric system.

CHRIS LEE

LAW

*An Essay on Crimes and Punishment*  
by Cesare Beccaria



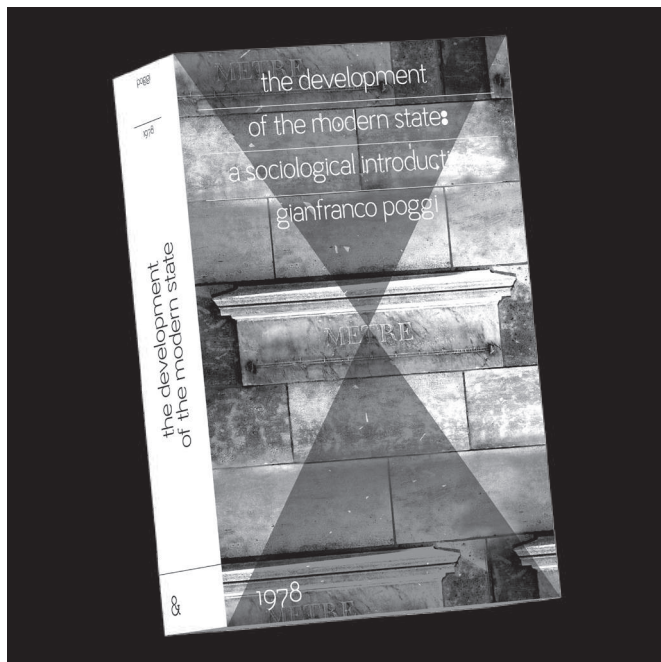
Cesare Beccaria: “These laws must be published, so that everyone has access to them; what is needed is not oral traditions and customs, but a written legislation which can be ‘the stable monument of the social pact,’ printed texts available to all: ‘Only printing can make the public as a whole and not just a few persons depositories of the sacred code of laws.’

(Foucault, 108)

## STRIKE AND RIOT

## STATECRAFT

*The Development of the Modern State: A Sociological Introduction*  
by Gianfranco Poggi



“61 Gianfranco Poggi, *The Development of the Modern State: A Sociological Introduction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978), p. 78. For all the advance in human rights that equal citizenship carried with it, it is worth recalling that this momentous step also undercut the intermediary structures between the state and the citizen and gave the state, for the first time, direct access to its subjects.

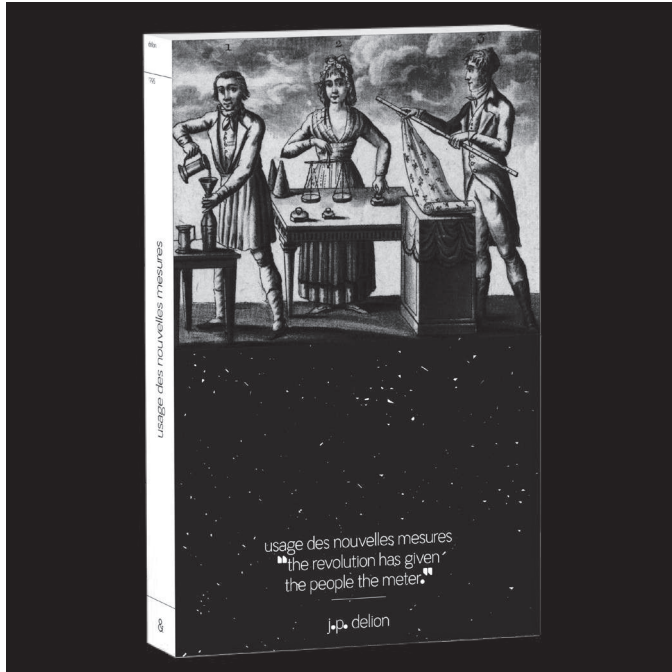
Equal citizenship implied not only legal equality and universal male suffrage but also universal conscription, as those mobilized into Napoleon’s armies were shortly to discover. From the heights of the state, the society below increasingly appeared as an endless series of nationally equal particulariers with whom it dealt in their capacity as subjects, taxpayers, and potential military draftees.”<sup>3</sup>

CHRIS LEE

EDUCATION/LAW

*“The Revolution Has Given the People the Meter.”*

by J.P. DeLion



Prior to the legalization of the metric system in France, a plethora of standards of weights and measures were used to govern commerce and taxation. The vulnerability to the arbitrary application of traditional measures and the practical problems of coordination tended to benefit the landlords. This was one of the grievances that helped foment revolutionary sentiment in France.

As a counter-measure, the Revolutionary government commissioned the French Academy of Sciences to develop a rational system whose units would be derived from impersonal, natural phenomenon in an effort to trivialize the traditional privileges of the landlords. For example, the meter was established as a fraction (1/10,000,000) of the distance from the Equator to

the North Pole, and the kilogram was decreed to be 1/100th of a cubic meter of water at 4°C. This tautology of form would be immune to manipulation and arbitrage. The landlord's prerogative to define the exchange standards was vested instead in objective phenomenon—it was literally objectified in the *mètre des Archives* and the *kilogramme des Archives*.

The new metric system's legitimacy was thus decreed by the legislative power of the newly formed bourgeois nation-state. The legitimacy of standards would no longer be premised on the infallible divine right of the ruler (i.e. Hammurabi's Stele), but instead by the infallibility of (a fraction of) the distance between the Equator and the North Pole and its physical/graphic representation in the state archive.

What emerges is the modernist disdain for the traditional, and a desire for rational, dispassionate forms ostensibly immune to bias. Processes of knowledge production and validation thus privilege that which can be sensed inter-subjectively (literally, objectively, empirically).

Legal ethics and notions of justice follow suit. Claims made from outside the modernist epistemological regime are considered to be dubious, unaccountable, and potentially invalid because they are illegible to rational modes of governance.



CHRIS LEE

GRAPHIC DESIGN/CONSENSUS  
*The Banality of Excel: Orthography,  
Grids, Borders, Colonization*  
by Jeff Thomas



This book addresses formalism beyond its dismissal as the shallow domain of surface. It aims to regard design through what anthropologists might call “thick descriptions,” and make its forms available to substantive analysis. It considers *the grid*, which has been left largely under-scrutinized by graphic designers in spite of being central to their practice, and outlines some reference points for its critical examination.

It threads together a number of examples that range from accounting to urbanization, cadastral maps, data visualization and typographic style. The discursive unity upon which these references are premised is their common status as what Johanna

Drucker calls forms of “visual knowledge production.”

What is at stake in “thickening” the conversation around the grid is the recognition of graphic design’s political consequentiality by asking what role it plays in processes of management and state-making. It calls out many of the assumptions practitioners reproduce in our work and pedagogy with regards to ideas about fact, normativity, order, correctness, and perhaps even justice.

It argues that the forms we use are coextensive with the horizon of what is thinkable and sayable. These forms reproduce values and discourses, and we use them to coordinate thought and practice—in short, they become standards with which we communicate.

Indeed, these standards are by definition made banal the very moment they become conventional. And in a world saturated with inert forms of structural violence and injustice, we require tools to destabilize and undo the discipline of existing forms of what Michel Foucault calls “power-knowledge.”

CHRIS LEE

NOISE

*The Continuous Monument*



(...)

Side A

The CFA	10'00"
Gabe's	1'20"
Faculty 45	2'30"
Tony	3'33"

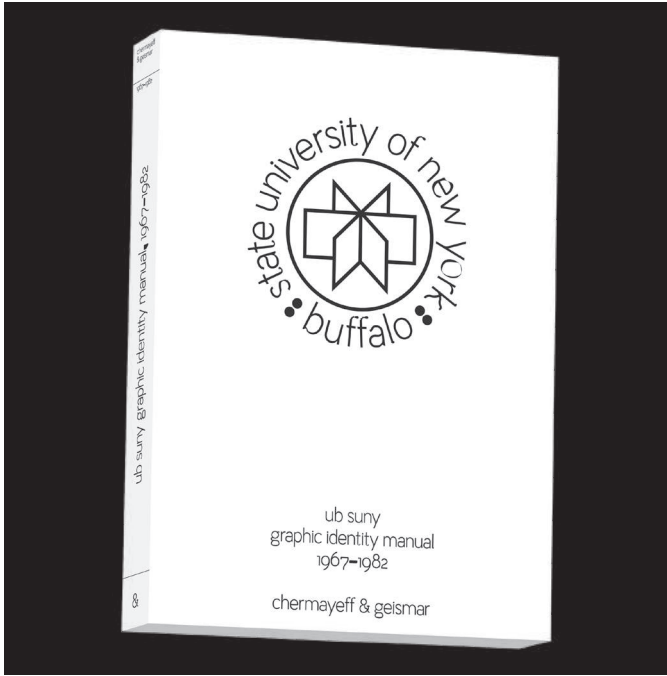
Side B

Thecontinuousnonevent	∞
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## STRIKE AND RIOT

### GRAPHIC DESIGN/CONSENSUS

*UB SUNY: Graphic Identity Manual, 1967–1982*  
by Chermayeff & Geismar



“A new seal for State University of New York at Buffalo was designed in 1967 by Ivan Chermayeff and the New York firm of Chermayeff & Geismar Associates, and first used at the inauguration of President Martin M. Meyerson on May 29, 1967.

The seal represents a radial cluster of books which symbolizes the integration of knowledge achieved through the diverse faculties of the university incorporated into a silver medallion of office.”<sup>4</sup>

Typical of modernist graphic design, this new corporate identity is a departure from the Latinate style that characterized previous (and subsequent) iterations of the university’s graphic identity.

CHRIS LEE

It is a thoroughly dispassionate form, appropriate to a modern university abandoning the baggage of tradition. Its aesthetics echo the brutalist architecture of UB SUNY's North Campus, which would eventually house the experimental colleges.

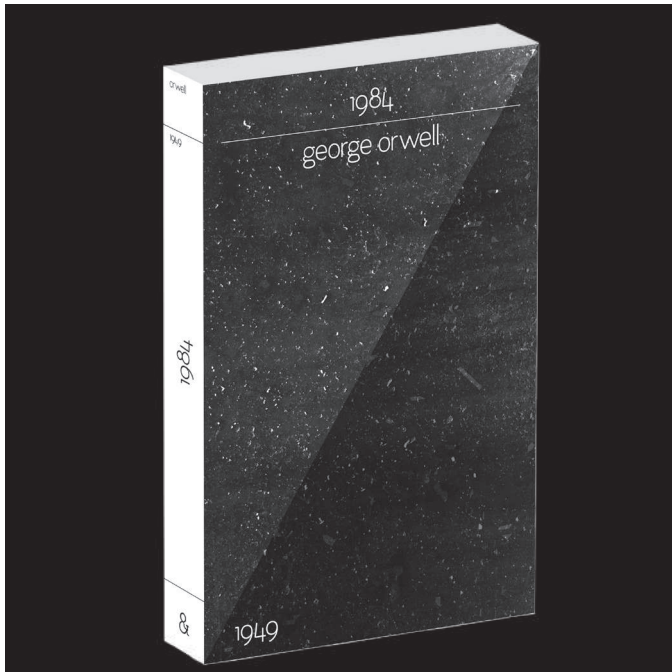
Shortly after the decommissioning of this identity in 1982, the experimental colleges were shut down and their faculty absorbed into the existing departments.

The logo also resembles the structure of a panopticon.

SOCIAL ORTHOPEDICS/FICTION

*1984*

by George Orwell



(...)

## STRIKE AND RIOT

Winston works in the Records Department of the Ministry of Truth. He is a kind of scribe, working for a publishing apparatus of the Party. He is a worker who fabricates historical documents that align with the Party's ideological agenda. Winston secretly hates the Party. He struggles to manifest his individuality and desire in spite of it. He writes a diary, he falls in love. To Winston, these are the only things that are true. He will learn however that truth is a matter of power. His resistance is suppressed—the omnipresent gaze of Big Brother and the Party's official language, “newspeak,” and the practice of “doublethink” make it unthinkable, unsayable, unknowable, and *ungood*.

## BORDER THINKING

*Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections  
From Eurasia and the Americas*

by Madina V. Tlostoanova & Walter D. Mignolo



(...)

What is knowledge production and theory that has not been authorized by the institutions of the colonial matrix of power? Where does it come from and who is making it? How is it lived?

“Border thinking is the epistemology of the exteriority; that is, of the outside created from the inside” (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006:206)  
“You have to go to the reservoir of the ways of life and modes of thinking that have been disqualified by Christian theology since the Renaissance and which continue expanding through secular philosophy and the sciences, for you cannot find your way out in the reservoir of modernity (Greece, Rome, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment). If you go there, you remain chained to the illusion that there is no other way of thinking, doing and living.”<sup>5</sup>

“Consider, on the one hand, knowledge in the modern and imperial European languages and—on the other hand—Russian, Arabic and Mandarin. The difference here is imperial. However, they are not just different. In the modern/colonial unconscious, they belong to different epistemic ranks. ‘Modern’ science, philosophy, and the social sciences are not grounded in Russian, Chinese and Arabic languages. That of course does not mean that there is no thinking going on or knowledge produced in Russian, Chinese and Arabic. It means, on the contrary, that in the global distribution of intellectual and scientific labour, knowledge produced in English, French or German does not need to take into account knowledge in Russian, Chinese and Arabic”

STRIKE AND RIOT

FUGITIVITY/POETRY

*The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study*  
by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten



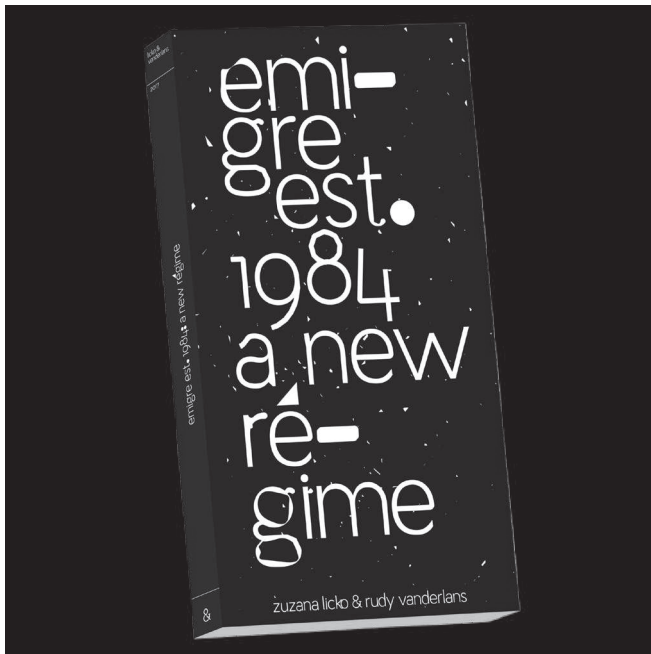
“Refusing to be for or against the university and in fact marking the critical academic as the player who holds the ‘for and against’ logic in place, Moten and Harney lead us to the ‘Undercommons of the Enlightenment’ where subversive intellectuals engage both the university and fugitivity: ‘where the work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still black, still strong.’ The subversive intellectual, we learn, is unprofessional, uncollegial, passionate and disloyal. The subversive intellectual is neither trying to extend the university nor change the university, the subversive intellectual is not toiling in misery and from this place of misery articulating a ‘general antagonism.’”<sup>6</sup>

“Ruth Wilson Gilmore: ‘Racism is the state-sanctioned and/or



extralegal production and exploitation of group differentiated vulnerabilities to premature (social, civil and/or corporeal) death.’ What is the difference between this and slavery? What is, so to speak, the object of abolition? Not so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society. The object of abolition then would have a resemblance to communism that would be, to return to Spivak, uncanny.”<sup>7</sup>

TYPOGRAPHY/HISTORY  
*Émigre est. 1984: A New Régime*  
by Zuzana Licko



*émigre, est. 1984*, is widely regarded as pioneering of the (so-called) post-modern graphic design tendency. The work of *émigre*, which represents some of the first “native” digital typefaces (fonts created, produced and distributed solely in

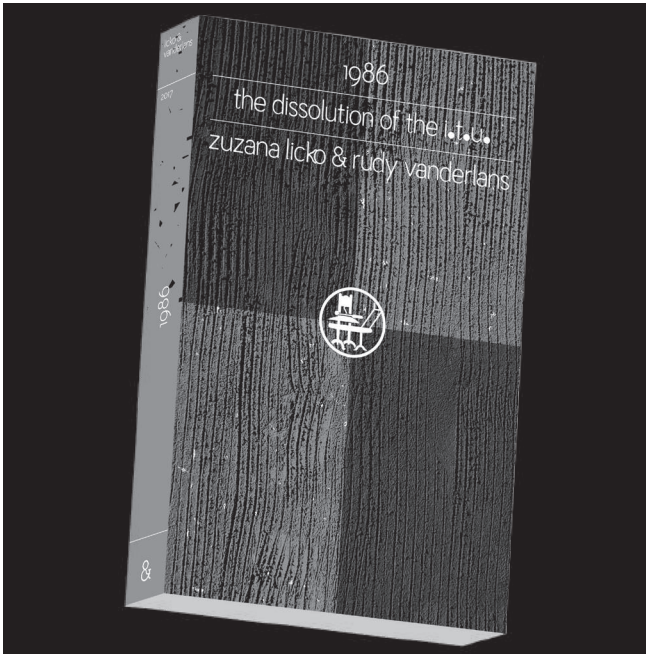
digital environments), signals an abandonment of modernist tendencies and principles of graphic form. It also represents the redundancy of whole cohorts of typographical labor that supported the production of typographic design in the previous labor régime, collapsing and intensifying these within the contemporary figure of the graphic designer.

TYPOGRAPHY/HISTORY

*1986: The Dissolution of the I.T.U.*

by Johanna Gitelman

In its heyday, the International Typographical Union was the larg-



est and most powerful trade union in North America—its members held the power to stop the presses and halt communications. Digital technology and automation triggered the atomization of communication labor and meant the gradual dissolution of the union. Graphic designers today inherit this tragedy as a precondition of their labor.

1. Eunsong Kim, "Poetry Without Poets," in *Forms of Education: Couldn't Get a Sense of It*, eds. Aeron Bergman, Alejandra Salinas and Irena Boric. (Seattle: INCA, 2016), 26–49.
2. Société Réaliste, "FUTURA FRAKTUR," in *Pre-specifics: Access XI!*, (Eindhoven: Onomatopée, 2010), 111–114.
3. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 365.
4. "University Visual Identity," University at Buffalo Libraries, accessed May 31st, 2017, <http://library.buffalo.edu/archives/ubhistory/seal.php>
5. "Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking, and Epistemic Disobedience," Walter D. Mignolo, accessed May 31st, 2017, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0112/mignolo/en>
6. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 9.
7. Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 42.

# INFREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## *Evening Class*

We are often contacted to contribute to discussions about self-organised education, or to clarify our own learning environment. The frequency of such requests has assured us that others are seeking out alternatives to institutional education. This interest seems most obviously to be borne out of frustration with expensive and depoliticised art schools. Ironically, the vast majority of these requests come from individuals engaged in research from within a fee-paying institution.

We are constantly struggling to find a suitable output for reflecting on our self-organised status that does not essentialise or reduce the multitude of voices and personal opinions within our group. We have compiled a list of Infrequently Asked Questions: perhaps it will be useful to those considering working collectively.

With thanks to Eleni Papazoglou.

\*\*\*

- \* Should education, whether it's self-organised or institutional, be lifelong?
- \* Is it predominantly about education?
- \* Is it accessible?
- \* How accessible should it be?
- \* What are your aims as a group?
- \* Is it based on trust?
- \* What's the ideal group size?
- \* Is the group diverse?

## INFREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- \* Can you be in institutional and self-organised education simultaneously?
- \* How much should you engage with institutions?
- \* How much should you engage with other self-organised groups?
- \* Are you all graphic designers?
- \* Is it open to others outside the field of graphic design?
- \* Why do so many of you have teaching jobs?
- \* What values are you teaching when you teach? Are you inherently less conservative than others in academia just because you are thinking about these things, or...
- \* Are you becoming the new establishment?
- \* “Do you have striking images of work you have made for clients?”
- \* How could the structure be better?
- \* How do you fund yourselves?
- \* Can you make real changes in each others lives, ie institute a basic income, a 4 day working week?
- \* Is it possible to receive funding that does not compromise how your group operates?
- \* At what point would you be selling out?
- \* Is it important to continually question the format/structure?

## EVENING CLASS

- \* How do you stop things like time and maintenance becoming new currencies?
- \* How do you accommodate different views within the group?
- \* Can you pass on the structure to others?
- \* Do you force each other to commit?
- \* Can people participate remotely?
- \* Do you invest in longer term things, ie an archive, a library, a building?
- \* Should you become a formalised co-operative?
- \* Do you only exist because of particular circumstance (location, finance, struggles, personalities)?
- \* Would you continue if you were financially stable and emotionally satisfied?
- \* Is it frustrating or unsuccessful when just a few people attend a public event you have organised?
- \* How does financial and emotional insecurity affect the group and individuals within it?
- \* Is there a hierarchy within your group? Does it change?
- \* Do those that have been around for longer have more responsibilities and input? Should they?
- \* Are new members welcome? Should it grow?
- \* Should it include traditional educational formats?

## INFREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- \* Do people who organise the most get the most out of it?
- \* Is there constant negotiation of your own position within the group?
- \* What are the subtle traits that distinguish you as an organisation rather than a group of friends? Do you see a clear difference?
- \* What do you see as remuneration, if any, for work commissioned or self-initiated?
- \* What happens when people leave?
- \* Would you know when it had been completed?
- \* How would you decide to end it?
- \* When is the next meeting?



## EVENING CLASS

Evening Class is a self-organised learning environment where participants cultivate common interests, develop research and collectively decide the class's programme from our space in Poplar, London.

Evening Class responds to the need for autonomous support networks within the cultural industries. We see long-term learning and open exchange as a necessary reaction to rising tuition fees and the shrinking of non-commercial spaces and activities in the UK.

Our programme takes the form of workshops, public talks and debates, reading groups, radio broadcasting, performances, walks, and social activities. We work in collaboration with other groups and activist organisations in order to contribute to wider discourses.

The group has been active since 2016 and is currently made up of fifteen people. We meet on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, and collectively decide the class's direction, through subject-specific working groups, monthly meetings, rotating admin tasks, and voting using Loomio.

Evening Class began with the intention to select twelve people from a group of applicants who responded to an open call. However, the initiators realised that, in order to challenge the selection processes of conventional education, the selection procedure should be removed. Joining Evening Class remains open to all and everyone is welcome.

Evening Class is a self-supporting, not-for-profit group. The group's expenses fluctuate in accordance with the group's needs. At the moment they amount to £35 a month each for rental of space. Please visit our website if you would like to donate or find out more: [evening-class.org](http://evening-class.org)

A CONVERSATION IN, OFF,  
BETWEEN, FROM, WITH

*The Ventriloquist Summerschool*

The Ventriloquist Summerschool is a platform founded and organised by *Kristina Ketola Bore* and *João Doria*. The first edition of the summer school took place in 2015 and usually takes the form of a one-week situation that seeks to induce a discussion about the role of voice, discourse and accountability in artistic practices. It invokes graphic design as a field of mediation between diverse fields of knowledge such as visual arts, architecture, writing and music.

Alongside the summer school format, TVSS also includes a radio (The Ventriloquist Radio) and a publishing house and print studio (The Ventriloquist Press). TVSS has also appeared as a public conversation platform, in collaboration with institutions through fairs, talks and workshop formats, aimed at considering the meaning of voice and discourse in artistic practices.

Each edition consists of a set of parallel workshops, a public program and a closing event with varying formats, negotiated by the group and in response to each year's theme (2015: Voice; 2016: Illusion). Featured tutors have included Harry Gassel, Kristian Henson, Eric Hu, Nicole Killian, Sean Kuhnke, Laura Pappa, Andrea Pinochet, Anu Vahtra, with a public programme consisting of Jan-Robert Henriksen, Tableau Paper (Henia Gamborg Kjørsvik, Jakob Landvik and Tove Sivertsen), Susanne Winterling and Chrissel+Electra.

In our work with The Ventriloquist Summerschool we are very interested in the conversation as method. It grows from and is intrinsically linked to voice, which was a starting point for us when conceiving the school. Therefore this text is taking the form of a conversation between the two organisers of the summer school: *João* and *Kristina*.

*Kristina*: When thinking of the The Ventriloquist Summerschool (TVSS) in today's climate, I am increasingly seeing it as taking on a role that is beyond our initial intention. This became very

evident I think, when we participated at The Alternative Art School Fair (Pioneer Works) last year together with around 50 other education initiatives. More precisely, how the summer school sits in a larger discussion taking place around education concerning alternative pathways for knowledge exchange, alternatives to increasingly focused quantified learning models and schools dominated by a drive for tuition fees, as well as education as a tool for protest. Our intention with the school – even though not springing out from these ideas – can be seen as taking a similar trajectory in the sense that it started out as a place for us to discuss, to come together, and as an alternative to what was already there. That it can be seen in a lot of different lights also demonstrates one of my favorite things about TVSS: Its ability to be flexible, encompass different meanings and subjective views.

So to start at the beginning, we founded the summer school because we were looking for a platform for discussions. We came back to Oslo after studying abroad and found that there was no space for the type of conversations that we had enjoyed while doing our graduate degrees. So we figured, then we make one.

*João:* I remember the two of us changing emails back in 2014 about the “Designer as...” type-construct and thinking of Ventriloquism (hence Designer as Ventriloquist) as a very apt metaphor which we ended up internalizing, finding our own packaging to it and linking it very much to the exercise of one’s own voice from multiple and constantly alternating perspectives – that of being manipulated, that of manipulating, that of speaking through. During the Responsive Programming panel which we held together with Sheila at the AASF/Pioneer Works we were prompted to review the implications of that metaphor. There was a component of puppet-making coming through the use of this word that was (and still is) totally outside our intention but it really made us think of how certain format choices we previously made could still reinforce prevalent student-teacher

relationships hierarchy-wise whereas we have worked on eliminating that structure and keep on aiming for more egalitarian models. I feel like the work we're trying to do at the Rogaland Kunstsenter Independent Study Program is an active iteration of that conversation both regarding what we'll do with our public talk and the workshops you and I will individually teach. They now aim at relying a lot more on chance, improvisation and participation than anything we did before.

*Kristina:* Lately I have been thinking a lot about what type of historical roots we are evoking in terms of radical pedagogy – both when it comes to the school, but also in terms of what I'm interested in when it comes to my own practice. I think we both look up to some of the people who were driving forces behind movements happening in the late 1960s and early 1970s – specifically Sheila Levrant de Bretteville and the work that she together with Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro did with the Woman's Building in Los Angeles. The idea of learning together, and the pedagogical approach of Paulo Freire of learning as part of experiencing (which I believe inspired Sheila a great deal), I think in many ways define a lot of the ways we have gone about constructing the summer school.

*João:* Totally, but not exclusively, I have to say. In my head (in hindsight) I believe that on the first two editions of the TVSS we were positively emulating the work of people we deeply admire and that have made a mark on our perspectives along the way as a way to find our own way (don't know if you agree about it – I don't mean to sound reductive but I do want to be critical about the specifics of what you and I bring to the table in the bigger picture of that discussion on pedagogy.)

That goes for pedagogical strategies, for the references and themes chosen for our workshops. I remember a conversation with Laura (Pappa) at the end of the 2015 edition, where I told her I was very impressed about how I perceived her more as

a regent/maestro/conductor and how naturally it looked like her group owned their own dynamics and responded with very personal work when it comes to GD outputs but especially about how they bonded socially in a way that I could tell it was connected to her pedagogical approach.

In that same year, I spent all my effort on one-to-one meetings for how impressed I still was that at Yale I could sit with any faculty in my studio for hour-long sessions, so many of them, talking as much about life as about work and how I felt like that was the best I could give. On the second year, though, I changed the format towards co-tutoring with Andrea (Pinochet), building a physical space of ours and a constellation of things to live in that space while we would live in it too. I think we should do an exercise and build a family tree of what the work done so far has touched upon and responded to.

*Kristina:* I see the importance in teaching – not as a power-move in regards to enforcing hierarchies, but rather challenging the ones already in place. I believe there is great power in coming from a place of ideals and then trying to work towards that.

Both when working with the summer school and when teaching the rest of the year, I try to consider how a workshop can be a mutual learning experience that is not only about me getting a particular result, but finding out together with the participants what our goal will be and how we will evaluate it. Last year for the workshop I did, we read and discussed two pieces by Martinican writer and philosopher Édouard Glissant. I believe his concept of Poetics is always relevant, particularly in teaching – poetics meaning in this case the relational ways of using language; telling, listening, connecting. Coming off Glissant: Language, or the relation we establish through it, helps us make the non-specific concrete and can be used to renegotiate current and future conditions.

*João:* Today I had a conversation with Maziar (Raein) and we were talking about how do we genuinely invite opposition and dissent in a way that it doesn't get co-opted as part of the range but mostly towards helping us to gain awareness of our own limitations and being able to enjoy each other's contributions from an experiential and transformative standpoint rather than just shaking hands and saying "oh yes we're different". I had this smile in my mind because it was very much the same conversation we had with Sheila and Susanne (Winterling) except that they all happened in different spaces and Maziar was the only one not to reference Mr. Robot. The conversation went about how to be deliberately disrespectful of the structures in place but actively invested in this disrespect (rather than dismissive or indifferent) so we'd have no other option than finding our own way, and together. I feel like we have a long way to learn from theater and contemporary dance when it comes to that.

Your comment on evaluation reminded me of us formulating the RKS/ISP talk. We did many rounds (and it was providential that Henrik (Austad) showed up at the studio to help us go away from our own heads.) We want to establish markers so we can negotiate conditions and yet we don't know for sure if those markers are potentially killing the fun or the spontaneity. Still it seems useful from a research standpoint but there must be a more fluid way and I think we're both after learning what are the elements that facilitate that fluidity.

*Kristina:* For me a very exciting aspect of the summer school is also the network that it has generated. We see that the people that come to the school remain friends, that some of them decide to make projects together and that many of them stay in touch and continue their friendship. I loved how Sam Panter (2016) created a project at Cranbrook as part of Helen Ip's (2016) graduation, that for me is a very specific outcome of the school. I just did jury work at the Estonian Academy (where I also teach) where Indrek Sirkel is programme director for the

graphic design department. Indrek was a guest tutor at the 2016 edition, and on the jury with me was Nicole Killian, who was a participant on the 2015 edition and a tutor for the 2016 edition, as well as Laura Pappa who taught in the first edition of the summer school (S/O Communication Observation Group!). Again, that is a very concrete thing that have come from us coming together for a week in Oslo in summer. However, the more abstract and non-specific is the friendship and acquaintances – I have met so many wonderful people through the school, both people from Oslo, Norway and abroad, and I think that both you and I, João are interested in the communal and how work and working can be an inclusive activity in this sense. The summer school has become a place for making connection, both through practice and through the personal. It has made me really consider and try to articulate what relating to other people can mean in terms of making work together, and how friendships can be a positive part of practice. I see this as being very connected to the conversation as method and medium and creating spaces that feel safe enough for people to exchange knowledge and question current situations.

*João:* The communal has been a recurring conversation topic for us and in many scales and timeframes. For a long time I felt like the only relevant thing we were doing with TVSS was getting people together because great things get lost in the gaps between graduating/setting up a studio/getting a job/moving away and all those post-school events at any level. While organizing the summer school we alternate between worrying as much about concepts as about how much toilet paper is left or how will we warm up lunch now that we broke the cooktop (sorry Grafill.)

To me that is very tightly connected to us deliberately choosing tutors that we consider to be our friends, living similar life moments (and of course doing work that moves us) plus sending the word around the networks and channels that we have,



refusing to invite already established professionals or charging a participation fee given that education in Norway is free. That places a constraint on us to the point we couldn't make the 2017 edition because we literally got no grants. Overriding those conditions to me would have really negatively impacted our core beliefs and certainly break the chain between the participants over time therefore breaking the community.

There are many pitfalls in those ideas: the uncertainty of grants, the potential formation of a clique over time, the creation of a parallel circuit to the regional (rather than the integrated one as we want but seriously why the fuck we get more applications from abroad than Norway?), the failure to reach beyond the Graphic Design community (in our defense our participant groups have always represented varied fields but GD is definitely the most prominent), the lack of continuity across the calendar year (well we're addressing that by taking a more platform-oriented approach with many spinoffs), the concentration in a certain age group (no matter how much we say that we're open to all ages), the concentration into a certain social display and so it goes. But we're learning!

# WHAT IS NATURE STUDY?

*Esther McManus*

## Introduction

We often think of teaching as a process of equipping people with the skills and information they need for life. However, the question of what that information will be, how it should be taught, and how students will deploy it in the future is contested. Schools can be both liberatory and marginalising; they introduce students to the dominant perspectives of their time, welcoming or excluding them along lines of class, race and gender. For many, school is an early introduction into the realities of social inequality, and a place where they learn to undervalue and undermine themselves.

If the school building functions as the site of social reproduction, sanctioning certain behaviours and ideologies, what alternatives might be found outside of it? This simple premise has been examined widely, but this pamphlet's focus is the work of two recent educators who have used outdoor methods to counter the stultifying status quo. Both leave the school building behind in pursuit of a critical, empowering education for all. The world outside the school becomes the site of potential.

Anna Botsford Comstock's teaching practices engage with the natural environment to counteract the regimentation of burgeoning industrialism and standardised scientific methods of the early twentieth century. Extracts from her *Handbook to Nature*

*Study* (1911) are reproduced in the first section of this pamphlet, presenting an approach which simultaneously values rational scientific methods and personalised, ethical interactions with nature.

In the second section, Anthony Fyson & Colin Ward's *Streetwork* (1973) looks to the urban environment to challenge social hierarchies and student disconnection with civic life. As Education Officers at the Town and County Planning Agency in 1970s Britain, they advocated teaching in the townscape, at a time when over 90% of students were taught in urban schools. *Streetwork* envisaged young people as positive resources for their communities, through developing the habit of observation, evaluation, and questioning decisions in the environment.

While their ideologies differ in several respects, Comstock and Fyson & Ward's approaches have much in common. At their core, both desire to escape the confines of the school building to transcend structural or psychological barriers to learning.

Both texts express a common desire to minimise the hierarchies of the school: between teacher and student, and between the school and daily life. Comstock saw the teacher/student binary as creating an unhelpful dynamic, suppressing students' ability to make discoveries for themselves. Working together on shared investigations, Nature Study teachers and students were able to exercise joint responsibility for the success of their activities, and share a role in the

production of meaning. The latter was particularly important for Comstock, as a way of countering the societal emphasis on depersonalised interpretations of nature. Fyson & Ward emphasised the unhelpful splitting of school and civic life, and believed that students should understand and participate in the social processes that take place around them. Using local sites outside the school they were able to introduce students to active ways of engaging with society and local issues that affected them.

Secondly, both texts present subject boundaries as perpetuating a narrow, skewed perspective of the issues being taught, denying their complexity and interconnectedness. Comstock considered these rigid subject boundaries to reduce human experience into its constituent parts, at the cost of a more holistic understanding of the world. Far from being natural or neutral, these artificial divisions serve to elevate or eliminate areas of knowledge or experience from the curriculum. In the introduction to *Streetwork*, Ward states "I am convinced that the best environmental work being done is in the primary schools, mercifully free from the vested interests of subject division." Both texts sought to understand the implications of subject division and categorisation in their own time, and were eager to facilitate the possibility for alternatives.

Finally, both texts share a common strategy of studying the local and familiar, insisting that study should start with what pupils are interested in and affected

by. In these texts, the aim of schooling is to develop the students' capacity to identify their interests and enable them to create new knowledge for themselves, relevant to their lives and surroundings.

The following texts are historically-situated responses to specific historical moments, but their approaches have relevance for today's UK context, which still exhibits many of the tendencies that were identified several decades ago. The hierarchies and divisions in our school structures and curricula are still presented as neutral (rather than reinforcing the status quo), and they enforce biases in our education system which can persevere unchallenged into adult life. These texts will be of use to the teacher, activist, artist, civil servant, parent and student; and they help us realise that these different roles cohabit in our own identities. The work of Comstock and Fyson & Ward is presented here, in their own engaging and practical styles, to inform and inspire contemporary educators within and outside of conventional schooling.



Anna Botsford Comstock  
Handbook of Nature Study

*The practice of Nature Study was described by one of its advocates, Louis Agassiz, as 'an American habit': an approach that responded to the advances of industrialism, scientific classification and all-encompassing efficiency in early twentieth century America. The tension at the core of Nature Study mirrors American society's central dilemma at the time: secular, scientific methods were producing abundant new knowledge of the world, but it was up to individuals to produce new values and meanings in this ultra-rational modern society. In this climate, Nature Study sought a holistic, experiential approach, alongside the technological advances of its age.*

*Comstock is recognised as an early advocate of teaching Nature Study outdoors. While working for the New York State Department for the Promotion of Agriculture she planned and implemented a program of outdoor study throughout the state's public schools and later taught Nature Study at Cornell. For Comstock, the Nature Study method created a physical and cultural space for values other than regimentation to bloom, which impacted the experiences of both students and teachers.*

*An intense love of the natural world is expressed throughout Comstock's writing, and she places great value on experiences of pleasure outdoors. Her belief*

*that the "age of nervous tension" afflicting American society could be remedied by outdoor experiences, and their resulting perspectival shift gives her writings a spirituality uncommon in today's scientific texts. Importantly, this was not seen as incompatible with being a valued scientific voice of her time and a celebrated academic.*

*In her Handbook of Nature Study, Comstock emphasises that this approach is neither 'science' nor subordinate to it. As a method of teaching, it is equally concerned with cultivating students' imaginations and their aesthetic appreciation of sight and sound as with accurate, rigorous observation: Comstock's practical writings encourage the Nature Study teacher to support students in finding and articulating their own interests, which they can then build on independently with enthusiasm and increasing eloquence. She revels in the fact that "the nature study lesson is never finished", making it explicit that learning will last a lifetime, and that new knowledge and meaning is continually created for both teacher and student.*

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When and Why the Teacher Should Say  
"I Do Not Know"

In nature-study any teacher can with honour say "I do not know" ; for perhaps the question is as yet unanswered by the great scientists. But she should not let lack of knowledge be a wet blanket thrown



over her pupils' interest. She should say frankly, "I do not know; let us see if we cannot together find out this mysterious thing. Maybe no one knows it as yet, and I wonder if you will discover it before I do." For three years, I had for comrades in my walks afield two little children and they kept me busy saying "I do not know." But they never lost confidence in me or in my knowledge; they simply gained respect for the vastness of the unknown. The teacher, in confessing her ignorance and at the same time her interest in a subject, establishes between herself and her pupils a sense of companionship which relieves the strain of discipline, and gives her a new and intimate relation with her pupils which will surely provide a potent element in her success.

#### The Field Excursion

It is a mistake to think that a half day is necessary for a field lesson, since a very efficient field trip may be made during the ten or fifteen minutes at recess, if it is well planned. Certain questions and lines of investigation should be given the pupils before starting and given in such a manner as to make them thoroughly interested in discovering the facts. A certain teacher in New York State has studied all the common plants in the vicinity of her school by means of these recess excursions and the pupils have been enthusiastic about the work. The nature-study lesson should be short and sharp and may vary from ten minutes to a half hour in length. There should be no dawdling. If an outline be suggested for field ob-

ervation, it should be given in an inspiring manner which shall make each pupil anxious to see and read the truth for himself. The nature story when properly read is never finished; it is always at an interesting point, "continued in our next."

The half-hour excursion should be preceded by a talk concerning the purposes of the outing and the pupils must know that certain observations are to be made. For all field work, the teacher should make use of the field notebook, which should be part of the pupils' equipment.

#### The Field Notebook

A field notebook may be made a joy to the pupil and a help to the teacher. To make the notebook a success the following rules should be observed:

- 1) The book should be considered the personal property of the child and should never be criticised by the teacher except as a matter of encouragement; for the spirit in which the notes are made is more important than the information they cover.
- 2) The making of drawings to illustrate what is observed should be encouraged. A graphic drawing is far better than a long description of a natural object.
- 3) The notebook should not be regarded as a part of the work in English. The spelling, language and writing of the notes should all be exempt

from criticism.

- 4) As occasion offers, outlines for observing certain plants or animals may be placed in the notebook previous to the filed excursions so as to give definite points for the work.
- 5) No child should be compelled to have a notebook.

The field notebook is a veritable gold mine for the nature-study teacher to work in securing voluntary and happy observations from the pupils concerning their out-of-door interests. It is a friendly gate which admits the teacher to a knowledge of what the child sees and cares for. Through it she may discover where the child's attention impinges upon the realm of nature and thus may know where to find the starting point for cultivating larger intelligence and wider interest.

#### The Correlation of Nature-Study With Language and Art

Why do pupils dislike writing English exercises? Simply because they are not interested in the subject they are asked to write about, and they know that the teacher is not interested in the information contained in the essay. But when they are interested in the subject and write about it to a person who is interested, the conditions are entirely changed. A boy once said to me "I'd rather never go on a field-excursion than have to write it up for English," a sentiment I sympathised with keenly; ulterior mo-

tive is sickening to the honest spirit. But if that same boy had been a member of a field class and had enjoyed all the new experiences on this excursion, and if later his teacher had asked him to write an account of it, because she wished to know what he had discovered, the chances are that he would have written his story joyfully and with a certain pride that would have counted much for achievement in word expression.

The correlation of nature-study and drawing is so natural and inevitable that it needs never to be revealed to the pupil. At its best, drawing is a perfectly natural method of self-expression. Nature-study offers the best means for bridging the gap that lies between the kindergarten child who makes drawings because he loves to, and the pupil in the grades who is obliged to draw what the teacher places before him. It is through nature-study's method of drawing what interests the child that they retain and keep what should be an inalienable right, a graphic method of expressing their own impressions. Too much have we emphasised drawing as an art.

If nature-study is made a drill, its pedagogic value is lost. When it is properly taught, the child is unconscious of mental effort or that they are suffering the act of teaching. As soon as nature-study becomes a task it should be dropped; but how could it ever be a task to see that the sky is blue, or the dandelion golden, or to listen to the oriole in the elm!

Anthony Fyson and Colin Ward  
*Streetwork: The Exploding School*

*Throughout his life, Colin Ward's writings developed a pragmatic approach to anarchist values, which he applied to many aspects of civic life and public policy. His belief in mutual aid and self-help lent itself to a philosophy and practice of education, which was "directed towards the creation of self-governing communities and independent, autonomous individuals". Streetwork articulates an approach to education for the common good of society as a whole, which is not separate to that of the individual student. While Streetwork is highly practical in its outlook, it was presented as a polemic under the conviction that "there is not only a crisis of confidence in the school system; there is also a crisis of confidence in the wisdom of the decision-makers who shape our urban environment".*

*Fyson & Ward's Streetwork is introduced as "mainly concerned with the environmental education of the non-academic urban child—in other words the vast majority of the population". It outlines the critical necessity for an education which foregrounds citizenship and participation in environmental decision-making, and the urban environment is presented as the ideal site for this work. Rather than a bounded subject like 'environmental studies', their broad notion of 'environmental education' envisages "geography, history, English, maths...to be taught in a way*



*which seeks to enhance the pupil's understanding of, and concern for, their environment". Their belief that a study of 'environment' must take into account intersections of natural and human geography, social policy, and daily experience led them to advocate a curriculum of student engagement and collaborative assignments beyond the walls of the school.*

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#### The School Without Walls

The Parkway Education Program in the city of Philadelphia has been in operation for three years, supported and funded by the local education authority. Students are not hand-picked but are chosen by lottery from a waiting list of applicants from the eight geographically-determined school board districts of the city, who are in grades nine to twelve (i.e. ages 14-18) regardless of academic or behavioural background. There is no school building. Each of the eight units or 'communities' (which operate independently) has a headquarters with office space for staff and lockers for students. All teaching takes place within the community: the search for facilities is considered to be part of the process of education:

'The city offers an incredible variety of learning labs: art students study at the Art Museum, biology students meet at the zoo; business and vocational courses meet at on-the-job sites such as journalism at a newspaper, or mechanics at a garage... The Pro-

gram pays for none of its facilities, but instead looks for "wasted space", space which is maintained twenty-four hours a day, but is in use perhaps less than five or six of those hours. Students, then, going from class to class, will travel around the city (normally on foot). There is a student-teacher ratio of 16:1 and for every teacher a "university intern" is added to the staff.'

The Parkway Program claims that:

Although schools are supposed to prepare students for a life in the community, most schools so isolate students from the community that a functional understanding of how it works is impossible. Few urban educators now deny that large numbers of students are graduating from our urban secondary schools unprepared for any kind of useful role in society. Since society suffers as much as the students from the failures of the educational system, it did not seem unreasonable to ask the community to assume some responsibility for the education of its children.

We talk a lot today of the idea that the school premises and facilities represent a community resource that should be available beyond those within the statutory age range, and that others besides teachers have an educative function in it. But there is an important corollary to this eminently sensible point of view. Just as the school should be open to the community, so should the community be open to the

school. All the resources of the community are educational resources. It ought to be taken for granted that the school has a claim on the factories, warehouses, offices, transport depots, municipal departments, supermarkets and sewage plants of the town. As it is of course, so hermetically sealed are our educational institutions that schools seldom have recourse to the specialist facilities of other schools controlled by the same authority.

#### The Enquiring School

All these current tides of thought about the role of the school in its immediate neighbourhood are significant for the expectations we have of environmental education, its subject matter, its methods and the kind of exploration which the school makes of the environment. They are important above all for what we have learned to call the affective domain of education—where we are concerned with the attitudes and values which our students adopt. What do we want them to discover, think and feel about the built environment? Why does it matter?

I am not advocating a simple increase in the amount of local study. We must remember that there is a strong possibility that the urban pupil, by living in the school environment while many of his teachers commute from other districts, will already have learned more about the locality than the teachers will ever know. What is more, the pupil may not like what he knows. As Michael Storm wrote: “despite a consid-



erable experience of orthodox 'local study', school leavers are ill-equipped to understand the processes at work in their society." He suggests that the starting point should not be the question "what should people know about their locality?" but "what issues are currently alive in this area?" The approach is not problem-solving in the old sense (the creation of an artificial brain-teaser for classroom use only), it is concerned with real issues currently occupying the community. Controversy and conflicts of interest are the stuff from which an interesting and useful course of study may be built, and taking a local issue, preferably one being aired in the local press, and attacking it from whatever angle strikes some response from the class is an approach likely to succeed.

As educators, our aim should be preparing school children for their future roles as participators in environmental decision-making. There are public arguments in all our cities over planning issues; school is the right place to rehearse the individual's role in such controversies. It follows from this belief that we should support an increase in the social content of environmental courses. In contrast to much traditional fieldwork in rural areas, in the town it is human activities which are rightly centre of attention. Inevitably pupils working in this field will be as concerned with pressure groups and community action, and the mechanisms of decision-making as with the mere recording of land use. So fieldwork will be out of the school, but not always in the open air. Resources as varied as libraries, offices, cinemas, and the Town

Hall will be used. People will be interviewed, and the varied life of the town observed.

In this way, the school could become the Enquiring School, and its students local researchers who service the community with information on rents, traffic densities, current planning proposals, employment prospects, and so on. One of the discussion panels at the York Conference on Social Deprivation and Change in Education recommended that 'pupils ought, though problem-oriented community projects, to become involved in the actual problems of the local community. The results could be passed on to adults for appropriate action.'

The tragedy of much that passes for environmental education is that it flows like water off a duck's back from the ordinary pupil because it doesn't belong to his world or to the way he perceives and appreciates his environment. Environmental education is suspect unless it is linked, not with the official culture but with this unofficial culture—irreverent, boisterous and subversive as it usually is—because it is this which binds us to place, which gives us those subtle ties of concern for the *genius loci* which I take to be what environmental education is for: the neglected affective domain of educational objectives.

### Conclusion

The previous texts, and the books from which they are taken, each articulate a theory and practice for challenging social orthodoxies of their time. Leaving the school building behind offers potential for different ways of learning, through forming relationships with the local area and the people within it. These teaching methods, which place value on alternative practices and subject areas, enable students to have a broader range of experiences and imagine a society beyond the status quo. This expansion of what can be *imagined* is essential for inspiring and implementing genuine change, for individuals and broader society. Social change is necessary when the orthodoxies of a time are oppressive, stultifying or perpetuate inequality. The dominant social practices that Comstock and Fyson & Ward challenge in their work are still present today - I would suggest in a more exaggerated form - making the need for change undeniable. This conclusion will articulate some of these 'exaggerations' experienced in the contemporary UK context, alongside examples of teaching strategies which aim to challenge them.

Standardisation of the school curriculum has become more rigorous in recent decades, with increasing emphasis on grades as a measure of 'progress' and a narrowing of the subjects which are deemed valuable. This standardisation in both what is taught and how success is measured - for both teachers

and pupils - is an expansion of the rationalisation and categorisation that Nature Study and Streetwork sought to challenge.

In the UK, initiatives like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) measure 'success' of teachers and students via narrow sets of data, denying a broader picture of school life. In UK schools, increasing priority is given to STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths) with the intention of addressing skills shortages in British industry. A similar governmental initiative whereby all students are required to study the "Ebacc suite" of eight traditional academic subjects has led to the number of those studying social sciences and arts to decrease rapidly. While there is acknowledgment in the scientific community that maintaining rigid boundaries between STEM subjects is unhelpful, there is an increasing void between STEM subjects and the humanities rather than a loosening of *all* subject boundaries. These policies effectively reduce the perceived value of non-STEM or Ebacc subjects and deny suggestions that value can be found outside of exam results and quantifiable 'progress'. This removes the potential for a critical, creative approach to teaching, which Comstock and Fyson & Ward insist is compatible with (and necessary for) a rigorous, holistic education.

The diminishment of an education in the humanities and social sciences, and the increase in quantifiable

measures of success, has been discussed at length by advocates of imaginative, critical education such as Gayatri Spivak and Raymond Geuss. One strand of these arguments is typified in Geuss', "Can the Humanities Survive Neoliberalism?", which outlines how

"until very recently the Humanities were not about reaching "results" that could be formulated propositionally or mathematically, but rather were about learning to develop increasingly differentiated and sophisticated structures of perception, thinking, and reacting, about asking questions, about constructing and evaluating different points of view."

This holistic appreciation of the humanities can be extended to education in general, which has an ability to transform how we see, feel and develop our desires. Geuss believes that the humanities' historic function to help people "deal with themselves, their past, their world, and others in a free, less rigid, more satisfactory way" makes them an essential part of an education for a healthy, fair society.

This suggests that today's curricula would benefit from a loosening of subject boundaries and a broadening of understandings of 'progress', where STEM and Ebacc subjects - undeniably valuable - could be taught in creative and critical ways, supporting the development of the whole person. Comstock and Fyson & Ward believed that this complexity of



thought and plurality of value could be found out of school, where complexity and interconnectedness are experienced first hand. Streetwork methods enabled students to see how geography, history, economics and politics are intrinsically linked in public policy and decision-making. Comstock's methods presented love of nature and the experience of pleasure as inherently compatible with accurate observation and analysis, presenting value beyond the rational and quantifiable.

Similar strategies can be found more recently which echo the methods and ideologies of Streetwork and Nature Study. Jim Rose's *Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum* (2009) was commissioned in 2008 to recommend "what the curriculum should contain and how the teaching of it should change to foster children's different and developing abilities during primary years". Rose recommended cross-curricular teaching, with core subject disciplines reduced to six broad 'areas'. Not only would this tackle the 'curriculum overload' that gave "insufficient time (for) children to engage adequately with every subject required by law", but emphasised the benefits of teaching with an embedded complexity of concepts and skills. The *Independent Review's* use of innovative case studies highlighted schools which used cross-curricular methods to connect with other local schools and their local neighbourhoods, presenting practical strategies for implementing the recommendations.

Bournville Junior School, Birmingham, integrated music, geography and history into thematic 'learning journeys', comparing music from different epochs and places, introducing the importance of appreciating historical and local contexts. While respecting the valuable contribution that each subject brings to students' understanding, this approach demonstrates how subjects can strengthen and enhance each other when presented in combination. Equally, the multidisciplinary approach of these 'learning journeys' can be seen to weave national curriculum requirements with activities that develop students' familiarity with collaboration and interpersonal communication. Bournville Junior School's innovative curriculum was further supported by links with local secondary schools which have specialist music and language teaching, reaching beyond the boundaries and limits of the individual school.

The methods of Streetwork and Nature Study aimed to introduce students into the world around them, so they could actively participate in it. Fyson and Ward's accounts demonstrated how involvement in the socio-environmental issues of local neighbourhoods enabled school leavers to "speak out intelligently about the sort of 'progress' that lowers the quality of life in urban areas." Comstock believed that those who understood and developed an interest in their local flora and fauna would become 'staunch protectors' of it. Not only does this increased engagement improve the life of the individual, it assists in the production of an engaged, active citizenry, which is

able to understand and debate the major issues of their time and place. Recent writings by Anna Minton highlight the consequences of failing to equip people with an ability to participate in decision-making in their environment. In *Ground Control* (2012), Minton describes the overwhelming lack of public debate over the selling of public land to private companies in the UK, in contrast with similar examples in the US which provoked considerable public discourse. Her concern that “the failure to reflect the public interest...is a central aspect of the erosion of the public realm and consequent disengagement from politics” could be championed by teachers, whose curricula and teaching methods could be designed to counter this erosion.

Another of the *Independent Review's* case studies – De Havilland Primary School, Hatfield – engaged with a public invitation for ideas to rejuvenate a local square. The resulting study of the local environment led to the design, implementation and analysis of local surveys, model-building and design work, and presentations at local meetings to discuss the students' ideas. The project integrated key elements of the curriculum alongside experience of communication across different contexts and partaking in local decision making. Rose used the De Havilland case study to demonstrate that

“well-planned, cross-curricular studies...help children to better understand ideas about such important matters as citizenship, sustainable



development, financial capability and health and wellbeing...and provide opportunities across the curriculum for them to use and apply what they have learned from the discrete teaching of subjects."

This has much in common with Ward's educational philosophy, which ultimately advocated a school that was "no longer an isolated building surrounded by playgrounds and fences", but "a community facility, set among the shops and public buildings in the centre of a district". By allowing the community to be 'inextricably mixed', Ward believed that barriers to participation in all elements of civic life would be removed. Ward doesn't suggest that this will be an easy step for schools and communities to take, indeed he acknowledges that "it requires an immense effort to insert a school into the fabric of a community in this way". Yet his conception of anarchism inherently encourages and supports small, local experiments of this kind, which are possible to attempt at a local level, unlike sweeping national policies. Rose's recommendations supported these kinds of local experiments, whereby a reduction in the overall content of the primary curriculum provided individual schools with "considerably more scope for exploiting their local circumstances" and engaging with their neighbourhoods in meaningful ways.

It is worth noting that while Rose celebrated and encouraged a curriculum that was sympathetic to Nature Study and Streetwork practices, his recommen-

dations were swiftly disregarded after the Labour government was replaced by the coalition in 2010. As Education Secretary, Michael Gove launched another curriculum review in 2011 with the desire to craft a more 'empirical' and 'traditional' curriculum for primary and secondary education, leading to many of the changes in student examination and the diminishment of arts subjects discussed in the introduction. In the current climate it may be necessary to look to Ward's advocacy of a 'school without walls', yet with the informal education sector taking the lead rather than formal schooling and the state. There is a place for students in the life of the community, as De Havilland Primary School was able to demonstrate. How can public life and decision-making be made more accessible for the majority of the community, including the young? Streetwork and Nature Study have offered some strategies to moderate the damage perpetrated by standardisation and uncritical education in mainstream schools. It is up to all members of a community - not just those working in schools - to be informed by these approaches and participate in understanding, debating and changing the times and places that they live in.

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE  
DESIGN SUMMER SCHOOL

*Francisco Laranjo*

The 2008 financial crisis and the draconian political decisions that followed, were bluntly felt in the UK with tuition fees suddenly tripling, and universities restructured to mirror the typical corporate governance. Precarity became the norm. For students with hefty loans, and faculty with redundancies and the rise of employment of young associate or visiting lecturers. This was lighter on the institution's budget and social obligations, while taking advantage of the contagious energy and commitment of recent graduates. Studio spaces and rooms are rented to each course to define the criteria for (financial) relevance and recruitment centres are positioned in strategic positions of the globe to maximise profit. Rebranding across universities was a consequence of substantial investment in marketing as business strategy, turning students into customers, and the transfer of the focus from education to brand equity.

## NEOLIBERAL ADVENTURES

With unsustainable fees preventing access to design schools, and universities transformed into super-companies, education could finally be consumerism.

Aligned with Silicon Valley's language and blind promise of technology as a bright, inevitable future, design education bought into the market imposed facilities and their worshiped environments. 'Smart Labs' are recurrent in design schools, with 'new media' and 'digital studios' still proudly displayed as a sign of progress and forward-thinking education. In each school, there's an oppressive battalion of iMacs, staged to impress both young students and their parents, ready to feed the Adobe monopoly, and increase the list of *skills* to include in the CV. Rankings and stats are the defining badges of merit spun by universities' PR teams, under constant pressure of accelerating and condensing learning processes. Intensive and immersive are mandatory keywords in the rush to optimise resources and present new course portfolios to the next batch of costumers waiting in line.

It is in this context that an increase of short courses, and especially the ‘design summer school’, became a popular format for the discipline. It was born out of easy profit. The emergence of low-cost airlines and the rise of Airbnb created the foundations for the exploration of alternatives or complements to academia. Summer is the obvious period of the year in which this can happen—an opportunity to practice a foreign language, hone a technical skill and visit a different country. In short, privileged tourism. Summer courses are far from new in US universities, particularly since the 1970s, with 2-week trips traditionally to Europe, especially historic and idyllic cities in Italy such as Rome, Florence or Venice, but also London and Paris. Inversely, European students fly either to New York or California, typically Los Angeles. This has always been, of course, a rare and expensive treat for elite students.

But since the mid-2000s, the summer school as an enjoyable and fun small business that could be a condensed experience of a semester, became a fashionable endeavour among designers. The idea of being able to spend two weeks with a handful of (sometimes) popular designers, talk to people with similar interests and walk in sandals and t-shirt all day in a beautiful setting is seductive. However, two weeks in the summer can be profoundly influential in a young designer’s education. They can be opportunities to question academia, learning processes, ideology, politics. In short, design itself. But in their majority, design summer schools are overpriced tourism gatherings with good weather and a nice view. Short descriptions and platitudes are recurrent, with alluring photos of their respective locations, while exhibiting the happiness of former participants. Eager to get ahead in their education, prepare for an upcoming academic year, develop their knowledge, rub shoulders with established designers, and have a crash course version of a semester, the packaging of a design summer school is clearly attractive for young students.

But while most summer schools can be seen as inoffensive design tourism, and short courses at universities a way to recycle and maximise resources, appeal to potential future students or genuinely attempt to provide an informed introduction to a subject, there are more dangerous capitalisations of the context described above. From courses shockingly titled *Home-less* to create VR environments, to schools that announce that they're "hacking design education", it's possible to see both an alienated co-option of political, social and cultural phenomena and self-absorbed, uninformed gestures appropriating tech language to sell technical workshops as revolution. The New Digital School' is an example of this, asking participants to develop their (digital) skillset—UI, UX, front-end development—through masterclasses and hopeful jargon, such as the title for their pedagogical model: 'The Student-Centered Learning Framework'. A title which one of its founders says that it "should be flashy, catchy and sexy."

Through expensive tuition fees and the generic techno-utopian language, the school can both boast the word 'new' in its title and 'hacking' in its subtitle while effectively doing the contrary of what they preach. This illustrates the essence of the neoliberal promise, without the burden of all the ethical, moral and political considerations and previous studies in pedagogy. Education is therefore not citizen-building, liberation, human development, emancipation and knowledge-sharing, but a private, semi-relaxed design spa for the market. Unknowingly or simply allured by the pressure of entrepreneurial conformity, both participants and initiators are victims of what the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire called "fear of freedom".

POSSIBLE SUMMERS

To undermine the importance of two weeks in the education of a young designer is dangerous. There is no such a thing as a neutral education process, as Freire's seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) importantly notes. It either conforms students to the logic of the dominant system or becomes the practice of freedom, working towards the transformation of society. Education is not something that designers can add as just another entry in their portfolio in the quest to ride design's next trend wave. Freire argues that "the oppressors are the ones who act upon the people to indoctrinate them and adjust them to a reality which must remain untouched." Therefore, adopting a banking model in which tutors will teach students how design and reality should be shaped, is reinforcing the status quo. It's the fear of realising one's own incompleteness or oppression. It's the fear of freedom.

There are, of course, recent schools that aim at challenging such propositions, forming a growing network of projects with shared agendas. Some examples include the educational projects Trojan Horse<sup>2</sup> and Hackers and Designers<sup>3</sup>. The first sets out to "explore the boundaries and preconditions that define the field in which architects and designers operate today", while the second, focus on a different theme each year dealing with the construction and distortion of reality. By committing to a critical questioning of reality and design's role/ potential in understanding and challenging it, projects like these share an agenda with Freire and work towards the development of alternative educational models. Hackers and Designers note that "tutors and mentors will become participants, participants become workshop leaders—everyone will be taken on the collective venture of shared responsibility, bringing in own expertise, urgencies and experience." Both are free.



It's possible to identify three main approaches in the design summer school. 1) a group of designers act as the specialists, teaching students their concept of design, adopting a typical brief and crit scenario predominantly focusing on form and technique, and often showing their own work as a possible example of success; 2) a group of politically-engaged designers visit the participants during a period of time, typically 8–14 days, to share their methods and their work, unified by a specific (popular) theme and adopting the banking model; 3) a group of designers come together to critically examine the conditions affecting and constructing reality as co-investigators, questioning design's role and often grounded on a specific context and relation to local communities.

Perhaps the summer can be a time to consider different points of view, not feed the European and North-American colonisation of design. Working on a laptop on Indesign overlooking a lake is not a spiritual retreat to charge creative batteries, it's just privileged illusion. If young students, recent graduates and professionals wanting to invest in continued learning refuse to partake in this playful exploitation of education, then it is possible to support and develop a pluriversal design education. Together, it's possible to not support oppressive models in flip-flops, but abandon the fear of freedom.

1. <http://thenewdigitalschool.com>
2. <https://trojanhorse.fi>
3. <https://hackersanddesigners.nl>

THE FIGURE OF THE JOKER AS A  
METAPHOR/METHOD FOR TEACHING

*Sophie Demay & Clara Degay*

“Games, especially those of the Theater of the Oppressed, are important because they are a synthesis of discipline and freedom, both necessary for life in society. Every game has its rules and requires discipline. It is not enough to split a group in two teams for them to play with each other. They must have, for example, a balloon. Whether this ball is small for the practice of table tennis or large, round or oval. Whether it is touched with the foot, with the hands, with a club or a stick. Whether it is thrown in a goal, over a net, into a hole or basket. Within these imposed limits, and while respecting them, the player must use his freedom to achieve objectives. Without discipline, there is no game; without freedom of creation, the game is boring. Likewise, without discipline, there is no social life; without freedom, there is no life. Games stimulate a form of solidarity necessary to the formation of a team. A team which will only be able to win if, between its players, there is collaboration and mutual aid. Games of the Theater of the Oppressed, have been in the majority, invented by myself [Augusto Boal] and by other practitioners or adapted from children games or games from different cultures. What is key is not their originality but their adaptability to our objectives. (...) Games are essential to the formation of a group, its flexibility, the promotion of the dialogue between its participants. In short, games promote communion.

In order for different people, who at times do not even know each other, to be able to work together, it is necessary that they play together and form the group. Nobody is obliged to do everything. Everyone must seek to be better than himself and not better than others. Without competition spirit. Without violence.”

– Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 1997

In his 1973 *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Augusto Boal (1931–2009), a Brazilian political activist, theater practitioner and

## THE FIGURE OF THE JOKER (...)

theorist developed a theatrical method for social and political change. First developed to fight the authoritarian regime of Brazil in the early 70's, the method since then has spread worldwide with Boal's exile in Europe. His techniques developed into different theatrical styles, each using a specific process to achieve a different result.

### THEATRE IMAGE

In Boal's method, the 'Image' is a key tool. In the Image, actors — those who are involved in collective acts of research, enquiry or learning about the world — construct a scenario from their lives which reflects an issue. The image is not only symbolic or representative of that situation. It is a consolidation of meaning in which the lives of the performers are deeply implicated in the image they produce.

### THEATRE FORUM

The 'Forum' is also a key environment in Boal's method. Any environment can work: a public square, a theatre stage, a classroom... A Forum aims at teaching people how to change their world. In this process, the actors or the audience — which Boal calls 'spect-actors' — can stop a performance, often a scene in which a character was being oppressed in some way. The spect-actor can suggest different actions for the actors to carry out on-stage. He can also be asked to come on stage and perform his own intervention.

### THE JOKER

Also central to Boal's method is the figure of the theatre director, the facilitator, the difficultator, which Boal's calls the Joker. He is the educator, the psychologist, the nurse — the midwife assisting in the birth of ideas and actions. He must himself decide nothing and suggests without imposing. He is a great

listener of the audience as well as of his actors. He is the *master of time*, who can pause a scene to allow time for reflection. He is an exciting narrator, who happily digresses to make a clarification. He notes, he points out. He accepts all propositions from his audience and supports its experiments. He behaves as a non-savant and makes no judgment or commentaries on the success of failure of an intervention. He is the Ignorant School Master who keeps relaying doubts back to the audience.

### THE JOKER AS METHOD

The Joker uses doubts, failures as vital tools for learning. The Joker explores the stage as a potential location of radical openness and possibility (bell hooks, 1996). The Joker's technique is a call for action, an invitation for those entering a space of education to take a position regarding their learning process. An invitation to take responsibility, in short.

\*\*\*

This contribution is part of Sophie Demay's ongoing research on the figure of the Joker. It is comprised of text extracts and exercises written by Augusto Boal, of symbols designed to study specific actions of spect-actors, and of research material encountered during this exploration. It is the result of a week-long collaborative research enquiry/workshop/exercise with Clara Degay, which took place in April 2018. The series of symbols they created (*Lexicon for a Documentation*) were used to document rehearsal sessions and representations of Forum Theatre, held at the Théâtre de l'Opprimé, in Paris. This theatre was set-up by Boal when in exile and still operates today. The texts are inspired by Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed and a conversation with Alain Ramirez Mendez, Boal's theatre administrator and actor. The exercises are selected from *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 1997.

THE FIGURE OF THE JOKER (...)



Animals as Actors: Circus: Dogs,  
Billy Rose Theatre Collection photograph file.



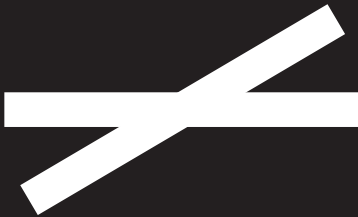
Games for Actors and Non-Actors,  
Augusto Boal, Game of Power.

## LEXICON FOR A DOCUMENTATION

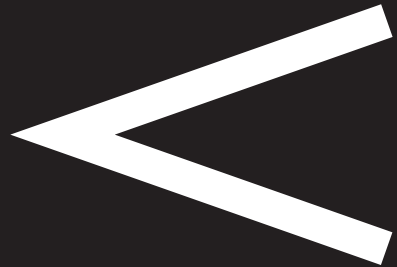
'In a Forum Theatre session, no one can remain a spectator in the negative sense of the word. It's impossible. All the spectators know that they can stop the show whenever they want. They know that they can shout 'Stop!' and voice their opinion in a democratic, theatrical, concrete way, on stage. Even if they stay on the sidelines, even if they watch from a distance, even if they choose to say nothing, that choice is already a form of participation (...)



The Joker initiates. He is a narrator, omniscient, master of time.



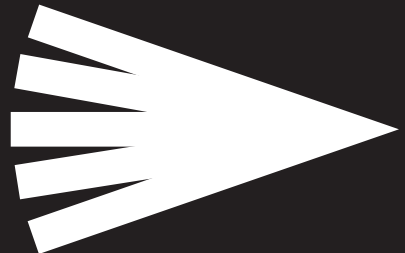
The Joker interrupts the narration. Clap.



The Joker suggests an action to the actors on stage.



The Joker supports the audience to identify a problem.



The Joker questions the audience to analyse a previous action.



The audience responds  
and offers an alternative.



The audience responds  
and improvises a role.



Rearrangement of a scene.



Resumption of a narration.



End of a narration.

In order to say nothing, the spect-actor must decide to say nothing – which is already acting. Generally, everybody has something to say and everybody ends up speaking, by entering into the game, especially if there is the motivation, the desire to express their opinion, their theory, their inclination, their wishes – and this expression is the scene. The keener the desire to take action, the more the spect-actors hurry on to the stage.' A.B. 1997



## EMPOWERING

*original title: The great game of power*

- \* A table, six chairs and a bottle.
- \* First of all, participants are asked to come up one at a time and arrange the objects so as to make one chair become the most powerful object, in relation to the other chairs, the table and the bottle.
- \* Any of the objects can be moved or placed on top of each other, or on their sides, or whatever, but none of the objects can be removed altogether from the space.
- \* The group will run through a great number of variations in the arrangement.
- \* Then, when a suitable arrangement has been arrived at, an arrangement in which, by group consensus, one chair is clearly the most powerful object, a participant is asked to enter the space and take up the most powerful position, without moving anything.
- \* Once someone is in place, the other members of the group can enter the space in succession and try to place themselves in an even more powerful position, and take away the power the first person established.

DOING (NOTHING)

*original title: The antiquated telephone exchange*

- \* A circle of people watching each other.
- \* All are numbered from 1 to however many people there are in the group. If there were 10, say, the surveillance might go like this: 1 watches 4, 2 watches 5, 3 watches 6, 4 watches 7, 5 watches 8, 6 watches 9, 7 watches 10, 8 watches 1, 9 watches 2, 10 watches 3.
- \* The numbering need follow no particular mathematical formula – as long as everyone is watching someone, and being watched by someone else.
- \* The instruction is to do nothing, unless you see your quarry do something. So you watch carefully without doing a thing. But whenever anyone moves the tiniest bit, his observer is also to move, a tiny bit more.
- \* As someone else is watching him, that person will now move a tiny bit more than he did and a tiny bit more than his model did. The whole thing escalates.
- \* With the instruction ‘Do nothing’ as the starting point, we end up with all extremes of behaviour.

ASSISTING

*original title: Bigger and bigger obstacles*

- \* Three obstacles: a chair lying on the floor, a chair standing upright, three chairs on top of each other.
- \* Three actors at the far end, watching.
- \* The protagonist looks at the first obstacle. A man helps him to surmount it.
- \* The protagonist looks at the second obstacle. The man comes and helps him surmount it.
- \* The protagonist looks at the third obstacle; the man comes and urges him to sort this one out on his own.
- \* The protagonist is disappointed – he could have got over the first two obstacles (for which he had assistance), but not the third, for which he has no assistance.
- \* What would you do in his place?

OBEYING

*original title: Friend and enemy*

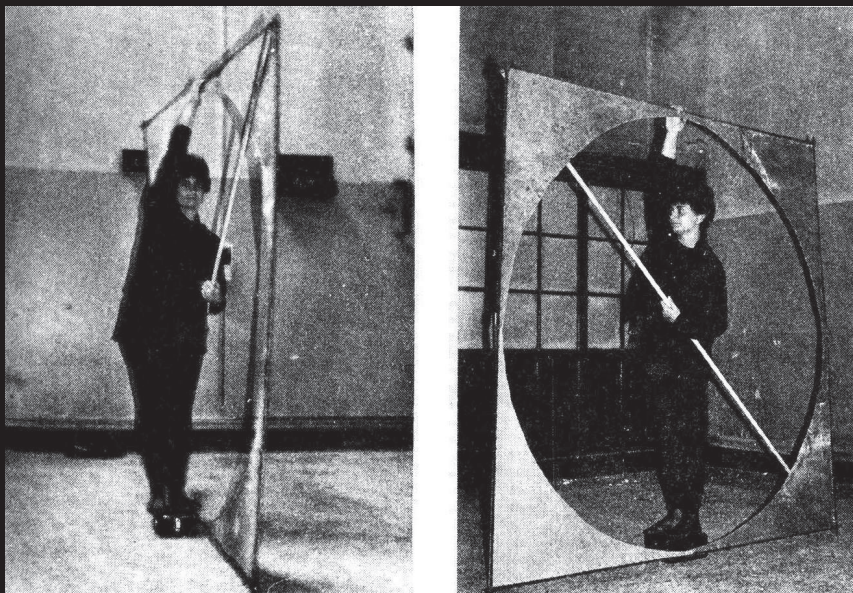
- \* In groups of three, one person is designated the protagonist and the other two decide alone (without telling anybody what they decided) whether they will be friend or enemy to him. They do not have to be the same thing. (...)
- \* The protagonist closes his eyes and the two of them start alternately to give orders, suggestions, propositions, that he is supposed to obey (to sing, to crawl, to jump).
- \* If he cannot obey the order (i.e. 'Fly') he can try anyhow; or equally, if he does not want to carry out the instruction (i.e. 'Take your clothes off') he can pretend he is doing it.
- \* After two minutes, the second protagonist closes her eyes, and the other two choose again whether to be enemy or friend; then a third protagonist.
- \* At the end, in the same order each protagonist explains why they imagined that one person was this and the other that. As they haven't consulted, both may turn out to be friends, or enemies.
- \* What makes the game difficult is that no order (suggestion, proposition, etc.) can be delivered in the same tone of voice, which has to change each time – the form has to be dissociated from the meaning, the voice from its content. Voice is one language, words are another.

## SYNCHRONISING

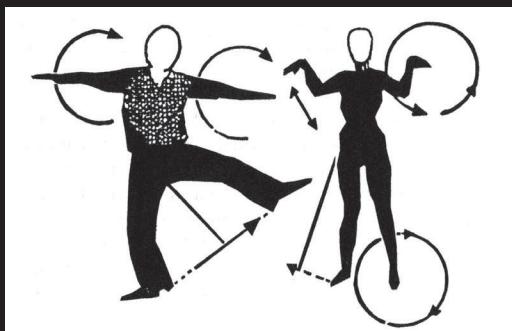
*original title: The plain mirror*

- \* Two lines of participants, each person looking directly into the eyes of the person facing them.
- \* Those in line A are the ‘subjects’, the people; those in line B, are the ‘images’.
- \* The exercise begins.
- \* Each subject undertakes a series of movements and changes of expression, which his ‘image’ must copy, right down to the smallest detail.
- \* The ‘subject’ should not be the enemy of his ‘image’ – the exercise is not a competition, nor is the idea to make sharp movements which are impossible to follow; on the contrary, the idea is to seek a perfect synchronisation of movement, so that the ‘image’ may reproduce the ‘subject’s’ gestures as exactly as possible.
- \* The degree of accuracy and synchronisation should be such that an outside observer would not be able to tell who was leading and who was following.
- \* All movements should be slow (so the ‘image’ may be able to reproduce and even anticipate them) and each movement should follow on naturally from the last.
- \* It is equally important that the participants be attentive to the smallest detail, whether of bodily or facial expression.

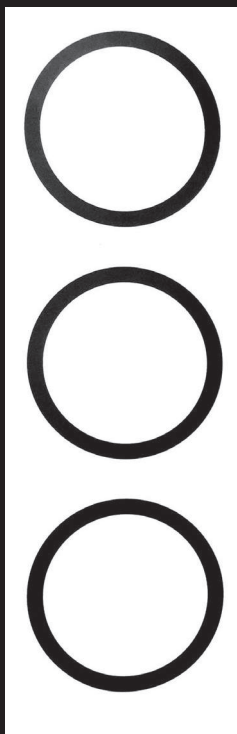
THE FIGURE OF THE JOKER (...)



Pédagogie de l'espace, Workshops,  
Jean-François Pirson



Lexicon for a Documentation.  
Research

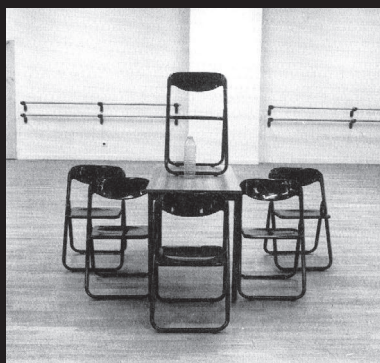


Games for Actors and Non-Actors,  
Augusto Boal, Exercises.

London Bridge children's game,  
Lewis W. Hine.



Games for Actors and Non-Actors,  
Augusto Boal, Games of Power.



La mina, Workshops, Barcelona,  
Jean-François Pirson.

Childrens Games,  
Iona & Peter Opie.



HOT FOR TEACHER: SOME NOTES  
ON GRAPHIC DESIGN AND PEDAGOGY

*Mark Owens*



## 01. Writing Matter

The roots of European typography can be found not only in the cutting of metal type and the mechanics of the printing press but in the practices of Renaissance handwriting and humanist pedagogy. The subject of numerous instruction manuals published over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, handwriting served as a crucial marker of class distinction, granting a degree of social mobility to those who could master and reproduce its forms. This required a strict disciplining of the body through iterative drills of copying and re-copying texts by hand. Derived from the marks of the humanist pen, within its very forms typography thus encodes a pedagogic program and its fashioning of a newly literate, modern subjectivity.

## 02. Kunst und Industrie

The Werkbund emerged in Germany in the first decades of the twentieth century, just as mass culture and consumerism were beginning to take hold with the advance of industrialization and commodity culture. Grappling with these new developments from capitalism's front lines, this group of applied artists, architects, critics, and theorists formulated new approaches to design and advertising for the marketplace. This included rethinking the point of sale as a place where the consumer, alienated from the means of production that had created the products on display, might be educated as to the realities of contemporary manufacture. Imagined as a kind of stage or teaching theatre, the shop window and the showroom were proposed as a place where economics and aesthetics could meet, not in the interest of distracted desire, but as a site where art and industry might be reconciled.

### 03. Josef Albers' Teaching Whites

Best known for his legendary color course at Yale and the subsequent book, *Interaction of Color*, Josef Albers surprisingly favored a certain chromatic restraint in his sartorial choices in the classroom. As a Frederick A. Horowitz notes in discussing Albers' teaching methods at Black Mountain College in the recent book, *Josef Albers: To Open Eyes*: "Noticeably well dressed for his classes, Albers conveyed the impression that class was an event for him and that he'd come prepared. A student recalls him bounding into the classroom 'with an air of expectancy; spanking clean, very crisp, in really white pants and white shirt and his hair combed nicely with that little curl on the side of his forehead, freshly shaven, and ruddy from the walk down the hill.'"

## 04. The Red of La Chinoise

Jean-Luc Godard's prescient 1967 film *La Chinoise* stages a critique of the counterculture's flirtation with Maoism through the device of a mock documentary that follows a group of student radicals who convert a bourgeois Parisian flat into an ad-hoc Marxist think-tank. The setting of the film is itself a pedagogic space, and central to Godard's method is the schematic deployment of text, image, and the colors red, yellow, and blue as on-screen hermeneutic devices. As the philosopher Jacques Ranciere has argued in his discussion of the film, "Inside the frame structured by the three primary colors, Godard organizes the mis-en-scene of the different modes of discourse within which the Maoist text can be spoken. There are three such modes: the interview, the lecture, and the theatre. Godard's task is to examine and modify the value of truth and illusion normally accorded to each of these three modes." Relocating the basic tools of graphic design to the cinematic frame, *La Chinoise* thereby dismantles the construction of authenticity underpinning both the language and gestures that constitute the theatre of radical politics.

## 05. Van Halen

Formed in Pasadena, CA in 1974, the band Van Halen rose to prominence playing parties and clubs around Los Angeles. Without the benefit of a manager the group built up its fan base through an ambitious campaign of DIY publicity and promotion. As guitarist Eddie Van Halen recounted in a 1982 interview: “We used to print up flyers, with some local people helping us. But it was basically our own thing. We’d print up flyers and stuff, like, thousands of ’em in high school lockers. And the first time we played, I guess we drew maybe 900 people.” Building on this success, the band would reach the height of its fame ten years later, with the release of the album 1984. By this time the band’s iconic =VH= logo, designed by Dave Bhang, had become ubiquitous in American high schools, scrawled on desks, binders, and book covers by countless budding graphic designers. It seems only fitting, then, that the album’s final single, Hot For Teacher—with its narrative of adolescent male sexual awakening and outrageous music video featuring teenage dopplegangers of each band member—would find the group returning to the pedagogic site of its initial success.

## 06. The Paper Chase

James Bridges' 1973 film *The Paper Chase*, based on the novel by John Jay Osborn, Jr., follows first year Harvard Law student James Hart as he negotiates an anxious one-sided relationship with stern contract law professor Charles Kingsfield, complicated by a romantic entanglement with the professor's daughter, Susan. In order to cope with the workload Hart joins a study group whose members agree to divide up each course and share detailed xeroxed outlines in preparation for final exams. At a crucial moment in the narrative Hart learns of the existence of the "Red Set," a locked special collection in the law library containing all of the professor's notes from their own years as law students, and shortly thereafter Hart and Ford, his closest friend in the study group, break into the stacks. Awestruck by the sight of the rows of red hardbound volumes, Hart proclaims, "This is the unbroken chain. This is the ageless passing of wisdom," but when they recover Kingsfield's notes Ford remarks, "They're just notes. And they look just like mine."

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James Bridges. *The Paper Chase*. 20th Century Fox, 1973.

# THE TRANSPARENT SCHOOL

*William Street*



## **TRANSPARENT SCHOOL**

A small collection of workshops, materials and images.

### **TAPE TYPOGRAPHY**

4pm on Wednesday 28 March

### **TYPOGRAPHY AND SPACE**

2pm on Monday 16 April

### **CONVEYOR BELT TYPOGRAPHY**

12pm on Monday 23 April

### **BLIND TYPOGRAPHY**

6pm on Friday 11 May

### **EXHIBITION WORKSHOP**

5pm on Thursday 21 May

## TRANSPARENT SCHOOL MARCH – JULY 2018

### EXHIBITION, RESEARCH AND WORKSHOPS

The workshops and exhibition took place at the Winchester School of Art as part of the development and realisation of the *Transparent School*. The project has stemmed from an interest in algorithms, learning structures and typography.

Wednesday 28 March  
TAPE TYPOGRAPHY

Monday 16 April  
TYPOGRAPHY AND SPACE

Monday 23 April  
CONVEYOR BELT TYPOGRAPHY

Friday 11 May  
BLIND TYPOGRAPHY

The programme/school has no real structure and seeks to operate in alternative spaces within an academic institution. *Transparent School* is a independent platform for experimentation, research and workshops that attempts to question the physical spaces in which undergraduate students design — and investigates alternative methods of generating ideas.

The programme has manifested in response to similar schools such as *Parallel School*. *The Transparent School* is not a rejection of academic institutions, Transparent suggests the programme is situated in the space between institutions and

self-initiated programmes, to make it accessible for participants at undergraduate level.

The context of the school will alternate annually. The first year will research the process of an algorithm — in particular the *Random Walk Algorithm* — which is a mathematical term that has been applied to painting, photography and subjects outside of visual communication. *Random Walk Algorithm* is described as a random path based on the succession of previous steps.

Between March and July 2018, a short series of experimental typography workshops took place at the Winchester School of Art. Participants from a range of disciplines took part in the Transparent School.

The workshops developed naturally through trial and error. Rolling on from the succession of one another, representing the Random Walk Algorithm not only as the narrator/ topic of the workshops but as the overarching concept for the school.

The Typeface stemmed from the *Random Walk Algorithm* in that 2 shapes were used in a formulaic manner to create letters and numbers. The idea was to work consecutively through the alphabet using only 2 forms. When a letter or number was unable to be made that would be the end of the algorithm. The process and path between would be described as the Random Walk.

2015

*Self-organised initiatives can enable reflection on institutionalised education and initiate a change in attitudes towards it.*

— Robert Preusse for *Inside Out*

1980

*No, especially this was my aim in life, to break through the borders of the art system, to reach the needs of everybody who participates and to share in the element of creativity and work.*

— Joseph Beuys at Cooper Union

2006

*Albers seemed to prefer the idea of the school to remain alive as an idea, or set of ideas, that could be continually invented by individual attempts to discover it or produce it.*

Short text extract from, *A School is a Building with a School in it*, written by Paul Elliman

## EXHIBITION

5pm on Thursday 21 May

A small exhibition curated by *Transparent School* participants showcasing group work produced over the course of 8 weeks was held at the Winchester School of Art. The exhibition was an opportunity for participants to come back and reflect on and discuss their work.

## NOTE:

During the exhibition participants developed a motion workshop whereby a participant would draw blindly onto moving paper.

## TAPE TYPOGRAPHY

4pm on Wednesday 28 March

The purpose of this workshop is to develop a series of unconventional letters and numbers. Participants must aim to complete the alphabet. Participants will be asked to use tape to create characters in a formulaic manner with the intention of creating the alphabet. A random number generator will select a number between 1 and 5 — this will decide the amount of pieces of tape a participant can use. Participants are asked to work chronologically.

If you are on the letter R of the alphabet and the random number generator selects 3, you may only create the letter R using 3 pieces of tape. This will challenge the limitations of tape and typography. You must stick to the number that the algorithm has generated.

Workshop took place in an unused classroom at the Winchester School of Art. Participants include Alice Mckenna, Georgina Estill, Panagiotis Skaribas and Thomas Mcgrath.

## TYPOGRAPHY AND SPACE

2pm on Monday 16 April

Participants will be asked to create half of a number or letterform on large pieces of paper. They will be facing away from each other and unable to confer or communicate. They will use only their initiative and draw random glyphs — some will be upper case and some lower, some with serifs and some without, some may not look anything like letters.

Groups of 2 will be given a letter or number — they will be unaware that their partner knows the same character. They must then proceed to draw half of that chosen character. If they are both drawing the number 2, then both participants may end up drawing the top half — the purpose of this workshop is to embrace the lack of control and utilise drawing without method.

Workshop took place in a Timber Yard at the Winchester School of Art. Participants include Georgina Estill, Lukas Keysell, Rory Macrauld and Thomas McGrath.

2015

*If I were to draw connections between the Utopia School and academia, the connected dots would again come through the participants*  
— Jaime Iglehart for *Inside Out*

2018

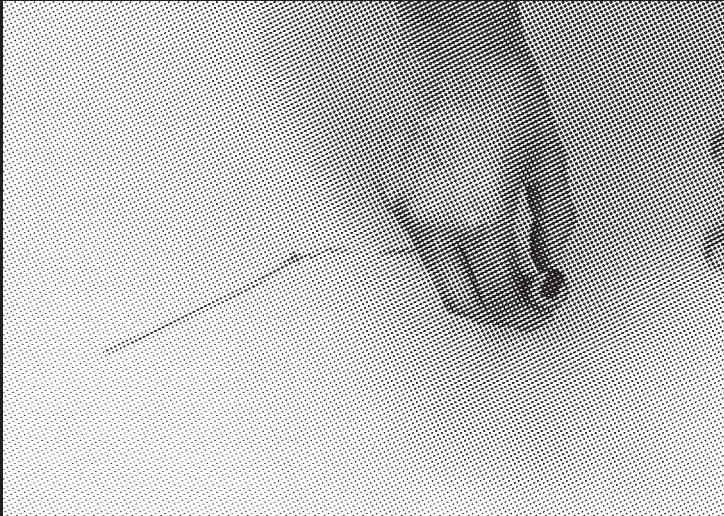
*I don't see the present programmes or schools as replacements for art schools, but more as simply limited alternatives existing at the present.*  
— Andrew Brash on *Evening Class*

2006

*Art is as often purely a place or even pretext for communication and action, as it is an end in itself, henceforth recent buzzwords such as platform, plateau and project. We therefore need new tools, not only in an art historical sense, but also in terms of the education of artists as a discipline and institutional space.*

*Spaces for Thinking*, A short text written by Simon Sheikh

**\*Below Participant of the *Transparent School* taking part in the exhibition workshop with 3 others.**



**CONVEYOR BELT TYPOGRAPHY**  
12pm on Monday 23 April

Large pieces of paper will be placed over a table and rotated in a conveyor belt motion. Participants must draw 1 letter however they feel necessary. The character must be based on previous letters with the intention of creating a whole word. The conveyor motion will distort the typography and force the next user to act randomly.

Participants will have to work efficiently — it is key that legible words are made. The Random Walk Algorithm is about the succession

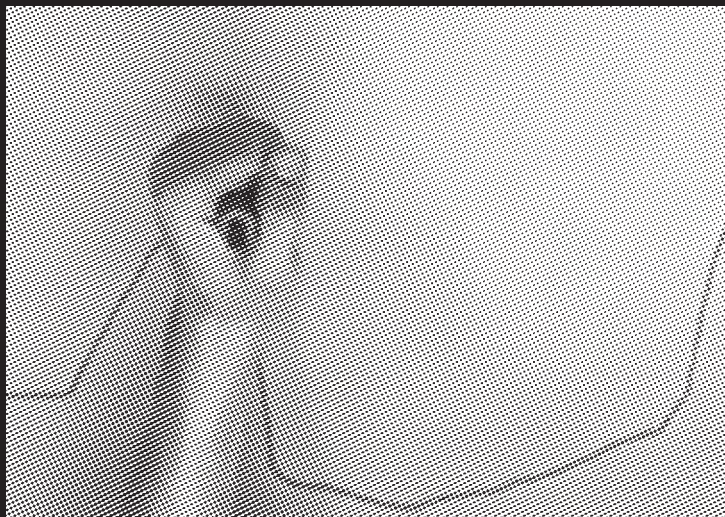
of previous steps — the user should consider the concept of succession and how it can be applied to drawing words and letters.

Workshop took place in a lecture theatre at the Winchester School of Art. Participants include James Aspey and William Street.

**NOTE:**

Initially the rules for the workshop didn't work. We began to draw half of a letter in one colour whilst the other pulled the paper. We switched roles and asked the other to finish the letter that had been drawn.

*\*Below* Participant of the *Transparent School* taking part in the Blind Typography workshop.



## **BLIND TYPOGRAPHY** 6pm on Friday 11 May

Participants should pair up and work as a team. Participant 1 will be blindfolded and given a pen which they are to use on the large sheets of paper. Participant 2 will think of a number or letter that they want their partner to draw — they must describe how to draw their chosen figure using only: left, right, up and down. Canvas size is up to the users, however using a large sheet of paper is less restrictive.

The objective is the transferring of information and the relationship it

has with the application. If participant 2 chose the letter C, they would most likely ask the user to start in the top right of the page and move their pen to the left of the page in a curved downward motion.

Workshop took place in an unused classroom at the Winchester School of Art. Participants include Alice McKenna, Curtis Rayment, James Aspey, Hugo Bilton, Lukas Keysell, Megan Krawielitzki, Thomas Mcgrath and William Street.

## EXHIBITION WORKSHOP

5pm on Thursday 21 May

During the Exhibition the audience and participants responded to each other's work by developing a workshop that merged together the 4 workshops.

3 people are needed to do this workshop. The first participant must hold a piece of large paper flat on the floor, another will hold a pen just above the paper (suspended) — this person will be blindfolded and the third participant will be stood above.

Participant 2 will place the pen on the paper. 3 will then give directions from above using only: left, right, up and down. 1 will move the paper in relation to the directions from 3.

Workshop took place in a large studio space at the Winchester School of Art.

1980

*that this understanding of art would work very effectively — to help the change of all structures in the body of the society. So, this is then important, from my point of view that these areas existing in the social body with the element of freedom existing in everybody the element of equality, where everybody can shape or could shape*  
— Joseph Beuys at Cooper Union

2018

*I think alternatives to schools are extremely important, and work as subversive and often transient models.*

Joseph Ménage in a conversation with William Street about the *Ventriloquist Summer School*

2005

*An experiment has no preconceived idea of the outcome; it only sets out to determine a cause-and-effect relationship. As such, experimentation is a method of working which is contrary to production-oriented design*

*Experimental Typography, Whatever that means, A short text written by Peter Bil'ak. First published in *Items, No.1**

BEING AN ART WORKER ON THE  
CARGO SHIP—IT MAKES ME WEAK

*Stefanie Rau*



## INTRODUCTION

Three months ago I moved to Amsterdam. I came here to enter a space in which I am hoping to develop my practice into a new direction: A practice that for me still is difficult to define, that wants to move away from whatever I am or might be as a graphic designer. A practice that wants to be developed and discovered, something in- between and beyond what my previous studies assigned me to be. It might not even have to be defined, but has to be in a certain environment in order to grow. That's why I am here. Because I am looking for a space that will support exactly these needs.

In his text *To the Seminar* Roland Barthes describes three different spaces:

- ① The institutional space, meaning everything that structurally is ordered by an institution and provides the general framework of a school.
- ② The transferential space, meaning the teaching and the learning.
- ③ And finally what he calls the textual space.<sup>1</sup> That one is created by the act of writing or creating and the mutual passion for the creative dialogue with our environment. So we, the students therefore decisively create this space. This space is multilayered, it is complicated, it is fragile, it is irrational, it is unpredictable. It is not an existing space, but rather a “potential space”, which has to be supported by the institutional and transferential space, which function as a fundament.

Since the beginning of the program I have worked on a lecture, that I presented at a conference at the folkwang University of the Arts in essen in the end of November. The conference — organized by students — was about the “concept of design in the

context of design studies and research” and my lecture tried to unpack this concept by reflecting the space through the relationship between education and design. I was interested in working on a concept of design which acknowledges the question »where?« – immediately after asking »what?« and »how?«.

Since the lecture was especially written for the space of this conference, I realized that the translation of this text doesn't fit into our context here today. I rewrote most of it and adapted some of my thoughts to the space where we find ourselves right now. I will attempt to do, what I only implicitly tried before: Think through spaces. I will use this next 15 minutes to guide you with my thoughts through this very space.

### WHERE ARE WE? OFFSHORE?

We find ourselves on the outskirts of Amsterdam, about 40 minutes from the center, in an industrial area – a business park. From the outside only the sign at the front and the recently installed flagpoles tell us what kind of space we are entering. We are here, because the institutes regular building is being renovated. A temporary space – but for us, this will be the Sandberg Institute for the time of our study. So unfortunately we won't even experience the improvement of the actual building. Our experience of the Sandberg is a temporary one of an industrial building, of trying to inhabit, reuse and making it our own.

On the very first day, when the entire school gathered in the assembly hall for the introduction to the program, the tutors and the staff, the building was referred to as a cargo-ship. Thinking about it now that reminds me of Michel Foucault's use of the ship as one of the examples to describe his idea about heterotopias, about *other spaces*. A ship, a flexible moving place, floating on the sea. A space without a place, with a constantly changing location, a flexible, mobile space. Can we take this metaphor in order to speak about this institution?

With the image of the boat in mind we could ask:

Which direction we are going?

Who is determining the direction?

What are the complex mechanisms that work as an engine for this ship?

What is our role on this ship?

Who gets to be on board?

Are we a fishing trawler neatly packaging the catch?

A container ship supplying the market demands with new ideas? Or are we an exclusive cruise liner consuming bohemian life?

The Netherlands has a long history in trading- exchange and commerce. That's how this city developed from a small fishing village to one of the most important ports in the world, commercial capital of the Netherlands and financial center. The so-called "kogge-schipp" has transformed into a cargo-ship and is transporting commodities from A to B. Standardized containers stand for the exchange, moving in-between and connecting continents. A means of transport of globalisation; a non-place on the ocean, in-between. With Foucault's words the boat "has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, a great instrument of economic development"<sup>2</sup>. Instead of commodities and goods that get traded to the whole world and that were potentially moved in and out through the gates on the backside of this building, we as privileged, selected students are now embodying this exchange, the internationality, the movement. Standardisation is experienced, not by container-sizes, but through the structure in which we study. 60 (invisible) eCTS-Credits provide us with an accredited master degree. This is one thing among others that we take with us, when we leave again.

## BEING AN ART WORKER (...)

*we are moving,  
perhaps we are drifting,  
we might get lost,  
we are bobbing around,  
taking risks in order to return, or to move further,  
to translate, to exchange,  
to gain new perspectives,  
frame the chaos and tell a story, we are oscillating  
between here and there,  
we could call that learning*

I find myself in a contradiction between wanting to know where I am going and trying to enjoy the view, sit back, follow the winds and don't think about determination. What a cheesy image! While imagining myself sitting on a sailing boat with the wind blowing through my hair, I am writing this text sitting in a place that looks more like an open plan office. Foucault uses the term "reservoir for our imagination", yes, maybe it is a heterotopia, but it is not only that. In the end this is a private art school, an institution, a postgraduate program in the capital of the Netherlands with a tuition fee of 2250 euro.

## ALL DAY AND ALL NIGHT

Let's enter this building through the wooden stairs and by the tropical plants, say "hi" to Nancy, walk by the newly separated wooden shelter walls of the media lab, through the staircase upstairs. Here we are. Our space is open. We share it with two other departments. We're not only sharing the space, but also the sound, for example this constant noise of the air conditioner. [short break] hearing it now, it reminds me of the sound of the ocean.

In the very back on the left side a squeaky door opens into the "theory space", a small room equipped with a sound station and a projector. To the right the windows let you see outside and to

the left you can see into the big hall—the spaces of the fine arts department. Since this hall used to be either a factory or a storage facility this view reminds me of some kind of a control-room, from where you can observe or surveil art students working in their wooden cubicles. You can be big brother. Or you can make theory, after watching and analyzing the practice of the arts. [*theoria, θεωρία – looking at things*]

This spatial division between theory and practice is something that only becomes visible through the spaces and consciously wants to be dissolved. each practice is theoretical and practical to some extent. Despite of whatever practice but by the mere fact of studying within an art school we all were labeled as “art workers” by Suhail Malik who was our guest tutor for two days in December<sup>3</sup>. he understands the use of this term as a tool to positively alienate yourself from your practice in order to become influential, to use the power of certain institutional structures to turn things around, to use agency for your purposes.

Contrary to the associative image of the ship, the association to the factory is not far-fetched. This is (could be) the actual space of a factory. The machines have left already long ago. We don't work from nine to five. We could be here all day and all night. In the late evening, when the lights of all the surrounding buildings are turned off and the art workers leave the factory, Overschiestraat 188 will be still illuminated.

Gerald Raunig refers to the university as a factory of knowledge. The use of the image of the factory in relation to contemporary issues concerning education offers, in his view, a concentration and assembly of bodies and knowledge that have the potential to re-territorialize and valorize other forms of labour, life and resistance.<sup>4</sup>

What kind of changes can be made by actually experiencing the conversion of a factory to an art school within the actual space

rather than only using this fashionable comparison in order to be able to speak about resisting capitalist mechanisms of transformation?

As well as our conception of being within this space, by our mere presence we are changing our surrounding. This space is not floating in the trans-boundary waters, but is anchored in a neighborhood that we hardly notice. The fact that an art school is being located within this part of the city, which seemingly is so far from the center, is transforming the dynamics of this city.

### A DOCTOR'S OFFICE?

On the way to the communal kitchen we pass the offices of the different departments. Partly you can look inside, partly there are milky glass walls separating the spaces. The one-on-one meetings in there and the spatial arrangement both remind me of a doctor's office. "how are you feeling today?" exactly that's the question that we get asked in that space. Schools have changed. from the school in regard to the concept of the greek *schola*, as defined by the free time and leisure to being an authoritarian part of religion, a place of discipline, of punishment and violence. from being a painful place into todays managed, credited and individually tailored performance improvement-strategies.

The only pain that I feel today is the migraine perforating my forehead. My back hurts, my eyes are tired, my skin is dry, I feel exhausted and dizzy. I haven't slept well in days. Do I drink too much? Or should I drink more? Being an art worker on the cargo ship – it makes me weak.

A white plastic chip card opens the doors into the waiting room for the treatment. I am sitting here, reading. ... Wait a minute, this is *not* why I am here. This is *not* a doctor's office!

In the document which sets out the amount of tuition fees that we are paying, it says that through our payment the Sandberg Institute provides us students „with an intensive, small-scale, international study program with a strong focus on the individual student.“ This space that reminds me of a doctor’s office is the place where Roland Barthes might locate a way of teaching related to taking care. Next to educating or teaching, Barthes describes this as an aspect of encouragement of each individual.

There won’t be curing or healing, but – in relation to the three spaces that I introduced in the beginning – new spaces evolve that are not determined by their physicality and architecture, by walls, windows and doors, but follow our ideas, interests and purposes. They are equally determined and influenced through inner relations, their structure and social interactions.

Spaces, lived through our perception, through our experience and through our presence. And: they are created through imagination, through association, through narration, through text, through a practice that embraces the in-between.

1. Roland Barthes, An das Seminar, in: Was ist Universität? Texte und Positionen zu einer Idee, ed. by Unbedingte Universitäten (Diaphanes, 2010) p. 17.
2. Michel Foucault, Die Heterotopien. Der utopische Körper [1966] (Suhrkamp 2013) p. 21.
3. Suhail Malik, Seminar at the Critical Studies department, December 5th, 2015.
4. Gerald Raunig, Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity (MIT Press, 2013).

THE DESIGNER WITHOUT QUALITIES –  
NOTES ON ORNAMENTAL POLITICS, IRONIC  
ATTACHMENT, BUREAUCREATIVITY AND  
EMOTIONAL COUNTERCULTURE

*Silvio Lorusso*



## CHARISMA

Some months ago I found myself in Berlin attending Re:Publica, an international conference on innovation meets politics meets branding meets tech. On the main stage, just after the vocal intervention of Russian chess master and activist Garry Kasparov, it was the turn of Dr. Nelly Ben Hayoun, experience designer and “manufacturer of the impossible”. Ben Hayoun is unanimously described, by the likes of Hans Ulrich Obrist and Micheal Bierut, as a force of nature, “an inexhaustible source of renewable energy”. While the sheer scale of her design experiences for clients like NASA, MOMA or Airbnb implies the work of a team (“we work, “we believe”, etc.), Nelly Ben Hayoun Studios is evidently framed around a charismatic leader. Their productions are truly impressive, often including two dozen lines of credits. Faced with such a vast and energetic orchestration of talent, any practitioner blanches.

Nelly Ben Hayoun was there, in prime time, to present the University of the Underground, a new postgraduate course created by “dreamers of the day” with the goal of forming the “very hard working” critical thinkers and radical designers that our world is so much in need of these days. A school for the “the Willy Wonkas of modern times, the contemporary Joy Division’s, JG Ballard’s, Marie Curie’s and Rauschenberg’s, action researchers and designers, mythologists and makers of new worlds!” The experience designer stayed faithful to her endorsements: the performance was cheerfully chaotic, with an often giggling audience and multiple plot twists (speaking of charismatic leadership, at a certain point there were *three* Nelly’s on stage).

The University of the Underground, hosted in Amsterdam by the prestigious Sandberg Instituut but implanted in London as well, is just one among the copious amounts of shorter or longer experiments in alternative education and pedagogy. To stick with the field of design, the Scuola Open Source in the south of Italy comes to mind, as well as the Parallel School or

the nomadic Relearn sessions. And, to zoom in the Netherlands, I can mention Hackers and Designers or Open Set. So, what makes the UUG a particularly fascinating case study? Besides its laudable commitment to tuition-free education (more on that below) and the ambitious plan to run the MA for 100 years, the bombastic branding, positioning and charismatic leadership of the University of the Underground, winking at grassroots movements and do-it-yourself experiences but at the same time emphasizing free will and personality, represents a good opportunity to reflect on the meaning of counterculture today and evaluate its potential role. As someone who is intermittently involved in design education, I'm interested in the ways in which institutions are able to seamlessly neutralize, regurgitate and later administer or even steer countercultural expressions. The main motivation behind these notes is an attempt to provide a multifaceted articulation of this process and understand some of its consequences.

MYTHMAKERS, CREATIVE SOLDIERS,  
FUTURE PRESIDENTS

Within the UUG, chaos is considered “a method of public engagement”. Rooted in Dunne and Raby's critical design, influenced by theatrical practices and inspired by Roland Barthes' idea of the mythologist, the school trains “creative soldiers” to infiltrate institutions in order to “engineer change” with the hope that -who knows- some of them they might become presidents one day. “Manufacturing countercultures” and providing a “positive inspiration and disturbance” is the way to go. The set of references informing the culture of the school is maximalist and eclectic: punk, Artaud's theatre of cruelty, Marie Curie, “pirate utopias”, The Smiths, and so on. The school originally presented itself a bit like a teenage bedroom: a ludic space organized so to signal a sense of belonging to certain groups, to express different breeds of coolness.

Signaling plays a crucial role here. Describing the International Space Orchestra project, Ben Hayoun elucidates her understanding of counterculture, somehow derived from Bordieu's distinction of the forms of capital. In a sense, it looks like the University of the Underground has incorporated Bordieu's analysis *a bit too well*. Its branding combines a "critical"/"disruptive" lexicon with an array of progressive cultural icons, a dream team of advisors (a very diverse one, which is something that deserves appreciation), and a street aesthetics reminiscent of punkzines involving stencils, xerography and markers. This straightforward mobilization of cultural capital in both its embodied and objectified state at once addresses the current institutional landscape –which is not afraid of "radicals" anymore, instead it welcomes them– and pitches the school to mildly progressive media outlets and their audience.

Clearly, mobilizing various forms of capital is both unavoidable and necessary. Yet, it seems that the UUG, like many other instances of "radical change" in design, simply replicates traditional dynamics of accumulation, obfuscating them under the veil of criticool jargon. Working with institutions? That's boring... We "infiltrate" them. Designers? Please call us "creative soldiers". A semblance of antagonism is the perfect accessory to the casual look of prestige. Paradoxically, the manifestation of a pseudo-antagonist social and cultural capital becomes a means of acquiring more of it in a pacified, institutionalized form, disguising direct and indirect economic conversions that happen somewhere else. "Anti" is the precondition of "into" and then it becomes its corollary.

Culture and social relationships become respectively cultural and social capital when they are used to compete, consciously or not, against other agents. Compete for what? Platforms of expression, attention and therefore subsistence. And not enough attention is given to the alternative pedagogy endeavors that are willing to bring about a genuine diversity of language

and praxis, those brave enough to question or even reject the disruptive raw models institutionally tailored to the docile and innocuous high-end creative worker. Shouldn't the goal of countercultural education be to reveal the hidden automatisms behind the acquisition, mobilization and conversion of, not only economic, but also social and cultural capital?

### IRONIC ATTACHMENT

During the Re:Publica presentation, one candidate's application was showcased to convey the vibe of the school. His application consisted in a videoclip of himself playing an 80s song featuring several clichés of contemporary design discourse ("I want to change the world", "I'm process-led, concept-driven"). Ironically, his gig communicates the idea that radical expression as an institutionalized practice is the new default. The performance was a parodical *mise-en-scène* of character disposition, inspired by a common part in a usual play, that of the creative mind addressing an organization. The irony is in the juxtaposition of the presumably solemn and enthusiastic ambition of changing the world with a dry inflection and a frivolous tune for entertainment and mindless consumption. In other words, enthusiastic engagement as muzak. Was the applicant trolling? Maybe. One thing is certain though: that on a meta-level of irony, what was a joke on enthusiastic commitment is then unironically used to actually display this attitude.

The Indiani metropolitani, a post-hippie and art-oriented subcultural youth group which was part of the Italian '77 movement, used irony as a disorienting strategy for public protest, yelling slogans like "We demand to work harder and earn less!" Inspired by both Grundrisse and Dadaism, they were fascinated by the ambiguous nature of irony:

What interests us is the sense of bitterness that irony leaves us with, its flattening action. Irony

opens spaces, it unhinges, it reveals what cannot be hidden anymore [...]. Irony lacks flesh and blood, it is only partially a practice of liberation, as partial as is violence and its organization. Finally, irony is a frustrating “language that marks the space between our desires and the difficulty of their realization”.



Detail from *Oask?!* A zine by the Indiani Metropolitani

Nowadays, we live in post-ironic society for it has learned to neutralize irony’s subversive power by simply incorporating it. A global online marketplace can shamelessly launch a campaign that promotes unhealthy workaholism, while H&M can successfully bring to market UNEMPLOYED hoodies. As David Foster Wallace pointed out, irony, especially in its postmodern breed, moved away from its antagonistic origins to evolve into a mere advertising technique that, while pleasing the audience, acts as a protective shield against criticisms, because how can you ironically criticize something that is already ironic about itself?

Paraphrasing DFW, the applicant’s videoclip manages simultaneously to make fun of itself, the design world, and the ones

who are meant to evaluate his attitude, pleased by the fact that they *get the joke*. However, I'd like to offer another interpretation of the ironic stance of the videoclip, one that has to do with detachment. Commonly, irony functions as a means of coping with a feeling of powerlessness and irrelevance. When switched on, the 'ironic detachment' mode allows us to alienate ourselves from collective and individual miseries. For this, we pay the toll of disengagement. Thus, the song can be read as a disengaged take on impotent engagement.

Can irony still be countercultural? Are there ways to develop an ironic attitude that doesn't lead to immobilization? Is it possible to forge an irony that produces proximity and becomes action? "Ironic attachment" would need to counter the dominant detached attitude characterizing ironic statements. Given the ironic contradictions we are surrounded with, ironic attachment should be a sort of meta-irony, which involves the capability and willingness to find ironic detachment *ironic in itself* by contextualizing it within societal and structural conditions.

## CLASH OF COUNTERCULTURES

At a first glance, the most revolutionary aspect of the University of the Underground is the fact that is tuition-free, which is a noble pursuit, given the rise of scholarly expensed and the subsequent extortion which is student debt. Ideally, the UUG's tuition fees would derive in part from philanthropic contributions and donations (80%) and in part from state funding (20%). Currently, the contributions from the government amount to 50%. Generally, obtaining financial support entails a compromise regarding the way in which a project is presented to the funding bodies. Individual artists asking for grants are required to adopt the *néolangue* of the creative industries, and to detail, say, their "competitive advantage". Antagonistic purity is not a good investment.

At a certain point, the UUG's conspicuous countercultural stance clashed with a more traditional expression of counterculture: a group of Sandberg students penned an open letter to criticize (fiercely but politely) their own institution. Their core concerns revolve primarily around the issue of corporately funded education: yes, the school is tuition-free, but the 80% of private and individual contributions opens the doors to "direct privatisation". Other concerns include the lack of transparency regarding roles in the school and the smearing, so to speak, of the critical reputation of the Sandberg Institute. Finally, they condemn the UUG's countercultural branding, maintaining that it is improperly reminiscent of activist endeavors. Perhaps as a result of the open letter, much of the original countercultural jargon disappeared from the UUG website, as well as the characterization of private contributions as philanthropy.

The concerns about countercultural branding and Sandberg's critical purity leave me hesitant: what it means nowadays to be an immaculately critical institution? Would that be effective anyway? If even Pepsi can adopt protest imagery, why wouldn't the UUG do the same? And yet, between the lines of the dispute between school management and students (and apparently some Sandberg teachers as well) I perceive a glimpse of what counterculture might be and perhaps has always been: a permanent distrust of opaque administration, a constant tension against the ossification of certain power relationships. Maybe counterculture is just crippling institutional self-doubt.

## ORNAMENTAL POLITICS

During the Re:Publica talk, my attention was caught by the notion of "performance of politics", understood as a technique to incite public engagement. Tweaking the idea a bit, it can be used to identify one constitutive aspect of design's ambiguous value system. Design has long learned to abhor its commercial, utilitarian, wasteful and dehumanizing nature. Key figures like



Victor Papanek or Ken Garland vocally criticized the sheer amount of time and energy spent by designers into polishing the cogs of the capitalist machine. More recently, the aforementioned Dunne And Raby advocated for a design that makes us think instead of making us buy (I wonder what they think of, say, Black Mirror).

Designers have learned to jot down manifestos (and so have advertising agencies). The UUG has its own one. In the meantime, plenty of labels like “social design”, “critical design”, “speculative design”, etc. followed one another and continue to do so. Each of these iterations contributed to an increasingly urgent but also abstract focus on the “big issues” of our time, which is the mirrored image of design hubris (“with great power comes great responsibility”). Want to help local cheesemakers to be more palatable to their customers? Meh. There are more important problems to fix, solve, correct. Don’t underestimate yourself! After all, you’ve been studying design for half of a decade.

The spectacle of design super-heroes vs societal problems has been successfully packaged in events like the Dutch What Design Can Do, a platform created to “demonstrate the power of design; to show that it can do more than make things pretty. To call on designers to stand up, take responsibility and consider the beneficial contribution that designers can make to society.” Each year a new challenge is launched, such as the “refugee challenge” or the “climate change challenge”, where a multidimensional geopolitical issue becomes, as the Volksrant reported, a Dragon Den-like competition. And, as designer and writer Ruben Pater boldly stated, design positions itself as the “ultimate problem-solving discipline”, superior to governments or NGOs. Global tragedies become design opportunities. I mean, literally: Bruce Mau, author of the reknown Incomplete Manifesto for Growth, reportedly stated that “a terrible situation is a great opportunity to use design thinking”. The same design



thinking that can be sold to companies and corporations. The wet dream of a universal design language comes true in the paradigm of design thinking-as-consultancy.



Josef Albers and his students leaning to the left.

While the design discourse evolves, its focus becomes more abstract. I have no doubt that individual designers are genuinely concerned with specific little or big issues and empathize with particular people or groups, but I feel that design as a field tend to focus on the general problems concerning a category, a user-group, a set of personas. A bit like humanitarian liberalism, design is not concerned with *some* men, but with *the* man. This is, at least partially, a form of professional propaganda targeted at policy makers that will in turn pour more money in the

creative industries machine, financing yet another social design event or prize. An abstract and conflictless notion of relevance and societal impact is appealing. Political and social engagement is thus performed, at least in some measure, to please the policy-making “great Other”. It is *manifested*. In doing so, design tends to construct a highly artificial world and offer an assured solutionist happy ending. Who will “interrupt the cycle of capitalism”? Designers, of course.

Inevitably, this sort of magical thinking influences education insomuch as students, consciously or not, are trained to wield “conspicuous morality”. Progressiveness, together with social and political engagement, becomes a form of positional consumption and, as such, it is an added value to the project and to the designer, something that sets the context of evaluation for teachers, audience and stakeholders. It’s not a coincidence that in its original FAQs the UUG candidly denied to be neoliberalist... ’cause we all know that neoliberalism is bad, amirite?

Thus, design schools offer a dispositional *grundkurs* where one is urged to feign a more or less standardized expression of critical and socially-concerned thinking within safe and somehow predefined ethical boundaries. A sort of humblebrag of good intentions that doesn’t hurt or upset anybody. “To hell with good intentions”, Ivan Illich once said. Clearly, no one is innocent, myself included: this very text is a positional product targeted at what is still a niche market.

Against this background, the notion of performance of politics becomes less a form of deep engagement with diverse parties than a frill to apply to one’s own projects and practice. Ornamental politics decorates design’s intrinsic utilitarianism. The problem here are not the specific values, but the fact that they become a formula, a mantra. Within this context, which sometimes resembles a “choose your own underprivileged social group” type of game, the issues

connected to one relatively disadvantaged category are often excluded, that of designers and creative workers themselves.

## DESIGNER++

The University of the Underground suggests that its students will “enter the realm of authors, directors, politicians, planners, dreamers, activists, mythologists and musicians”, thus resonating with the common idea that it’s time for design practice to expand its reach. Such hybridization, combined with the efforts of cultural entrepreneurship, will lead designers to “create their own job titles”. This perspective well fits what I would call the *designer++* model. During a recent talk, Thomas Castro, founder of Lust studio and head of department of Graphic Design Arnhem, proposed a mathematical formula of expertise: designer + educator, historian, activist and so on. Peter Bilak, graphic and type designer who teaches at KABK, during Agi Open Paris 2017 substituted the “+” with “as”, adding such qualifications as “entrepreneur” or “C3PO” to describe the many roles he played during his career.

The longer the clock ticks, the more the activity of designers intermingles with other practices and fields of knowledge. Is this the much coveted triumph of multidisciplinary or rather an expression of professional dilution? It seems that this urgency to hybridize design is a response to the progressive loss of its specific *content*. To put it bluntly, if no one takes me seriously as graphic designer, defining myself as such is no longer neither sufficient nor strategic. So, I brand myself as a futurist, a technologist and so on. However, the actual added value brought by my field of expertise remains unclear. As Thomas Castro appropriately asks in the same talk, “What are we still doing as designers when we’re living in template culture?” One needs to be ‘designer as X’ since ‘designer as designer’ is not enough anymore. Thus, all these design permutations might be understood as an instance of the “there is no job, create one”

mandate. The designer full of qualities resembles the mirrored image of a designer without qualities.

‘But designers have been multidisciplinary all along!’ one might say. Maybe multidisciplinary, but surely not *diluted*. Let’s consider for instance the design masters operating between the 50s and 60s. They also used to write, paint, teach, ‘do research’ etc. Yet, they could easily decide to interrupt those activities in order to devote themselves solely to logos, posters, books and corporate identities. Unlike this recent past, nowadays tutoring in a school, obtaining a scholarship or a grant, or even doing shifts in a bar is often the only way to practice design, in particular graphic, while making end meets. Slowly graphic design, which until recently represented a professional and identity pivot, shifts centrifugally towards the margins. So its content dilutes into complementary activities that at best integrate it, at worst erode it.



Critical Graphic Design, 2014.  
[\[http://criticalgraphicdesign.tumblr.com/post/72063348167\]](http://criticalgraphicdesign.tumblr.com/post/72063348167)

The Critical Graphic Design group, an obscure Tumblr blog criticized (unjustly IMHO) for its ironic yet spot-on critical stance towards the critical design discourse itself, presciently understood that hybridization is more a matter of survival than an expression of professional agency. Along a similar line, German artist Sebastian Schmieg speaks of ‘survival creativity’, i.e. “coming up with whatever idea it takes to survive in a competitive field.”

Back in 2006, Metahaven’s Daniel van Der Velden identified a major threat impending on designers: that of becoming “the proletariat of the creative industry” as a result of the globalization of design marketplace. He also lucidly understood that “if there is something that needs to be designed, it is the designer himself”. While the former warning went unheard, the latter advice has been religiously followed. High-end design practice was rebranded as ‘research’. Design thinking successfully infiltrated the corporate and institutional world, but the vaguer and purely humanistic “design research” rebrand turned out to be mainly a survival creativity strategy, indifferent for the most part to the overabundance of supply for such type of practice.

## UNEMPLOYED FLOWERS

In a picture shot in 1977 by Enrico Scuro during the occupation of the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna, we see a couple of students against a background full of drawings. One graffiti stands up. It reads “university is a garden where unemployed flowers blossom”. This statement still makes sense by today’s standards: schools and universities are and will increasingly be factories of unemployed, underemployed or occasionally employed workers. While it’s not something education itself can prevent, it has the obligation to critically address *this* “big issue”.



“University is a garden where unemployed flowers blossom”, Bologna (1977)

In this respect, I would like to focus on graphic design –the most diluted among the various design branches– and try to sketch what I think it’s a realistic composition of the workforce between now and the near future: a small elite of designers defines guidelines for global services and brands; an even smaller elite builds tools that facilitate the application of these guidelines; a narrow pool of ‘white collar’ designers handle these tools and guidelines; a vast majority of ‘Creative Cloud’ freelance designers compete locally and globally by offering their services on online marketplaces like Fiverr (what Guy Julier calls the Uber design precariat); a niche of artisanal/authorial/hybrid designers and specialists (type designers, cartographers, illustrators, etc.) tries to stay afloat in the market. Since the first, the second and the last category are generally understood as design excellence, their members also work as design educators in high profile schools, partially shaping the professional expectations of their students.

Most highly-trained designers are too educated to find gratification in the average freelance commission, so they compete

for the few spots that ensure them a semi-autonomous freedom of professional expression. Together with knowledge and skills, higher education provides also its own sorrows, as Raffaele Alberto Ventura explains in its disenchanting portrait of a disempowered leisure class fallen in disgrace. This is also why many well-educated designers spend their weekends in self-initiated projects, often the only ones in which they can fully express the skills matured during their education. Design education, for its part, mostly ignores this situation and focuses instead on publishing doubtful employment statistics depicting a rosy future for their alumni or simply promoting an entrepreneurial mentality. The latter approach is well exemplified by the blurb of a 2011 book by Steven Heller and Lita Talarico, co-chairs of the MFA Design program of the School of Visual Arts:

The design entrepreneur must take the leap away from the safety of the traditional designer role into the precarious territory where the public decides what works and what doesn't.

Substitute 'public' with 'market' and you will get a good expression of the mandates of contemporary employability ideology. A more recent example is *Don't Get a Job... Make a Job*, a self-help book by Gem Barton targeted at creative graduates. From the introduction:

You will be aware that the prospect of "finding a job" is tough. You have heard nothing but horror stories since the economic downturn began in 2008, yet you still chose a design degree, you are still chasing the dream. Why? Because secretly, deep down, you know that the future will be led by free-thinking, forward-looking, rule-bending, problem-solving, question-asking social-radicals, that's why! Think about the biggest problem we face today: poverty, dwindling energy resources, and war— it is design, not money, that has the potential to solve these problems.



Here it is, in all its splendor, the commonly cheerful and optimistic articulation of the cognitive dissonance experienced by designers and creative workers, who must face the hardships of finding a job while, at the same time, being expected to address “the biggest problems we face today”.

The entrepreneurial push belongs to an idea of higher education functioning as a training for the “real world”, i.e. work. Among the many reasons why this philosophy is problematic, I’d like to mention the most important one: we have no idea what work will look like in the near future. On the other end of the spectrum, people understand school as a bastion of intellectual activity not polluted by the demands of the economy and the job market. On one side there is a few years-long internship, on the other a leisurely Arcadia.

The debate on higher education seems too much focused on either submitting to the logic of work or rejecting the material reality of work altogether. While adoption of the former mindset would defeat the noble purposes of education, it is undeniable that higher education functions as an investment into one’s professional identity. As such, it is already work. From the Italian workerist perspective, students are already a section of social work, their studies contributing to class reproduction and -ideally- on social mobility. Students are “workforce in progress”. By preparing technically and ideologically to work, they are already working.

Is there a third way to orient higher education? Schools should situate themselves at the same time inside and outside the logic of social reproduction: they must be both protected and temporary space of purchased leisure but also a ground of critical analysis of work polarization, precarity and social competition. By being at the same time endogenous and exogenous, students and teachers would be able to address the rhetorical regimes that have infiltrated



education to serve the purposes of work reproduction. Instead of cooperating in order to address their common problems, students and teachers are urged to individually tackle the biggest issues of our time. They are pressed to save the world while partially ignoring *their* world. Ironic, isn't it?

Some people are questioning the Schroedingerian paradigm of the creative worker simultaneously entrepreneur and underemployed. Among them, the Precarious Workers Brigade who in their *Training for Exploitation?* maintain that "employability normalises certain subordinating attitudes toward work and the self, promoting free labour and individualistic behaviour, which discourages collective practices and solidarity."

## BUREAUCREATIVITY

When Garland penned his manifesto, one thing that he, together with other twenty designers, subtly denounced was the *reductio ad laborer* of the creative mind. Wasting time on improving the sales of "cat food" isn't only a problem of common good, but also a matter of professional frustration, of work drudgery. The "trivial purposes" of advertising dumb down, day by day, the activity of designers offering them no gratification.

The demand for professional fulfillment has found various expressions during the years. Daniel van der Velden concludes his 2006 essay with the following appeal: "Let designers offer the surplus value, the uselessness and the authorship of their profession to the world, to politics, to society." His very concrete worry was that "holding a mouse [might prove] cheaper in Beijing than in the west of Holland." Authorship, which is what many high educated designers aim for, is another word for creative autonomy. Unfortunately, it's easy to realize that nowadays design surplus value, genuine *creativity*, isn't fully absorbed by affluent societies.

Did I say “creativity”? Sorry designers, I know you despise the C-word. It is vague and tacky, lacking rigor and method. However, here I’m not concerned with this understanding of the term, I rather refer to the way it is intended in the “creative industries”: a qualifier for a series of jobs and practices like design, journalism, or architecture. In places like the Netherlands, creative autonomy is partially administered by the public sector through a shrinking system of grants and subsidies. Don’t get me wrong: better this than the desert of cultural funding that is Italy. However, this administrative process has a series of effects on the the way projects and practices are conceived, performed and presented. The management of creative activity affects it, projecting a bureaucratic shadow on it.

Creative work goes through a plethora of forms to fill, deadlines and standardized requirements in terms of outputs, documentation, and social media PR. Designers craving for (financial) autonomy paradoxically become administrative agents, organizing their own work in a way that is institutionally pleasing, which generally means adherent to the creative industry paradigm. In one word, *bureaucreativity*.

You think that MTV is creative, and paperwork is bureaucratic? Think again. Bureaucreativity looks like a flashy glaze on boring procedures. It is the creativity required to fill in a funding application for an experimental videogame, or to come up with a budget for an idea that doesn’t require one, ’cause – hey, I also need money. It is creativity that feels like a chore. Bureaucreativity is creativity subjugated to work, for more than creating, it preserves power structures. Take this excerpt on the role of creativity in an organization tweeted by design guru John Maeda. Here organizational theorist Russell Ackoff maintains that:

Organizations that value creativity must develop tolerance for unconventional behavior. They should realize that such

behavior is not a form of protest but a requirement for effective work.

What about schools and their students? Should they simply reject bureaucreative cool? Perhaps counterculture means going for a traditionally bureaucratic inclination, with grey walls and lack of fun or tacky creativity. The renewed appreciation of brutalism seems to go in this direction. Maybe boredom and gray realism is to way to go defeat the compulsion towards glossy bureaucreative self-administration and self-optimization.

### EMOTIONAL COUNTERCULTURE

In a 2015 inquiry for the *Atlantic*, journalist Hanna Rosin investigated an unusually high rate of suicides among well-off kids living in Palo Alto. Among others, a tremendous pressure to succeed and the high expectations from parents are identified as elements contributing to this bourgeois tragedy. Something that puzzles Rosin is the absence of a counterculture in the schools she visited. “Why isn’t there a sense anymore that you shouldn’t trust the authority?” – she asks.

Above, I’ve tried to highlight the way in which a more or less internalized conspicuous disposition involving enthusiastic and broad socio-political engagement is (sometimes ironically) packaged by design education and field discourse to titillate bureaucreative authority. To do this, I focused on the University of the Underground both because of the mediatic resonance it received and because, as an instance of alternative education, is still fresh. As such, it might be able to incorporate some of the ideas included in this text. Its design of experiences manifesto reads:

Our work aim to challenge power structures by initiating and engineering events. It rejects absurdity and boredom in the everyday and responds to it with passion, thrill and free

will, thereby generating new forms of individual and social imaginings and actions.

In this regard, I argue that the sociable, indefatigable and committed creative worker (in one word, *passionate*) offers a raw model to be performed by everyone else. While this attitude can be fruitfully contagious, it can also be perceived as an obligation. “As a designer, I have to be optimistic”, Bruce Mau admits in the aforementioned interview. What about those who find it hard to be optimistic? I’d like to conclude this text by exploring a possible form of counterculture, one pivoted on sentiments and emotions. Such counterculture should be able to offer some sort of catharsis to the white noise that surrounds bureaucreative engagement. A noise made of ethical disorientation, self-doubt and a sense of unfulfillment, passionlessness and *missionlessness*.

Education is a privileged territory for present and future workers of the so-called creative industries to organize, be that in the form of a collective, a studio, an activist group or a loose bunch of like-minded friends. Higher education offers what is often the last chance to construct a critical understanding of the realm of work, both for current students and for the wilderness of part-time teachers and tutors that intermittently contribute to the program. In this sense students and teachers are allies. In a time when school management increasingly promotes an entrepreneurial approach rooted in personal responsibility and thus individual culpability, collective forms of resistance become more necessary than ever.

Even within the schools with a critical bent, there is not even the slightest distrust of the emotional labor required to thrive in the art and design world, no wariness towards the ‘feeling rule’ of enthusiasm. Enthusiasm, together with corollary expressions of niceness and ersatz sympathy, is the fundamental *lingua franca* of design and the creative industries in general. This set

of predefined emotional articulations is needed to interact with teachers and collaborators but also to address clients in that kind of psychotherapy session that is the debriefing. Not to mention the religious zeal prescribed by job interviews.

Design is generally understood as creative work. But what is presently called ‘creativity’ is less a matter of intellectual or physical dexterity than a feature of one’s character, a personality trait. Creativity is first and foremost an emotional endeavor emerging relationally, a jubilant manifestation of the recombinant potential of ideas. When was the last time you stumbled on a melancholic expression of creativity? I bet you can’t easily recall. As a confirmation that creativity is more a sentiment than an exercise of inventiveness, the reality of creative labor is for many mostly a matter of micromanagement and dull repetitiveness.

The *idea* of creativity underlies an emotional disposition more than one rooted in the mind or the body. Yet, there’s no such thing as a ‘course in enthusiasm’. This is because such positive disposition is so foundational that it doesn’t need to be made explicit. Max Stirner might have been right when he declared that the main reason of education is to instill *sentiments*. So, we are left with no ground to question these sentiments and with the solitary task of nurturing them inside of us. I believe that design represents one of the epitomes of the production of the creative –read enthusiastic– subject. Designers understand particularly well that a big chunk of their job is to streamline their personality into an optimistic and cheerful parody of temperament. Whereas for some people this is a natural tendency, for some other it is a demanding or even repellent effort: a work that doesn’t only involve face to face interactions but also digital communication, by means of email uplifting, LinkedIn smiling, Behance congratulating. This is not to say that enthusiastic people should feel ashamed for their upbeat attitude, but to point out that enthusiasm can be oppressive. Not to

mention the fact that enthusiasm itself is reduced to its bright side: one could ideally be enthusiastic and hostile, but this is not what agencies looking for “a young and enthusiastic graphic designer” want.



\* sez Lebanon Hanover.  
[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPw7nlluRdc>]

Since people are allowed or even urged to be themselves as long as they're not negative, or even worse, *sad*, I'm launching a 'call for sadness'. I invoke a poetics informed by the mild alienation of not-so-creative labor, by professional indifference, by cosmic purposelessness. A poetics of extraneity topped with self-deprecating irony serving as an informal means of solidarity, but also of ironic attachment as a way to engage with the world. I address all those who suffer from imposter syndrome, those who struggle to imagine Sisyphus happy. Let's adopt the iconographic and textual grammar of existential memes, twitter accounts like @sosadtoday and popular icons of social awkwardness like Addams Family's Wednesday.



Tear Gun by Yi-Fei Chen, 2016.

If design becomes just an expression of bureaucreativity hidden by an exhausting online and AFK emotional labor, the refusal of work, of its bodily and cognitive dimension, should go hand in hand with the refusal of mandatory enthusiasm, of the positive disposition that such work requires. This is why my call for sadness is actually a plea for an emotional counterculture, a collective reaction against the occultation of material circumstances by means of artificial self-motivation.

Fellow imposters, stop smiling and coalesce.

- \* This text is published online in a version that includes extensive hyperlinks to the texts and events referenced within it, which can be found at Silvio's Entreprenariat, at <http://networkcultures.org/entreprenariat/the-designer-without-qualities/>.

THE BANFF CENTRE, SUMMER 2011

*The Serving Library*



Visual Arts, July 4 – August 12

David Reinfurt  
Stuart Bailey  
Anthony Huberman  
Robert Snowden  
Angie Keefer  
Junior Aspirin Records  
Rob Giampietro

*Group seminars will take place each weekday morning within the model of the library that we'll assemble together in the Walter Phillips Gallery during the first week.*

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WEEK 1

Introductions, library assembly, exhibition opening.

WEEK 2



The T here stands here not just for TYPE, but rather for its mother discipline Typography, or how words are written into the world. Typography isn't only concerned with typefaces, traditions, or technical methods; it more broadly describes how an idea that takes abstract shape in the mind is transposed—via language—into the concrete world. If language is the looking glass that constructs our thinking, typography is the crucible where the Platonic essence of an idea meets its William Jamesian actualization.

Have you ever watched a 5-year-old learning to write? *First, draw a mountain, up-up-up. Stop. Now back down-down-down. Stop. Next, draw a line right across the middle, from this side*

to that side. *Perfect: an "A."* Then, as the child makes her way through the rest of the alphabet, practicing and practicing, she is at the same time also learning to recognize and to read. And as she moves from drawing to writing, it's as if the *mechanick exercise* of moving her hand to make these strange marks literally draws the glyphs closer. Reading and writing are fused in a mechanical-cerebral alliance whose alchemical result is typography. I'm reading and writing right now.

"Pure" information is a misnomer. Every transmitted idea must be carried in a container. And that container inevitably asserts itself back onto the idea it contains. John Cage put it simply:

It is like a glass of milk.

You need the glass, and you need the milk.

In order to think about typography, together we'll perform a series of simple exercises designed to recover the essential strangeness of our alphabet by following typographic assignments from Paul Elliman, Bruno Munari, Robert Bringhurst, Dennis Oppenheim (and son), Oliver Sacks, Beatrice Warde, and Donald Knuth. (DR)

### WEEK 3



The LASSO is loosely appropriated here as a device that captures a moving object (in its analogue sense) or an irregular one (in its digital sense)—in our case, “the cultural condition.” Brian Eno draws a capital distinction between “culture” (imperative) and “Culture” (gratuitous), and this class is concerned with the former—which is to say society in general rather than art in particular. Together we'll attempt to grasp its dominant characteristics, such as these three I happened across the other day in a book review: *The corporatized society ...The post-natural*

*environment ... The pharmacologically-altered human landscape.* To bring us up to speed we'll consider some previous attempts both distant and recent, including those of Henry Adams (1907), Umberto Eco (1962), Michael Bracewell (2001), Mark Fisher (2009), and James Gleick (2011).

Bruno Latour has recently called for a shift from thinking in terms of “matters of fact” to “matters of concern”—away from the limited perception of self-contained phenomena, and towards the fullest possible scenography of hybrids, connections and networks. He then asks, “What is the *style* of matters of concern?,” i.e., how might we model them in order to get a grip (if not exactly reign them in)? Past examples of visual representation, such as perspective drawing, projective geometry, CAD imaging, Google Earth, he claims, come nowhere near capturing the essence of current processes.

The practical part of our class will respond to Latour's question, attempting to model key features of our culture's near past and near future—the continuous present—in a manner appropriate to it. *Threatening for the effects.* What form might this take, bearing in mind the same knot used for a lasso also makes a noose? (SB)

#### WEEK 4



Some say that it's rude to POINT. But to select is far more so. A common misconception about curating is that it's about selecting artworks, when, in fact, it's about finding them, pointing to them, and moving them elsewhere—literally, poetically, conceptually, and carefully.

Much of the difficulty with making an exhibition lies in the fact that to select and extract something from circulation—an object,

image, practice, or idea—and stop it, examine it, and exhibit it, is to do it a great injustice. A range of writers have recently been discussing the life of *things*, referring, in the largest sense, to all that which is usually not considered to be cognizant human subjects: objects, pictures, rocks, animals, natural systems, etc. These things—objects, images, and ideas included—have their own agency and won't simply sit still under someone else's microscope, on someone else's terms. In fact, what makes them compelling is precisely what animates them, what they want, and where they go when they are set loose into the world. In other words, objects, images, and ideas have lives to live, and instead of selecting them, explaining them, and using them to prove a curatorial argument, let's try something far more respectful, affective, and generative: use your pointer, raise your glass, and give a toast.

We'll have the things on the walls of The Serving Library and the spirit of Fischli & Weiss as our guides, and we'll see where that takes us. In other words, the opening of our exhibition will mark the beginning of our curatorial idea, not its end. (AH)


## WEEK 5



We call anything functional, from software to ideas, a tool. This flex is recent. In antebellum America the word “tool” denoted an implement that could make one thing at a time. Reconstruction-era industrialization broadened the meaning of the word to include any implement involved in the manufacture of a product, which necessitated the coinage “hand tool” to distinguish traditional implements from what came to be known as machines. The difference between these two mechanical species, it seems to me, may be more a matter of culture than of engineering. Machines are both the rival and the antithesis of humanity. In their complexity they resemble us. In their simplicity (all those

moving parts, and yet no Oedipus complex, no fear of death, no ecstasy), they are as William Blake put it, “satanic.” Machines are largely autonomous and threaten us with obsolescence, whereas a tool is nothing without us. Depending on how technologically deterministic you like to get, a computer is either a tool on its way to becoming a machine or just a machine. And software like Adobe Photoshop is a tool comprised of lots of smaller, more specialized, interworking tools like the CROP Tool.

Left column. Third from the top. The icon resembling the annoying way photographers mime their hands up into a frame and move it around whenever the muse comes calling. *It allows you to select an area of an image and discard everything outside this area*—a sloppy tool for really basic needs. I’ve used it only once, while expunging Uncle Doug’s third wife from a photo he wanted to frame for his newish girlfriend.

Michel Foucault argued that man is essentially a thinking animal who lives in a world that is intelligible to him only because he imposes his own order upon his experiences. When asked to teach a Photoshop Tool at a temporary school inside an art institution in the middle of the woods in , I thought that considering Foucault’s term Heterotopia would be a way for us to get naked about being in such a clean, well lit place. The term comes from a lecture he gave in 1967:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely

different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.

A heterotopia is, then, a kind of manicured environment, anywhere where you feel like you are inside a big set of parentheses, an enclosed theater of human folly, aspiration, and formation. Practically, this class will involve a lot of reading (which is, of course, its own set of parenthesis) and talking about reading. What we read will be based on examples of the term, and our present digs: The Library. The Campus. The Cruise Ship. (RS)

## WEEK 6



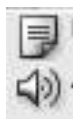
The SPINNING PINWHEEL—and its other incarnations: the tumbling hourglass, the cycling wristwatch, the progress bar — isn't an implement, it's a show. It appears intermittently, without warning, to signal a state of preoccupation, so that you, who were formerly in charge, but are now temporarily relegated to the audience, may be gently assured that any further inputs will be moot until the spinning wheel fulfills its distractive function, then disappears, whereupon the simulation of your tool-wielding agency may re-commence. If there is one element in the digital software user experience that cannot be avoided, this is it; you will encounter the pinwheel and its ilk. They are meant to persuade you that your computer is taking a moment to think.

This class will concern presentation, working from the assumption that how we talk about whatever it is we do, is an integral part of doing it, and therefore, whenever we attempt to talk about, we are inevitably talking within. Rather than spinning our wheels—dissociating talking from doing, thinking from making, and seeming from being—we'll consider the potential for more

usefully associative models of showing, telling, observing and listening.

As a background for our class activity, we will refer to talks given by Ludwig Wittgenstein and Vladimir Nabokov, concerning indefensible statements of wonder, including that familiar standby of the artist's repertoire: "Lately, I've been interested in ..." (AK)

Plus, on WEDNESDAY EVENINGS



Just as it's important to know how to read, write, speak and do, we all need to know how to *listen*. (What are hands for, if not to hide the eyes?) With those ubiquitous white headphone leads dangling from our ears as we walk the streets and ride the subway, today we're plugged in and listening in ways unimaginable even a decade ago. Compact discs are now more commonly used as drinks coasters and vinyl records survive mainly as connoisseur collectibles; recorded sound has shed its corporeal form and new structures of listening have evolved. We *scroll* through hours of recordings using the progress bar in iTunes, dipping in and out of songs, symphonies or audio books. We *shuffle* through manifold musical genres and decades, and *share* our discoveries with friends and like-minds.

These new structures of listening may have things to tell us about the way we produce and consume culture. How is narrative created? What does our ability to access, at the click of a mouse, almost any album or film that's ever been made tell us about taste, consumption and how we construct our idea of history and progress? If all that is solid really has melted into air, what of the materiality of the hardware we use in order to be "connected"? (That immaterial digital code needs to get to

us somehow or other.) How does listening affect the ways we relate to each other, make things or exchange information? Four sessions of AUDIO ANNOTATION (in the dark) will ask us to use our ears in order to see things a little differently. (JAR)

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Finally, at some point in the middle of the Foundation Course, Rob Giampietro will deliver a remote lecture on the HANDLE:







AFTER BANFF

*The Serving Library*

This letter was originally written to a good friend and interlocutor Mike Sperlinger a month or so after getting back from Banff. Obviously, it has been reworked for publication.

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14.08.11

Mike,

I've been putting off writing to you for some time, mostly due to being preoccupied with Banff, etc.

I suppose that "etc." is already an instance of the pathologically slack style lamented in the *New York Times Magazine* piece you sent me, the patron saint of which is supposedly David Foster Wallace. I suppose I enjoyed the piece in a heart-sinking kind of way—with some sense of, yes, that sounds about right but then, well, a lot of things I come across these days sound about right, and frankly this doesn't seem enough.

Sure, Wallace does casual very well. Sure, it's ubiquitous, pandemic even, and plausibly rooted in his considerable influence—in the U.S. at least. And sure, emails, blogs, texting and other nascent media cultivate the same. Yes, too, we're probably due some kind of backlash return to formality that I'll likely approve of. I don't know; I'm all for critique, of course, but this kind of commentary often seems gratuitous—written to fill cultural column inches and consequently hard to muster enough passion to argue for or against. That said, I took your sending it seriously enough to want to make a concerted effort to keep at least one uptight eye on my language here. For instance, If I were doing a Wallace I wouldn't have started that last sentence with "That said," but more likely "Whatever." Actually I did, then went back and surreptitiously changed it.

But to be clear (to myself as much as to you), the main thing

Wallace represents for me has less to do with his style or subject matter and more with his frequent attempts to articulate a set of clear intentions, a working ethos—a this-is-what-I’m-out-to-achieve relative to both literature-in-general and society-at-large. This doubtless comes across as the sort of woolly humanism that makes you want to throw up. And while your skepticism hasn’t exactly scared me off searching for my own “clear intentions” in view of such wool, it does force me to face the fact that I ought to be able to express them in terms that don’t irritate someone I’m pretty sure shares the same constructive cultural impulses. That is, in terms that are concrete and grounded rather than vague and airy.

Simply put, the idea of assembling a personal (or collective) masterplan and then patiently trying to carry it out seems to me a markedly unusual and so particularly commendable proposition nowadays—an out-of-fashion ambition, not unlike those “proper” writing standards mourned in the *New York Times*. I’m guessing you’d argue that any such ethics ought to be in the work rather than spoken or written about alongside it, and I’d be the first to agree. It’s just that lately I feel so many artists and writers assume as given that what they do is in some sense constructive, yet excuse themselves from articulating—or even contemplating—in *what sense exactly*. Meanwhile, the work itself doesn’t carry any such ethics clearly or convincingly either.

Wallace, on the other hand, publicly and explicitly set himself (and by implication others) measures by which to gauge the success of his writing. It’s this sort of vulnerability that I think pushes his work beyond mere exercises in look-how-cleverly-self-reflexive-I-am or plain old please-like-me, to name two frequent accusations. In short, it is answerable.

Okay, I’m generalizing wildly here, and talking mainly about students, simply because I really come up against this lack when teaching. With this in mind, then, I want to tell you about the

“working ethos” we tried to first lay out and then live up to over our six weeks in Banff. To be honest it’s partly an *aide memoire* for myself, but of course I’m hoping it also responds to some of the things we’ve been writing to each other about (in *Dot Dot Dot 20*, for instance)—at least that it’s more than a literary equivalent of forcing you to look at snapshots of me windsurfing and eating ice cream.

I’ll begin by sparing you another account of the intentions behind our Banff residency beyond this one-liner: *to reconsider the old-school Bauhaus-proxy notion of an Arts Foundation Course relative to a new-school Adobe-proxy Creative Suite Toolbox*. I don’t mean to downplay these intentions, but there’s a whole introductory pamphlet, a “Banfflet,” floating around online if you’re inclined to dig deeper. This was a particularly difficult thing to write—I think because the tone can’t help come across as anything other than bombastic, or at least pompous.

I mean, if you’re going to challenge a mandate as deeply-rooted as the Bauhaus (or at least what the Bauhaus has come to stand for, regardless of its actual nuances), it’s hard not to seem to be assembling some kind of counter-manifesto. Reading it this way, though, is to overlook our wholly speculative and sometimes deliberately absurd approach. The course was set up to interrogate the idea that learning how to look, read, write and talk, *and fostering the will to do so*—kindergarten stuff, really—are more usefully foundational today than learning about universals, abstractions, and craft skills; yet without assuming that this idea is necessarily correct.

Actually, let me retract that and quote one paragraph from towards the end of the Banfflet, because it draws together both something I just mentioned (explicit intentions) and something I want to go on to discuss (self-checking and balance):

We've been missing a shared goal for some time now—to establish a plan as concerted as a Bauhaus mandate, bearing in mind the lessons of such previous experiments and the cultural changes since. We intend to assemble a bunch of tangible skills (critical faculties, orienting attitudes, whatever) relevant to working right now. Not in reaction or capitulation, but more as a means of staying awake, alert, concerned. It should be apparent that this is a hard surface with a soft centre—a structure but no curriculum. As ever, it's a case of trying to establish and maintain an equilibrium of freedom and order; careful to ensure that “letting things work themselves out” doesn't morph into an excuse for letting original intentions slide.

Last night I recalled that when Will Holder and I first shared a studio and started working together in Amsterdam, he frequently used to drive me nuts whenever any decision had to be made by saying: “Let's see what happens ...”. In retrospect, I realize that whatever the decision under discussion, we can't *actually* have had to decide, otherwise we would have been forced to do so rather than possibly letting it slide. The point is, I'd tend towards having things securely buttoned down while he'd prefer to leave them as loose as possible for as long as possible. I think this was the single most important thing I've learned from Will. It also strikes me that while I would certainly *think* I was open-minded, he was patently doing it for real—allowing things to stay tentative and precarious until the very last minute. In this and many other ways he helped me bridge the gap between theory and practice.

That said, when it had all gone horribly wrong, it would be my turn to say: “Well, what did you expect?” Later I suggested we ought to have these maxims carved onto our adjacent grave-stones—a great working philosophy for any double act:

LET'S  
SEE  
WHAT  
HAPPENS

WHAT  
DID  
YOU  
EXPECT

So all that was the pretext. In practice, Angie, David, Robert and myself each directed a week of seminars based on a single Photoshop tool, abetted by a few guests: curator Anthony Huberman in the middle week, a series of dedicated weekly podcasts by Junior Aspirin Records, a realtime ichat lecture by Rob Giampietro, a pre-recorded talk by Jan Verwoert, and a live hookup with MoMA librarian David Senior via Skype.

As you can imagine, this sort of group residency would normally kick off with a couple of days' worth of presentations by the participants (introducing their work, what they hoped to achieve there, etc.). However, among the very broad strokes of plans we'd settled on in advance was the conceit of doing this only at the end—the idea being that the participants would individually speak and collectively react on the basis of what we'd all gathered over the previous weeks.

We spent the first week setting up the space together. The invitation from Banff was actually two-fold—to simultaneously run a course *and* stage an exhibition in their fairly large Walter Phillips Gallery. And given the nature of our Serving Library project, in which everything tends to bleed into everything else, it made immediate sense to set up a model version of our intended physical Library in the gallery to serve both as a seminar room and a public exhibition. Accordingly, we metaphorically-visually cut a chunk out of the space's far right-hand corner and filled the two adjoining walls with our collection of framed artifacts. Then we added a large square table, three shelves of our library's books in a corridor annex, and Nick Relph & Oliver Payne's "artists impression" of The Serving Library—a looping video shot in a dilapidated library in Los Angeles with superimposed Google

Sketchup books, digital bottles of red wine, and a number of silent readers.



In order to introduce the artifacts that would surround us for the next six weeks (as well as the general plan), we decided together how to install them. This involved reading aloud an “Extended Caption,” which is actually more of an essay that explains the various ideas behind drawing this stuff together. The reading became a group activity too, with different people reading a few paragraphs each. For the next couple of days, we discussed the various ways we might arrange the pieces, eventually settling on simply following the caption’s readymade chronology. We ordered the objects to form a lateral baseline-spine across the two walls, then arranged the rest above that spine according to various inclinations — aesthetic, connective, semantic, and so on.



During the second week, we got into the yoga-like routine of daily group seminars from 9.30 am –12.30 pm. David was first up with his class on the TYPE tool, which was concerned with



Typography in general rather than Typefaces specifically—and even more broadly, the idea that all *things* possess form. The baseline point of the class was that words only exist via the filter of a specific typeface, the trace of a hand, or a voice (not to mention extra-linguistic gestures), all of which inevitably affect the message. Whether we are conscious of it or not, these forms involve a constant back and forth with the world. That’s to say, we affect forms and those forms in turn affect us, including how we continue to give form to things, and so on.

David began by duplicating a project set by Paul Elliman, one of his own teachers at Yale. We divided into three teams and were given an hour in which to assemble and demonstrate a “new alphabet” from stuff found outdoors. The first team offered a collection of objects that, due to their diverse physical properties, produced different patterns when dropped into a bucket of water. The particular way in which the water moved in each case was the “language” to be read, which among other implications meant that both sender and receiver had to be already aware of the principle of codification. The second team arranged a walk along a route marked by similar objects to those found by the first team (rocks, sticks, plants, etc.), but alternately emphasized reading as process of moving through a text. The third one argued a lot, and to be honest I can’t recall much about their idea beyond the fact that it merely substituted found debris for our regular 26 Latin characters. Where the others focused on the system’s structure, its grammar, this last attempt was more plainly a direct translation of the existing model. The common aim of all this week’s set pieces (and perhaps the whole program) was to *make language strange*—to freshly notice its effects, its affects, and its defects.

It was already clear that we’d overestimated the group’s capacity for supplementary reading, so we only managed to push through about half the intended texts, talks and films. In the TYPE week these included: designer Paul Elliman’s 1998 essay “My

Typographies,” which complemented that opening project; artist Dennis Oppenheim’s 1971 short film *Two-Stage Transfer*, which comprises footage of himself tracing a shape on his son Eric’s back, while Eric simultaneously traces the felt shape onto a wall (in the second half of the film they switch roles); various references to computer scientist Donald Knuth’s late 1970s project Metafont, a piece of software based on a set of parameters that could be manipulated to produce infinite numbers of fonts and so typical of what he called “a contemporary inclination to view things from the outside, at a more abstract level, with what we feel is a more mature understanding”; film-maker John Smith’s *Slow Glass* (1988–91), a meditation on memory premised on the always-surprising fact that glass is a liquid; and Beatrice Warde’s well-known 1930s essay on design ethics “The Crystal Goblet,” in which she asserts that typography ought always to be “invisible” and holds up a simple wine glass as an example of an appropriately transparent container that’s designed to reveal rather than obscure its contents. We also arranged an impromptu Coke/Pepsi-style Scotch/Bourbon taste challenge, which involved sampling different configurations of whiskies and glasses in order to test Warde’s claim that our perception of given content is affected by the form of its container.

Two Brunos, Munari and Latour, frequently popped up during our six weeks. In the first instance, David screened some footage of Munari making invisible wax drawings with kids on Italian TV in the 1960s (not unlike the Oppenheim procedure). He also read from Munari’s *Drawing a Tree*, which includes a lovely line typeset vertically in the gutter of every page: “Each new branch is slenderer than the last.” The book shows and tells how, despite the fact that all trees fundamentally grow in the same manner (arboreally, from a root, branching, then branching, then branching again), each individual case ends up unique due to the exclusive conditions that surround it (soil, wind, rain, lightening, disease, animal intervention, and so on). Following Munari’s instructions, we built our own 2D tree from toilet paper

on the floor of the gallery—a slightly dumb group exercise that helped move things along. Generally speaking, the seminars tended to oscillate wildly between heavygoing and frivolous, with relatively complex theory and slightly ridiculous games squeezed into the same three hours.

Probably the heaviest class this week involved our reading and discussing the first half of Latour’s two-part lecture *What is the Style of Matters of Concern?*, which opens with the metaphor of a bird trapped inside a house, repeatedly and desperately slamming into a window as it tries to get outside. Basically, Latour is concerned with removing the glass. This essay is one of his many arguments against the Enlightenment-based distinction of so-called *natural* and so-called social phenomena (i.e. the “outside” and “inside” of the “house”).

Two other recurring metaphors are a bridge and a kayak. The bridge is constructed by those who perniciously try to account for natural phenomena from a social point of view, or vice versa. The kayak is Latour’s preferred vantage—the implication being that both banks look markedly different if you’re *going with the flow of a given issue* and so paddling between the two. It’s a plea for a holistic perspective, analogous to the unification of container/contained, the symbiosis of form/content, and other anti-dualistic thinking—hence its potential utility as a foundational arts tool. The same idea was to recur in different guises relative to different domains throughout the six weeks, and in this way the concept became increasingly robust—easier to grasp and so easier to discuss. Which brings us back to David’s starting point: the notion of “type,” “typography” or “forms” in general as marked by a perpetual back and forth with the world.



The following week it was my turn to direct the LASSOO tool. I should point out that we're fully intending to eventually include those digital tools with more obvious material histories such as the Paintbrush, Pencil, or Dodge & Burn. But in this first attempt at building a Foundation Course it simply seemed more appropriate—maybe just more *foundational*—to begin with those tools that allowed for easy metaphorical extrapolation. In any case, my idea with the lasso was to attempt to grasp *the contemporary condition*.

A rope lasso is of course typically used to capture a moving and awkwardly-shaped animal—usually while the rope-thrower is moving too. The present-day Photoshop lasso is partly analogous to its material precedent, but also different in that it's used to capture an irregular *shape* (as distinct from a rectilinear box). Cows and horses are “irregularly shaped” too, but for a cowboy motion is clearly the key factor. Anyway, you get the idea: the contemporary cultural condition is the moving, irregular animal we're trying to get a handle on.

You might also grasp that lassoing is analogous with Latour's kayaking. These kinds of easy analogies were both ubiquitous and contagious in Banff, and I think this was simply due to the daily repetition of these intensive three-hour sessions—a drill that often seemed as physical as it was cerebral. Consequently, the inevitable connections between the mass of matter that cropped up in discussion constantly hovered in our collective consciousness. What a claim! Less dramatically put, I just mean that if the classes had been once a week, or every few days, or with different people in different places, or perhaps even at different times on different days, I'm sure the puddle of inferences would have evaporated sooner.

What I had initially in mind seemed simple. As you know, I'm a big fan of the shortlist of cultural trends compiled by Michael Bracewell in *The Nineties: When Surface Was Depth*, as well

as Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism*, which effectively updates Bracewell's summary a decade on. Both are unusually slim and exceptionally readable volumes of socio-cultural theory, so it's possible to grasp some fairly complex ideas in the space of a week. My idea was to have our group compile an even more up-to-date list in order to first project our current condition into the immediate future (say another decade or so), then predict way beyond it (say another century). In the end, the week was a good deal more complex than that.

I began with an overview of Umberto Eco's 1962 book *The Open Work*. This is a survey of a particular strain of avant-garde art—basically, work that had been deliberately left unfinished or ambiguous in order to be completed in situ by the artist, performers or audience. It's no coincidence, says Eco, that such "open" forms appear in the modern era (his examples begin with Mallarmé)—in fact, they mirror an equivalent openness in science, mathematics and philosophy. Open Works are the most crucial, *useful* artworks of the time because they offer *new* forms that allow an audience to perceive the world *in a manner appropriate to it*—ideally in view to changing it.

I'm drawn less to Open Works *per se* than to the aesthetic theory Eco writes to support his cause—a theory that explains what makes truly avant-garde art more "authentic" and "socially committed" than other art in any given era. Here's an extremely compressed summary of that theory:

As citizens, says Eco, we participate in communal social systems (taxes, politics, travel, libraries) with a view to improving our overall personal situation, despite the fact that these systems tend frequently to seem hostile or malevolent. My favorite example of this since having moved to Los Angeles is driving. Obviously, we contrive to drive for the sake of convenience (to travel large distances, at great speed, perhaps with a load) yet immediately find ourselves facing countless inconveniences (bad

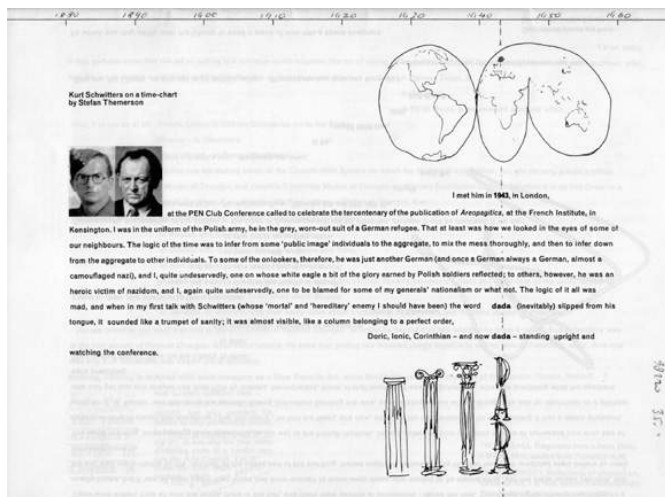
traffic, expensive parking, taxes, insurance). Nevertheless, says Eco, we willingly “alienate ourselves in” society not in order to *transcend* our situation, which is impossible, but at best to *transform* it—a struggle that’s generally worth the payoff.

This *fait accompli* has an analogy in art, he continues, in the sense that the authentic artist necessarily “alienates himself in” *the world of forms* (i.e. the history of art) in order to *trans-form* them. The vocation of the avant-garde is to disown existing, impotent forms, yet it remains unavoidably tethered to them in the attempt to forge newly potent ones. Here’s that “perpetual back-and-forth with the world” again: you can’t create in a vacuum, only hope to transform what already has some sort of communicative collateral. It’s this struggle, this *movement*, says Eco, that constitutes the art. Canonical examples include Stockhausen’s break from the 12-tone system in music, Joyce writing beyond the confines of a single linear narrative in literature, or Duchamp’s readymades, which shifted the focus of fine art from the particular subject to the general system.

Anyway, my idea was to claim the quality implied by Eco’s theory—“a committed, critical engagement with the present”—as another foundational quality. I offered two relatively recent examples that I think illustrate Eco’s point. As exemplary works-in-progress, both are charged with the sort of energy Eco’s getting at, in line with his sense of authenticity, yet “open” in quite different ways.



The first was Alighiero e Boetti's extensive collection of *Mappa* made during the 1970s and 80s, a sprawling series comprising some 150 textile world maps commissioned by Boetti from Afghan artisans. The flags of the world's nation states are stitched within their current borders at the moment of production, so the series documents the ever-shifting geopolitical landscape. Boetti's way of working was timely and telling in a further sense, too—of the shift to “outsourced” production.



Then I introduced Stefan Themerson's “Kurt Schwitters on a Time-Chart,” a personal meditation on Schwitters' work that focuses on its historical context. Like Boetti's maps, Themerson's chart is palimpsestuous, moving through various iterations over 9 years. It started life as an informal talk in 1958; this became the basis of a book; the book's thesis was turned into a formal lecture; and the lecture was ultimately translated into an extremely idiosyncratic collage-essay that runs over 20 pages of the progressive arts magazine, *Typographica*, finally published in 1967. Each new version of the work built on the previous one, amending, adding and refining as and when necessary.



The next morning we read Bracewell and Fisher. I outsourced the labour of reading by having a few members of the class summarize each of Fisher's chapters. This took a lot longer to deliver than I'd anticipated, as it provoked a great deal of debate. Somewhere around the middle of the book, the class collapsed—or evolved—into a discussion about what we as a group actually take Fisher's largely unqualified "capitalism" to mean. We duly struggled to distinguish "capital" from "capitalism" from "late capitalism" from Fisher's "capitalist realism" coining, which is itself a distillation of Frederic Jameson's observation that it's harder to conceive of the end of capitalism than the end of the world, i.e. that fundamental social change is no longer even on the radar.

The topic steamrolled over into the following morning, then we tried to compile our own list of contemporary vicissitudes, focusing on *trajectories* rather than simply listing stuff that's already happened, i.e. phenomena we're still living through and that we might be able to project on to some logical consequence or other. You can imagine the sort of thing: the ever-diminishing size and increasing speed of technology, connectivity, information overload, celebrity obsession, fundamentalism, haywire national economies and global ecologies, the changing dynamics of interpersonal relationships, the family unit, and so on and so on.

After this chaotic exercise it was time to proceed to the second part of Latour's *Matters of Concern*. Angie prefaced our reading by offering a brief introduction to his key 1991 book *We Have Never Been Modern*. According to Latour, the Enlightenment ambition of "progress" founded on scientific discovery has never been achieved; in fact, the whole notion is and always has been fundamentally flawed. The scientific laboratory, says Latour, was a cultural icon designed to publicly authorize truth-claims. And while the lab and the "facts" that it "proved" were certainly useful for debunking long-held superstitions and myths, these



“matters of fact” are now being revealed as inadequate and pernicious. When scientific experiments are conducted in isolation, i.e. in the artificial vacuum of the clinical lab, says Latour, they are immediately disconnected from other, *surrounding* facts and therefore incapable of adequately grasping a world that is, on the contrary, emphatically *connected*—in which everything affects everything else. Because our *ways of seeing* are out of whack with the nature of the phenomena being observed, he concludes, we’re unable to tackle them appropriately, towards usefully dealing with—i.e. changing—the world. This sounds a lot like Eco.

The previous week had been Rodeo Week in Calgary, the nearest big city a couple of hours away. Reportedly, this was a big deal, with the whole place taken over by booze, barbeque and citywide cowboy/cowgirl olympics. And it turned out that the person in charge of overseeing the administration in the Visual Arts department, Kelly, was a full-on cowgirl—with a cowgirl twin sister—who’d taken the previous week off to be in Calgary for the events. On returning at the start our Lasso week, she agreed to bring along her (pink) rope, and spent half an hour on Wednesday morning reigning in the various bits of furniture we’d had built for the residency (twin lecterns, a sandwich board, a street reader, a steel ring) while we asked her about the difficulty involved in, say, simultaneously riding and directing a horse *and* aiming and controlling the rope. During this Q&A she made a memorable comment about the size of the loop relative to the distance of the object: the further the object (the more difficult the aim), the bigger the loop (the greater the redundancy), and vice versa. My grasp of what this means in terms of culture remains just out of reach.

On Wednesday we also played the Mafia Game, a rudimentary role-play that was developed in the late 1980s. It was originally an academic psychology experiment designed to show how the economy of knowledge plays out in an enclosed community—and in the bastardized, popularized version such “knowledge”

amounts to who's Mafia and who's not. The game was introduced to me by an Iranian student at a different summer school the previous year, and we played it a few times with the group there. He told us how the game was hugely popular in Iran at the time, not least because its paranoid dynamic mirrored what was actually going on in Iranian society.

A quick version of the game:

Everyone in the group receives a card that assigns the role of either (corrupt) mafioso or (honest) citizen. These are secretly noted, then the game cycles through "days" and "nights." During the nights, the whole group shuts their eyes. Then, at the word of the communally-appointed God in charge, the Mafia awake and silently decide on one citizen to kill. They shut their eyes again, all awake, and God announces the death, followed by much speculation and accusation about whodunnit.

There's a round of voting for a suspect Mafioso, which involves a lot of double-bluffing by the others. A verdict is reached, and the accused is lynched whether or not they are innocent. Then the whole thing starts over—another night, another killing, more accusations, voting, lynching. The aim of the game, depending on your assigned allegiance, is for all Mafia to eliminate all citizens without being identified and killed off themselves; or conversely, for the citizens to successfully identify all Mafia and hang the lot.

The reason I wanted to include the game as part of the Lasso week was to practically demonstrate something we'd been talking about in light of Eco, Bracewell, Fisher, and particularly Latour. Namely, the problem of perceiving something that's permanently changing while in the process of permanently changing yourself; the impossibility of "getting outside" the condition under observation. The idea was simply (and complexly) to play the game while more-consciously-than-usual *watching ourselves*

*play the game*; to consider how and why it works as a game from the vantage of one of its working parts.

We played first on the Wednesday to get everyone used to the rules, again on Thursday once the group was a little less tentative, and then that same evening at the boisterous Canadian Legion, the only halfway decent bar in downtown Banff. With Latour's "concerns" in mind, the idea was to note how the game was affected by these different *surrounds*—in different venues, at different times of day, with 0, 1, 2, 3 rounds of drinks. At the same time, the ebb and flow of temperaments constantly changed according to previous games and burgeoning realworld relationships. All of which visibly and complexly affected the game's dynamic. Again: how to steer the horse while roping the cow.

Somewhere during the week I'd also assigned two David Foster Wallace readings from the novel *Infinite Jest*. The first depicts an absurdly sophisticated annual role-play tournament called Eschatron, which is played each year by the latest batch of adolescents at the novel's high-end residential tennis academy. Eschatron is a war game: an imaginary world map is projected over a few courts, its players assemble into various multinational blocs, then proceed to fire tennis balls (nuclear warheads) according to more or less strategic reasoning. The gathering entropy is analysed as close to realtime as possible by a kid running around with a computer on a trolley. Naturally, it all ends in total world destruction, specifically with the image of the data-processing kid's head crashed through an upended monitor, legs flailing out and up at the sky as a snowstorm obliterates the map.

The second excerpt I handed out is a very brief passage that recounts the invention and trajectory of "video telephony," an imagined technology that comes across as being far more science fiction than Skype, though I'm not sure why as it's

effectively the same thing. In the story the system is hugely popular at first, but rapidly declines once users begin to realize the necessity of the regular non-visual telephone's abstract delusion that the person on the other end is totally interested in and concentrating on what you have to say. Video telephony reveals instead the fact that the person on the other end is more commonly distracted and bored. This leads to self-consciousness, lack of confidence, and myriad compensatory products (increasingly sophisticated masks and avatars), before the whole thing is abandoned as a lost cause and the population happily returns to the visual ignorance of old phones.

We read this as an example of how a certain cultural phenomenon—a technology in this case—plays out over time. Then we took our own inventory of present/future phenomena and, in the manner of Wallace's example, tried to imagine plausible trajectories for each one over the next 5, 10, 50 years. Email protocols, for instance: if, why, and when to respond—and how are such factors likely to change given how they've altered over the past decade? Or the limits of Wikipedia: what happens once an entry's knowledge hits a certain threshold of specialism? How is such knowledge aggregated—by whom, and according to what standards?

The closing assignment on Lasso Friday was to design some kind of game ourselves—a number of base conditions and a set of operations that might model one of the contemporary tendencies we'd discussed in the past week. As time was fast running out, we decided to stick to the format of the Mafia Game but try adding an extra character that would significantly affect the game's dynamic.

One of the big news stories this week was the trial of media mogul Rupert Murdoch, and we duly decided to introduce a very contemporary Murdoch role into the game. In essence, our Murdoch was above the law, but unlike the Mafia his aim is

neither to eliminate nor safeguard the rest of the players, only to perpetuate the game—and his or her presence in it—for as long as is practicably possible.

And that was more or less the end of the Lasso. With two postscripts:

First, I gave the class one last chapter to read over the weekend, taken from a book by Adam Gopnik about growing up in New York called *Through the Children's Gate*. In the chapter, which is called “Fourth thanksgiving: propensities,” Gopnik writes a portrait of his family by detailing their relationship to games. First he recalls his son having a sleepover with a friend on what’s deemed (by the parents) to be a No Screen weekend, meaning no computer games, TV, movies, email, whatever.

When the kids, to his delight, report that they’ve spent the Saturday in a SoHo pool hall, Gopnik is thrown by his wife’s stoic observation, which is something along the lines of *aren’t they just doing your idea of a mindless activity rather than theirs, and anyway wasn’t pool considered just as pernicious in its day as you consider those TV or computer screens to be now?* Gopnik continues to grapple with his own prejudices, dissecting the demands he makes on his kids. A second narrative line is concerned with language games, particularly his daughter’s tendency to try out adult-ish words she doesn’t yet quite know how to use correctly, like “actually” and “miscellaneous” eventually realizing that this is way a lot of Manhattan adults speak too. Finally, he recounts of his own Mafia Game episodes—in Upper East Side apartments, with a bunch of middle class media couples, and a break for Chinese food:

Some of the game’s pleasure lies simply in its not being conversation: it is a relief not to have to make small talk with your neighbors at a dinner party. Instead of telling them elaborate social lies in an unformed context, you get

to tell them elaborate social lies in a formal one. After all, the game offers a stylized version of the same game most of the players have been engaged in at offices and in meetings all day long, and would normally be playing that night too, only less openly.

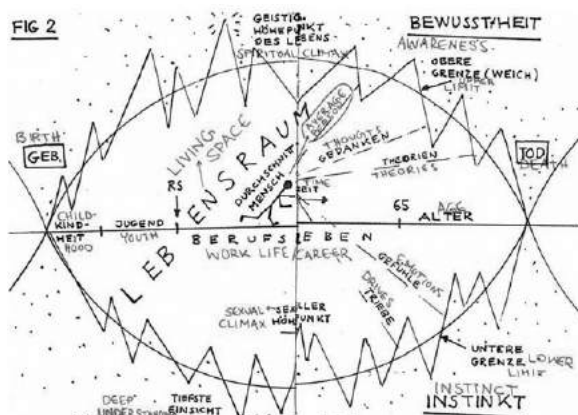
At the crux of the chapter, a suspicious Gopnik bursts in on his son and friend during a subsequent No Screen weekend to find them indeed at the computer. Don't worry, says the son—they're writing a screenplay. In fact it's a sequel to *Lord of the Rings* set in Manhattan. Okay, *this* kind of screen time is fine, admits Gopnik, who then again struggles to understand his own hypocrisy. He concludes that it's not the screens (i.e. digital media) that he objects to *per se*, only the idea of a cultural diet that consists primarily in passive rather than active interaction. It's fine, he reasons awkwardly, for his son to be a producer but not a consumer; fine to make stuff for other people to consume but not consume himself.

And before we finally dispersed for a weekend in the mountains, I played the group Mark Leckey's enigmatic video *GreenScreen-Refrigerator* (2012), a piece that touches on all we'd been talking about this week—from open works through contemporary conditions to productive defamiliarization. The Lasso, then, was all about the difficulty and necessity of watching, participating, and transforming *at the same time*.



We'd anticipated needing some kind of break in the middle of the course, so the fourth week was set up a little looser than the rest. Anthony Huberman showed up as a guest teacher with his designated tool the POINTER—the idea being that he'd focus on curating, i.e. pointing at other people's work.

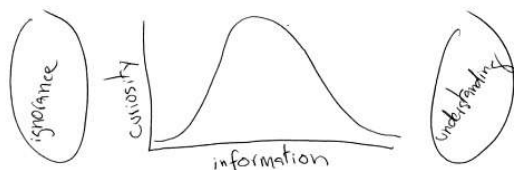
We'd also already decided together to demonstrate the point by pointing particularly at the work of Swiss double act Fischli & Weiss. To be honest, this was mostly an excuse to show one of their two “Rat & Bear” films, *The Right Way* (1982–3), set in the Swiss mountains and so in accord with our own remote surroundings. We'd also managed to borrow and hang, in another corner of the gallery, their related series of 15 blithe diagrams drawn under the rubric “Order and Cleanliness.” In light of our previous week's attempts to both diagram the contemporary condition and negotiate the vicissitudes of the Mafia Game, it was weirdly apt and instructive to have the series in the background.



Anthony began by discussing what he would probably resist calling “the ethics of curating”—to wit, the problems involved in exhibiting artworks in a manner more or less true to the spirit in which they were made. He pointed to his own recent attempts to do as much in *For The Blind Man In The Dark Room Looking For The Black Cat That Isn't There* (2009), a group show gathered around the idea of “nonknowledge,” as well as at The Artists Institute, a space he's since set up in New York.

I also recall him berating The New Museum's recent show *The Last Newspaper* as a typical instance of the pitfalls of an overly didactic approach—a show in which each piece of work in some

way or other happened to relate to newspapers. In Anthony's view, such a heavy-handed (and arbitrary-seeming) theme tends to overwhelm and obscure the niceties of the works it contains. Basically, he's against the sort of explication that tends to shut work down rather than open it up, as he's visualized in his own rudimentary bell-curve diagram:



On a graph that plots information (X) against human curiosity (Y), the vector begins at zero information and zero curiosity, rises to a midpoint of adequate information, maximum curiosity and total engagement, then falls as too much information yields diminishing interest. And so the question he asks, in view of making and showing art, is: How to surf the top of the curve by offering just the right amount of information to maintain momentum but not so much as to kill it? How to maximize potential energy? If this is still too abstract, consider the same sentiment as a sentence assembled by David:

The ongoing process of attempting to understand (but never really understanding completely) is absolutely productive. The relentless attempt to understand is what moves a practice moving forward.

Next, we collectively read one of Ryan Gander's "Loose Associations" lectures as an example of an alternative means of advancing ideas—in this case by tenuous, eccentric and frequently deadpan connection. We passed the transcription from person to person, each reading a paragraph out loud, then counterposed it with a longer piece written to accompany an exhibition curated by Tacita Dean, "An Aside."



One point that sticks in my mind from the ensuing discussion is how all the talk of carefully selecting, ordering, juxtaposing and captioning a group of works seemed peculiarly oblivious to the fact that each individual artwork is (ideally at least) *already* a carefully-conceived balancing act of what and what not to present. Again, the implication is that overdetermined mediation at the macro level of a show can overwhelm or obscure what's already vital and refined about those individual works that constitute it.

On Tuesday morning we watched *The Right Way* for a bit of existential slapstick, then to everyone's relief decided to supplant the day's seminar with a group hike down the local Voodoo Trail. Generally, we ought to have done a lot more walking and less talking—though naturally all the walking triggered a lot more talking, too.

Back in the gallery on Wednesday, from one of our twin lecterns, a precariously balanced laptop played video footage of Jan Verwoert delivering a recent talk in Berlin, while from the other we projected images of the work Jan referred to along the way. The result was a second-hand lecture with the benefit of being able to press pause whenever we felt like debating a point. Ostensibly an attempt to answer the question, *Why are conceptual artists painting again?*, Jan first discussed who or what has typically legitimized art in the past, then recounted a number of instances of defiant vulnerability in the face of official “lawmakers”: Lee Lozano v. Art & Language, for example.

Angie argued that Jan wasn't really talking about “the law,” inasmuch as the notion of “common law” is, theoretically at least, an articulation of consensus opinion at any given moment. In other words, “the law” is fundamentally fluid rather than fixed, and so contrary to the kind of blind authority Jan means to insinuate. Angie went on to wonder instead whether what he was describing was more correctly “violence.” Jan wasn't

there to answer back, of course, but having thought it through a bit more myself, I'd conclude that (a) yes, "authority" seems closer to what Jan's getting at than "law"; that (b) violence and vulnerability are two plausible ways of working in the face of that authority, and ultimately (c) what Jan's arguing for is actually a kind of vulnerable violence (or vice versa).

On Thursday, the last class before an official long weekend, we ended Anthony's week of pointing by reading and discussing a draft of an essay he was in the middle of writing. The piece was commissioned by—and to some extent about—the Paris art collective castillo/corrales. The draft eventually became "Raise Your Glass," published in the catalog for an exhibition of the group's work at Midway in Minneapolis. Later it was rewritten and republished under the name "How to Behave Better" in our own *Bulletins of The Serving Library 2* (an issue that ended up being comprised entirely of Banff matter).

In both versions of the piece, Anthony is primarily concerned with the *manner* in which artists—and by extension curators and institutions—have generally *acted* in the past, then how they do and could and should act today. He describes three paradigms of modern artists. The first is the *Age of the Boxer* (heroic, macho, violent: Picasso), the second is the *Age of the Chess Player* (smart, knowing, clandestine: Duchamp), and the third is the currently-becoming *Age of Rat & Bear*, in which artists supposedly wander off the chess board altogether, refusing all established channels, protocols and etiquette, and preferring to make up their own rules as they go along. The gameboard no longer conditions the work, although the work might reconstitute the gameboard. In any case, the summary conclusion is that it isn't (only) what you do it's (also) the way that you do it.

At this point, Angie inserted a quick impromptu talk on Ludwig Wittgenstein and ethics. I forgot to mention earlier that she'd already given a quick introduction to Wittgenstein during the

Type week. David had asked her to speak to the class about “the limits of language” with particular reference to colour (relative to his consideration of form’s relation with the wider world), and Angie had decided to recount Wittgenstein’s thinking about and around the subject.

Her first talk addressed Wittgenstein’s well-known drift from his early axiomatic “picture theory” of language developed and published in the early 1920s (language is a 1:1 reflection of the world; the inability to articulate certain phenomena demonstrates the limits of language rather than the limits of the world), to his later, looser thinking about and around “language games” a few decades later (language can’t be mapped as a set of bounded logical relations; it is wholly contextual and relative).

Angie walked us through these ideas while projecting a flat field of “green” behind her on the wall as she talked. The “green” is in quote marks because the colour on the wall was animated to morph constantly between different greens, intermittently pushing the boundaries of what most of us *probably* perceive more as blue or yellow. This is effectively a translation of Wittgenstein’s philosophy—that your green doesn’t necessarily mean my green, *ergo* “green” is not a fixed referent. It can’t be contained in a watertight “picture theory” and is thus better conceived of as one “language game” among many—all of which effect each other.

The focus on ethics in Angie’s second talk was precipitated by a bunch of notes and lectures about Wittgenstein’s work she’d found by chance in the library at Banff. In his 1929 “Lecture on Ethics” he distinguishes logical propositions (facts) from ethical (or aesthetic) statements. Crudely put, a logical proposition is “objective,” that is, verifiable and beyond dispute, regardless of any particular context. An aesthetic statement, on the other hand, is in the realm of “whereof we cannot speak,” essentially

nonsensical, and so necessarily “subjective”—an individual or consensus opinion in a particular time and place.

From this point of view, then, any assertion concerning art is inescapably relative. Otherwise put, it makes no sense whatsoever to speak of aesthetic matters as though they were absolute facts. But there’s a nice postscript to this hardline: Wittgenstein adds that he has only the deepest respect for anyone who feels obliged to do so inasmuch as it is an ineffably human impulse—“and I would not for my life ridicule it.”

To pause and explain again how this relates to a reconsideration of foundational skills in a contemporary art/design school, it seems to me that to acknowledge the relative, unspeakable nature of aesthetic discourse before going ahead and discoursing anyway is a profitably provocative thing to do.



Next up was Robert with the CROP tool. Somewhere along the way we’d decided that our roundabout reading of this function would mine Michel Foucault’s notion of “heterotopia,” a term he borrowed from biology and applied to space. Unlike a utopia, a heterotopia is an actual place, simultaneously public and private, and typically characterized by the paradox of being “open and closed at the same time.” (I suppose our tenuous idea was that heterotopias are effectively “cropped off from” the rest of the world.)

The plan was to assemble a few pieces of work set on Foucault’s prime example of a heterotopia, the cruise ship. We had in mind Jean-Luc Godard’s latest offering, *Film Socialisme*, and David Foster Wallace’s longform essay “A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again.” Both are at least partially set on a luxury cruise, which proves an ideal backdrop for a bit of pop

anthropology. Robert also noted the various heterotopias nested in our own current location: Canada > Banff > campus > Visual Arts dept. > gallery > toolbox. This helped sharpen the idea: the crop tool became a symbol of close reading, and Robert proposed as primary resource Don DeLillo's classic 1985 campus novel *White Noise*. His idea was to force us all to read the entire novel in a day, then subject us to a run of close reading and analysis for the rest of the week.

In the event we didn't read DeLillo; at this point in the course it simply seemed too much to ask of our flagging student body. Robert did, however, manage to coax it into reading the 126-page Wallace essay on Monday in order to collectively dissect it on Tuesday. He offered a set of principles for close reading (different approaches to first, second and third readings; granting the writer the benefit of the doubt; reading with humility, etc.), tried them out on a little bit of Nabokov (the wonderful introduction to his *Lectures on Literature*), then spent the rest of the class discussing the structure of "A Supposedly Fun Thing ...". We searched for the essay's key moments or flash-points, sequences that in some way seemed to sum up the whole, and ended by listing all previously unknown or obscure words and phrases. This list proved useful later in the week.

This was quite a heavy session, but Wednesday was much lighter. It involved a very different kind of close reading—one effected by our own writing. Robert had asked me to introduce Raymond Queneau's seminal *Exercises in Style*. After a quick history of the author and the book, I showed some examples from a related exercise I'd previously given to a class of art students in LA. Mimicking Queneau's *Exercises*, they were asked to rewrite a brief, mundane event from their past week in a number of different styles. These "styles" were, in turn, drawn from a lexicon of most frequently used "art words" the class had been compiling that semester. Here are three of my favourites from one student's trip to the dentist:

MARXIST: I went to the dentist for a teeth cleaning on Friday. Dr Nyong, although an immigrant, had taken American capitalism to heart, by charging a struggling artist \$60 for a few minutes of his time. Obviously the lack of social and medical program meant the money would come from my own pocket money that had already been taxed ad nauseum, to fund wars against the economically downtrodden peoples of foreign countries, and to line the coffers of the soulless elite. I was given a “red” toothbrush as a parting gift. Ironic.

HEROIC: Marching purposefully into the enemy’s compound, your narrator forced the foreigner to accept his terms to beautify what God had so generously given him. Keeping a scarlet anti-cavity weapon as a trophy, said narrator marched out into the world.

ENCOUNTER: My God, it’s a dentist. Right on top of a liquor store, of all places. Hello, is that a receptionist I see? The dentist is touching me, all over my mouth, in a painful yet professional way. We finalize our dance by exchanging gifts to commemorate our time together. I give she \$60. She giveth me a toothbrush. The colour of a valentine.

This was basically the template for the rest of the day’s class, only we had the Banff class rewrite the first couple of nicely mundane opening lines from Wallace’s essay according to a “style” suggested by entries from yesterday’s list of dubious terms. The only ones I immediately recall are “Phallic,” “Calvinist,” and “Old Dimes,” which should give you an idea of the crazy range. We had an hour or so to perform our operation on the text, and another hour to read the results, which were predictably deranged.

On the fourth day we collectively close-read Susan Sontag's canonical 1965 essay "On Style" along with a set of antagonistic questions from Angie. Sontag's basic argument is that style is content, or at least ought to be considered as such by critics. Curiously, though, "On Style" is (on close reading) itself fragmentary, elliptical, and frequently obfuscating—hence Angie's idea was to read Sontag in view of her own argument. In other words, how to account for the content manifest in "On Style"'s style? It was a particularly muscular morning, with a lot of wrangling about reading it out of its mid-sixties context and so forth. To wind down, Robert offered his own close (very close) reading of the end of Wallace's cruise report—an interpretation of its grammatical constructs, repetitions, and varying use of the first, second, and third person. He concluded with a meta-physical reading of the last paragraph.

And on the Friday he and Angie presented a number of works by artist Moyra Davey in pointed anticipation of the upcoming, final week. As I mentioned before, this week would entirely comprise individual presentations by all the participants. But the plan also involved our collectively assembling a set of rules to underpin the *critique* of these presentations—ideally in a form that would in some way assimilate the reflexive design of the Mafia Game (and whatever else seemed relevant from the Type, Lasso, Pointer, and Crop weeks).

The idea was to take Davey as a test case, a means of easing ourselves into (finally!) talking directly about contemporary art. As luck would have it, the Banff Centre happened to have a few pieces of her work in their archive that we were able to have brought up to the gallery: a series of extremely close-up photos of U.S. pennies so worn that Lincoln's profile is almost totally obliterated by filth and scratches. Next we watched Davey's *50 Minutes*, a kind of video diary about her family, time, literature, 9/11, psychoanalysis and domesticity that makes repeated reference to her refrigerator—which then sat in peculiar juxtaposition

with Leckey's *GreenScreenRefrigerator*. Finally, we read extracts from two pieces of her writing, "The Problem of Reading" and "The Wet and the Dry." I half-recall some some richly allegorical goings-on between Goethe, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Percy & Mary Shelley.

After absorbing these works, each in a different medium, we discussed their various effects in terms of what was common to all three and unique to each one. And to close we made one further close reading and group analysis of a very terse, sad piece called "Grammar Problems," in which Lydia Davis writes of her father's death via the ambiguity of past and present tenses. Here we conspicuously applied all the approaches to reading we'd been practising all week, and we already seems more athletic and capable. I can clearly recall the surprising sense of being able to simultaneously consider the text in terms of "direct" (objective?) meaning and "indirect" (subjective?) affect—as well as the interrelation between the two.

Later I had the impression that "close reading" was the sort of skill that, before Banff, most of us assumed to practice by default—and so approached this particular week with more skepticism than usual. It became increasingly clear to me that this wasn't necessarily true at all. Robert's exercises were pointed and relentless enough to make the act of close reading strange again, showing us that this particular skill had either been neglected, forgotten, or never actually learned in the first place. Something you thought you knew how to do. As time went on, I felt more and more that our Foundation Course—in this iteration, at least—was really more of a Refresher Course.

And so to the final week. Angie had announced the plan well in advance, so the group had been (or should have been) considering how to present their work to an audience as we went along. They were free to show stuff they'd made in Banff or beforehand, or equally to present some sort of investigation that extended



from the seminars, though it had become clear that the mornings were generally too draining to move on to much in the way of practical work in the afternoons.



In keeping with the previous weeks, we stressed that *how* these presentations were presented was at least as important as *what*—or rather, in line with the anti-binary thinking of Latour, Eco, Sontag and all the rest, there ought to be no distinction between the two. Angie offered the group a further hook onto which to hang their work: that everyone ought to ask themselves a question and attempt to answer it in the presentation—though that question needn't be apparent to anyone else.

The focus on individual presentations was born of a certain frustration with the typically wishy-washy rhetoric of contemporary artist's talks (“What I find interesting is ... and then I came across ... which made me think that ...”). The idea was to push on to something less insipid and solipsistic, more inspired and substantial. Though admittedly not exactly a toolbox tool, in an introductory talk Angie posited the pinwheel and its digital antecedents (watch, clock, hourglass) as emblematic of putting one's practice on hold, pausing in order to (re)consider and (re)articulate it. Thinking about thinking—in this case for the benefit of others as well as oneself.

And on the receiving end, as stated, the aim was to channel all our talk of the past five weeks towards assembling a set of rules for the group critique—rules that would foster contemplation of, say, how art/design might be deemed timely and pertinent beyond the more simplistic senses of “new” or “different”; how to talk about art/design in a manner or spirit equivalent to it; the extent to which art/design might be considered productively vulnerable or macho, or open or closed, or self-aware or deluded.

I should note that there was a fair bit of grumbling about the plan to leave these presentations until the end, but I still say that upending this particular expectation was worth the payoff—not for the sake of being contrary, but because it meant the talks were less concerned with things already made and more with *ideas before being transformed into things*. It shifted attention from products to processes, which after all seems more proper to what is, after all, a course not a show.

The format we initially settled on was to carve the remaining hours into blocks of 10-minute presentations and 15-minute reactions. The presentations could take any form whatsoever, and experiment was strongly encouraged. Afterwards, the rest of us would pick a card from a hat that allocated us into one of 3 groups, each of which then spent 5 of the 15 minutes responding in line with a specific command. These were initially something along the lines of: 1. summarize the talk for your best friend's mother; 2. loose-associate from the ostensible subject matter of the take; 3. describe the various effects and affects of the talk as a whole. By Thursday they'd been whittled down to: 1. *describe* (what happened; the affects); 2. *analyze* (the structure; how it yielded those affects); 3. *associate* (with other things we've talked about, ideally from other fields). Once we got used to reacting, the scaffolding seemed more and more superfluous, so we duly dropped the hat, cards, groups and categories.

These three mornings were fairly inimical and required deep concentration. While we didn't exactly force anyone to respond, there was of course an unspoken pressure to do so—and so too the regular bad vibes of any mandatory audience participation. In the end everyone complied, though, and the presentations seemed to improve as we went along. Improve how? In that they seemed increasingly useful. Useful how? In the sense that they generated more evocative, provocative and even profound comments. On the downside, we seemed to laugh less and less.

Then something particularly telling happened.

On Wednesday and Thursday, Robert somewhat conspicuously stopped participating—didn't draw a card from the hat, didn't comment, just sat silently watching the rest of us. Then, just before we all broke up for good, someone asked him why he'd withdrawn so suddenly.

Robert replied that he'd simply been curious to perceive how the critique was functioning as a system, but had found that impossible while participating because absorbing and responding to the particular presentation in the moment required his *undivided attention*.

In response to which Sharon Kahanoff (an invaluable member of the group, and not insignificantly a teaching artist herself) pointed out that Robert's "problem" embodied all we'd been trying to grasp and resolve for the past six weeks, namely: *how to participate while remaining fully conscious of the terms of participation?*

The trick, she went on, was to stop conceiving of this parallax view (unification, duckrabbit) as being the goal of education, and rather *realize it as the necessary precursor to vital work*. In other words, the "solution" to Robert's "problem" is to avoid thinking dichotomously in the first place.

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There was a certain paragraph in your last letter that I (happily) had to read a few times to fully assimilate. In it you describe “dialectics” as a fundamentally *passive* method—a tool for thinking rather than acting. Naturally there’s no reason such thinking couldn’t be in *advance* of acting, but anyway it just occurred to me that your observation chimes with the question of perspective we found ourselves repeatedly grappling with in Banff, nicely summarized by Robert’s quandry above, i.e. how to be simultaneously involved *and* aware, inside *and* outside. Otherwise put (perhaps): *how to inhabit an \*active\* dialectics?*

One last anecdote—something the same Sharon told me during Lasso week. It came up while we were trying to articulate the difference between what I might tentatively call “true” and “false” self-reflexivity. “True” being what I’ve previously suggested to you is something like the by-product of an ethos; “false” being more akin to a contrived add-on, an effect.

The story concerned one of Sharon’s students who was in the process of making a film that she (Sharon, not the student) described as being “like a really bad version of *The Blair Witch Project*”—shorthand for an emphatically anxious film. Part of the plan involved filming with an infrared camera along a particular stretch of road at night in an attempt to both capture and induce a sensation of apprehension or fear. You can imagine the sort of thing easily enough, right?—and that’s precisely the point: the idea was so premeditated that it precluded any *unscripted actual* movement—and perhaps a little surplus sublime—from entering the work.

So the student was busy filming along this route according to her conception of how it ought to appear when she suddenly realizes she’ll have to pass through a very dark tunnel under a broad bridge that she’d either overlooked or forgotten about. According to Sharon, the moment the student enters this tunnel, the camera subtly but palpably registers her actual fear as she

reacts and recoils. In this half-minute or so something genuine is recorded—an effect that yields an *affect* (a feeling, an emotion) patently lacking in the footage immediately before and after. This is what Eco’s getting at when he describes “form as a way of thinking”—as a means of proceeding.

In confirmation of all this, Sharon pointed me at a chapter called “The Vestige of Art” in Jean-Luc Nancy’s book of aesthetic philosophy *The Muses*. Nancy’s notion of the “vestige” describes that moment in the tunnel as something approaching “the trace of a cause” rather than an image of the cause itself, which isn’t quite the same thing as an image of the cause’s effect. He elaborates using two fantastically simple examples—the smoke of a cigarette and the footprint of a shoe. Both are clear traces of the *causes* of specific actions, or *actions made latent*, able to be perceived, or re-conceived, but only by indirect means. And because an essential quality of the trace is that it’s a step removed, fleeting, always in the process of evaporating or dissipating or fading, it can never be wholly grasped (fixed, domesticated, reified, neutered). Essentially and elliptically, I think he’s saying that this “vestige” of art *is* art.

In the hope of compounding Nancy’s sense, here’s something I’d originally intended to kick off this whole letter, but forgot about it until now. The other week I came across an early book of Latour’s—really half a book, given that it’s tacked onto the end of his first major publication, *The Pasteurization of France*. The work is called *Irreductions*, which actually happens to be something of a metaphysical manifesto. (“Manifesto” seems a bit strong for Latour’s chatty way of writing, but still.) It’s written as a series of branching, decimalized axioms, not at all unlike (and possibly in homage to) Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus*.

However, these axioms are occasionally interrupted by interludes with titles like “A pseudo-autobiographical account of a revelation in the French countryside” I may be remembering

that wrong, but certainly not this first “axiom” as I wrote down immediately, along with its footnote:

1. Nothing is, by itself, either reducible or irreducible to anything else.\*

\* I will call this the “principle of irreducibility’, but it is a prince that does not govern since that would be a contradiction.

The axiom is entirely in line with Latour’s later philosophy—against the reduction of actual complexities to fictional models. But it’s the footnote I really like. *A prince-iple that doesn’t govern!* An ethos that resists hardening into ideology! This seems to me a convincing way of *thinking* the balance we’ve been discussing (you and me and all of us at Banff)—and by “thinking” here I mean something like “accounting for theoretically, as a precursor or supplement to practice”. Pithy, I know, but perhaps *practically* so: an acknowledgement that’s necessarily fleeting – a vestige of insight! – then gets right down to work.

This brings us up to date. Like I said, I think that this pilot version of our so-called Foundation Course was actually more of a *Refresher Course*, in the sense that it was largely concerned with *upsetting customary modes of thought*. I have to admit I find it hard to imagine what we did there being applied to a younger set of people at what we’d usually consider to be “foundational” age, if only because any sense of its success seemed so dependent on the engagement and sophistication of an older, more mature group who arrived with preconceptions and fully-formed opinions we could all usefully work against. A measure of the success of these six weeks is that it did often feel genuinely “upsetting”—that is, awkward and uncomfortable.

I'm sure that all we learned there can be adapted to apply to a younger set of blanker slates; I just can't immediately imagine how. I think it's because I have a hard time accepting the idea that I'm supposed to convince anyone to be interested in all this—culture—in the first place ... which is what a large part of teaching undergraduates feels like to me these days.

Perhaps this is a good point on which to end—or begin again: any art worth looking at generates its own conviction, and likewise any individual or group worth pursuing their own arts generate their own convictions too.

Discuss?

S

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EXPLORING FEMINISM, RADICAL  
PEDAGOGY, AND CREATIVE PRACTICE  
*Frances Pharr & Leigh Mignogna*

What does “feminist” design look like? Who’s interests and perspectives does it represent? How is it made? Where are the spaces in contemporary design practice for feminist perspectives, and what might a feminist design practice mean to you?

These questions formed the basis for *Recreating a Women’s School*, a course we created and taught at Pratt Institute during the Summer of 2017. Prompted by our discovery of the Women’s Graphic Center, the design program led by Sheila Levrant de Bretteville and run out of the Women’s Building in Downtown Los Angeles from 1973-1981, the course has become the basis for an ongoing investigation of how we might integrate feminist perspectives into contemporary graphic design education and practice.

Our goal is to promote collaborative, experimental engagement with the topic, and to provide others with the tools as we go along. In the spirit of self-organized learning, what follows are a sample of our course materials: a description from the syllabus, three assignments, and a reading list. Like the course, the materials are intended to prompt open-ended exploration. We hope they generate more questions than answers.

## DESCRIPTION

Throughout history, designers have offered critiques of the discipline by proposing models for design practice that reflect and embody alternative values and ideologies. In this class we will investigate some of these models; in particular, those at the intersection of experimental pedagogy, feminist theory, activism, and graphic design.

We will:

- \* Explore pre-existing models and concepts for a design practice rooted in the alternative, the feminine, and the collective

- \* Identify theories and practices based on these concepts, and actively engage with them in our own work
- \* Research and amplify the contributions of women in graphic design
- \* Seek to identify, critique and counteract existing biases in contemporary design practice

Class activities will consist of regular readings, discussions, and experiments in making. We will place particular emphasis on collaboration, inquiry, and alternative models for learning (peer-to-peer, horizontal, inquiry-based, critical, feminist, etc.). We will also investigate how we interact with clients, peers, publics, and others—with the goal of subverting, re-framing, expanding, or better understanding these relationships and their impact on our work.

Collectively, we will explore how feminist perspectives can inform:

- \* *What we design* (the forms, objects, artifacts, and experiences we generate)
- \* *How we design* (the processes, relationships, methods, methodologies, interactions we engage in)
- \* *Why we design* (our values, objectives, and motives; for ourselves, for others, to raise awareness, to create change, to express a point of view, to promote, to advocate, to critique, to object, or to move others etc.)

*Be present, make and do lots of things,  
question, experiment and engage!*

## Reading List

- ① *A Reexamination of Some Aspects of the Design Arts from the Perspective of a Woman Designer*, Sheila Levrant de Bretteville
- ② *Feminism is for Everybody*, bell hooks
- ③ *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde
- ④ *Messy History vs. Neat History: Towards an Expanded View of Women in Graphic Design*, Martha Scotford
- ⑤ *The Politics of Design: A (Not So) Global Manual for Visual Communication*, Ruben Pater
- ⑥ *Why Aren't There More Women Futurists?*, Rose Eveleth
- ⑦ *Technically A Utopia*, Sarah Leonard
- ⑧ *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Donna Haraway

## ASSIGNMENTS

### Assignment 1: Feminist Design Acts

In her 1974 article *A Reexamination of Some Aspects of the Design Arts from the Perspective of a Woman Designer*, Sheila Levrant de Bretteville offers a vision for a feminist design practice. Observing ways in which graphic design mirrors and reinforces cultural and societal values, she proposes that alternative (feminist) values can give rise to new ways of thinking about design's role in society, new ways of working, and, naturally, new forms.

For this project you will engage in a series of “feminist design acts”— processes, actions, interactions, formal experimentation, or artifact-generation that reflect feminist values—and see where they lead.

Begin by defining your own feminist values. How do they translate into concrete actions? What can you make or do? As a starting point, you may want to amplify the voice, visibility, or contributions of someone underrepresented in the field; address a missing link in design history; confront a misogynistic myth around work culture; disrupt or flatten a hierarchy; close a distance between people; pay attention to your body; resist an unreasonable demand; celebrate the complexity of a polarizing topic; engage in a collective action; put your health first; etc. etc. etc.

Your design acts can be small or large, simple or complex; make sure to document. Come in next week with 1 physical piece, 100 small acts, 10 gestures, or anything in between.

**What are  
feminist values?**

**How can we begin to  
more concertedly reflect  
the values we believe in  
through our work?**

**What messages, forms,  
artifacts, mediums, processes,  
platforms, typographies,  
methods, structures, activities,  
actions, relationships,  
interactions, experiences, etc..  
embody feminist values?**

Assignment 1 questions

## Assignment 2: Alternate Design History

As with many professions, graphic design's published history reflects dominant and often eurocentric, patriarchal, and capitalist perspectives. As a result, we celebrate products at the expense of process, hero-archetype models that emphasize individual excellence over the contributions of a group, and a canon that discounts the experiences of individuals or groups on the margins. In particular, it is clear that female and minority graphic designers are still underrepresented today.

Who decides what becomes design history? What do we focus on when we promote or talk about the contributions of designers? How might we promote the voices and visibility of those marginalized by dominant narratives, and create a more inclusive practice?

For this project you will work collectively to amplify the contributions of women/ minorities/others that aren't traditionally recognized in the field, or find a way to celebrate design from a feminist perspective.

Identify an issue, conduct research, and decide what you will do or make. Consider confronting or disrupting an existing narrative. For example: stage an alternative awards ceremony; craft a new text or edit an existing one; dismantle a canon; disrupt an existing assumption about what design (or designers) look like; edit wikipedia; exhibit relationships and interactions instead of artifacts; interview an (unrecognized) expert; publish a library or database of alternative texts; make invisible experiences visible; begin conversations; generate a syllabus; etc.!



**Who decides what  
becomes design history?**

**What do we focus on when  
we promote or talk about the  
contributions of designers?**

**What tactics and methods  
can we employ to disrupt,  
counteract, or dismantle  
dominant narratives?**

Assignment 2 questions

### Assignment 3: Feminist Futures

The future is an expansive, undefined space—mysterious, malleable, and never entirely certain. Many of our current dominant visions, however—TED talks; the Paris Accord; Elon Musk’s Neural Lace project—while imaginative or seductively high-tech, keep underlying norms and power structures intact.

Individually and collectively, we have access to countless opportunities and tools (imagination, ideation, speculation, creative vision!) to project more flexible, even radical concepts about how our world might evolve. No-one owns the future; all of us are free to imagine it.

Artists and designers have often used imagined futures to help us better understand issues of social and political importance, and to introduce radical notions about what “could be.” Your assignment is to do the same: build out your own vision of a utopian feminist future.

What existing systems or structures do you find problematic? Propose a new world. Define a utopia; describe some radical alternatives to the present; paint us a picture, figuratively or literally; tell us, show us, sing us, draw us...

**Who gets to define what  
the future looks like?**

**Whose perspectives  
or experiences are  
represented in existing  
visions of the future?**

**If the future is female,  
what will it look like?  
What kinds of economies,  
social structures,  
design practices, policies,  
relationships, etc. will exist?**

Assignment 3 questions

NOT A SYMPTOM OF EMPLOYMENT

*Adam Cruickshank*

In the rancid custard of late-capitalism that we all push our empty husks through, where cash/swag/fame are the most visible and only constant signs, it's probably no surprise that many university students approach graphic design as a path to the good life or at least a viable financial future (or even simply a sustaining number of Instagram followers). For the majority, the desired result of higher education is a job in a design agency or an in-house design department. That the market does not support the annual global onslaught of design graduates barely needs mentioning, yet there remains an institutional expectation that we are preparing students for the workforce, helping to make them 'employable', providing 'connections to industry', etc. This increasingly pressurized economic atmosphere has helped erode the image of the artistic calling, the seemingly unstoppable yet now anachronistic compulsion to create, the fomentation of which was once the main responsibility of higher education.

I teach an elective subject in the Department of Art, Design and Architecture at Monash University in Melbourne. It is called Unconventional Publishing, is available to all second year, third year and honours students and has been running for two and a half years at the time of writing. The vast majority of participants come from the Communication Design undergraduate degree and a smaller proportion from other disciplines, including the Art History and Curatorship stream. Its projects concentrate on the idea of autonomous publishing practice and attempt to instill in students a long-term engagement with artistic activity over perennial student concerns about how to impress potential employers. In the 'outside' world, I am an artist and designer and my hybrid practice attempts to occupy the demilitarized zone between the exhibition of art and its designed frameworks, in particular to utilise design competencies in a contemporary art context beyond the expected and accepted client/supplier relationship models.

While this research does inflect my teaching, it does so in a manner that is difficult to gauge and that I have only just begun to notice (due at least in part to my pedagogical amateurishness). There is, however, a clear theme that runs through both and that in part accounts for the ‘un’ in ‘unconventional’: a decidedly non-commercial bias. By ‘non-commercial’ I merely want to draw an erasable and wiggly pencil line between a tilt at profitability (let’s call it a job) and a sustained engagement with artistic methods (let’s call it a practice). In the first week of each semester the general theme of the class is introduced: there are to be No Clients. Essentially, this simple statement introduces the idea that designers might develop projects of their own, independently. As a result, we don’t utilise the figure of the imaginary client so prominent in most higher education briefs: that benevolent boss looming over projects and revealing just the right amount of information in such a helpful way that it might be shocking if encountered in the ‘real’ world.

One of the ways we attempt to kindle the pursuit of a practice in unconfab (as the subject has become known) is by the enactment of extra-curricular projects. Sometimes these involve all students, sometimes select groups, but they always take place outside the institution. Of course, they remain within the bounds of the institution because that’s their enabling context, but they are not graded nor assessed, not part of the curriculum, generally do not take place in the expected hours and I am not paid to conduct them. I make it as clear as possible that they are not required projects, that you might pass the subject with stellar grades without engaging with them at all (if stellar grades are what the student is after), and many do. However, these projects have the tendency to interest mostly that small group of students who seek a practice before a job. The remainder of this text simply describes three of those projects and credits the students involved.

In 2016, the inaugural year of unconpub, myself and a group of self-nominated students conducted a small exhibition mid-year in the Monash University faculty gallery. We arranged to occupy the gallery two days before, did not appear on any official program of events and students surreptitiously served beer and wine to each other. We had a very public but nevertheless under-attended one-night exhibition called Making, Publicly. Work presented included: a video mashup of physically re-created early internet memes set to a too-loud soundtrack of Darude's Sandstorm (Cassie Stevens); two students dressed in aluminum foil masks and covered in data about artificial intelligence worn as a constellation of small temporary tattoos (Charlene Le); a video that documented unsuspecting participants in the background of YouTube vlogs set in public space (Lauren Conti); and an animation detailing the work of various under-appreciated women in graphic design (Lilian Auduong).



Making, Publicly, Monash Faculty Gallery, May 2015  
(Install detail showing video by Lauren Conti)

NOT A SYMPTOM OF EMPLOYMENT



No Clients , Curated by Adam Cruickshank. Bus Projects, Melbourne November 2016



In November of 2016, I curated an exhibition of unconpub student work at Bus Projects. Entitled *No Clients* after the subject's general theme, the work ranged from a digitally-printed bandana (Hayley Morris); a print-on-demand newspaper about a local Melbourne beach (Will Hawke); a book that weighed the National Gallery of Victoria's ephemera archive year by year (Ned Shannon); a zine generated by a script that accessed an unconpub picture archive, randomly selected a series of photos, placed them on pages and opened a print dialogue box (Rob Janes); a series of warning stickers detailing an imminent alien invasion (Samantha Doyle); a haphazardly-made black banner that proclaimed NO CLIENTS in white house paint (Beazyt Worcou); photographs of interventions to supermarket signage (Petrina Gatsos); and a book that detailed a walk around the Ian Potter Centre at Federation Square, concentrating on incidental sounds (Erin Callaghan).

In April of 2018 I was invited by Channon Goodwin (Bus Projects, AU) and Freek Lomme (Onomatopee, NL) to get together a small group of students and 'do something' in parallel to the exhibition *Being as Becoming*, which featured the work of Dutch artists Sanne Vaassen and Tim Breukers. We determined that our small group (myself and unconpub students Lucy Russell, Emma Nixon, Lizzie Boon, Rachel Pakula and Will Kollmorgen) would develop work in response to the receptive conditions of the exhibition, utilising the small amount of basic equipment that we could fit into the Publication Space at Bus Projects (where we were to work). In a mirroring of the terms of Vaassen and Breukers's exhibition, we would be resident in the space during gallery opening hours in order for our production to be public and our attention to be thorough.

We collaborated on a series of black-only laser-printed A4 sheets that were to be adhered to the wall of the Publication Space in a grid, much like an expanded flat-plan for a book. At the close of the exhibition we removed these 'pages' from the wall,

scanned them as they were, left them collated in the order they were made and reproduced them in a riso-printed book of 100 copies.

At various other times students have also run their own stall at the Melbourne Art Book Fair, conducted a series of John Baldessari's Class Assignments in the MADA Gallery at the invitation of curator Tara McDowell and, in response to one of the subject's briefs, conducted a collaborative off-site Risograph workshop (Alex Margetic). These small projects hopefully activate in students a love of the physical processes involved in making and publishing at the direct expense of discussing employment prospects.

Of course, employability becomes an obvious subtext, though one that is nevertheless discussed from a point of view with which the students are often less familiar. I hope the class can help set in motion an extended participation with the methods of art and design and to seed the idea that employment can grow from practice, instead of practice being an unwanted symptom of employment.



A Parallel Publishing Workshop (1), (Install detail) Bus Projects, April 2018



Class Assignments , Print tests in response to John Baldessari's instigations, MADA Gallery, October 2017

UNANSWERED LETTERS  
TO LEON FESTINGER (CONT.)

*James Langdon*

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10 March 2018

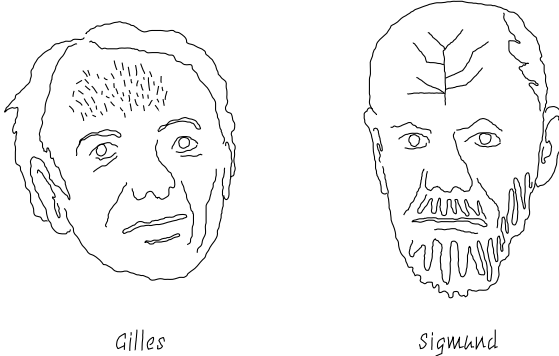
Dear Leon

I don't know if I will ever post this to you. It is nonetheless worth stating here that I do realise, and have realised since before we began our correspondence, that you are dead. I hope that you will excuse me suddenly writing so literally, considering — I have to admit — that our school also in fact does not exist.

I write you from the foyer of the 'Beyond Change' conference on design education. I have found a lot here that I want to share with you.

I want to tell you that I've come to regret sending you the portrait. Not only was it presumptuous on my part, but somehow I overlooked the possibility that you might interpret its representation of your trajectory as linear — an impression I never meant to give. I had conceived of your hair branching vigorously — with electricity! — in infinite directions, unified only by your momentum, your irresistible interdisciplinary swerve!

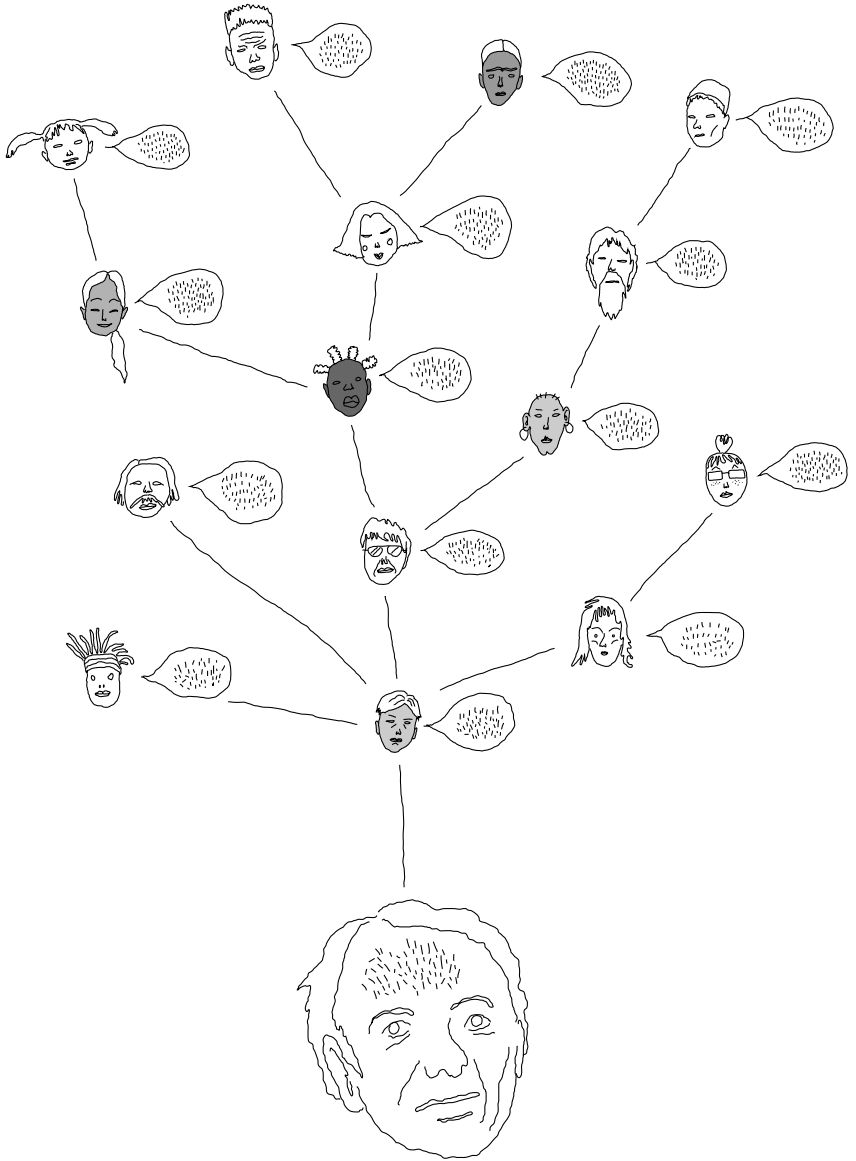
It's no trivial matter, this threat of the linear. I recall a line from Gilles Deleuze in which he recommends that one should have grass growing in one's head, not a tree. He's talking categorically, about thought, but the metaphor applies especially to the canon and its stifling hold on education. One of my students, Sun Young Oh, made this drawing of Deleuze's comparison:



As appealing as it is, there's a problem with the grass. A problem of propagation, so to speak. And it's happening right now, on this page. Every approving reference to Deleuze's idea — whether to its poetry or its Freudian critique — ironically contributes, in the aggregate, to reproducing the tree and not the grass!

Sara Ahmed, whose name has come up frequently here at the conference, objects to these politics of academic citation. She says "I would describe citation as a rather successful reproductive technology, a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies." Those bodies are maintaining an inert, Anglocentric culture of knowledge dissemination: the tree again. Such conundrums have kept you in my thoughts these days, Leon. I'm asking myself how to channel your spirit, your swerve, without — to force the arboreal metaphor — letting your roots constrain us.

JAMES LANGDON



Drawing by Sun Young Oh (2018)

In Stanley Schachter's memoir for you he wrote that 'The Human Legacy', the book that marked your transition out of the laboratory into the archaeological field, is one of the few 'non-banal' examples that he knows of interdisciplinary practice in the social sciences. 'Non-banal' may not sound like a particularly flattering description of your achievement, but I think he meant it as profound praise. (I understand that you knew each other, so perhaps some humour is lost on me here.)

Let me bring that commentary up-to-date, and in relation to design. You won't have seen Alex Coles's recent book, 'The Transdisciplinary Studio'. Coles invokes Paul Rabinow and Félix Guattari, and casts himself in the role of the ethnographic participant observer, describing his interactive visits to the studios of a number of contemporary artists and designers. The book's thesis is simple: "a significant shift in the development of the studio towards a model in which traditional boundaries are exceeded has occurred over the past decade and a half." Mere forays between established disciplines are inconsequential in Coles's transdisciplinary model. His introduction promises moves that will redefine boundaries, if not make them entirely redundant. It sounds exciting, until it gradually emerges that Coles is actually talking about categorically unremarkable design processes. He describes, as if they were unprecedented transgressions, how a furniture designer also makes exhibitions! How a graphic design studio organises events! How an artist designs objects, interiors, and buildings! In the same studio!

The problem is that such boundaries are, well, Stanley would find them banal. They require hardly any intellectual or technical dexterity to transgress. It's ironic that despite the ethnographic posturing, Coles seems to miss the fact that these are everyday processes, essentially familiar to all socially conversant designers. My colleagues and I joke about the book whenever the word transdisciplinary comes up in conversation. Gesturing to the playground game of rubbing our stomachs whilst patting



our heads, we exclaim “If Alex Coles could see this!” I should stop. I’m being unfair.

But you see my point, don’t you Leon? Your swerve from the academy to the field to the laboratory to the excavation site is the essential motif for our school. It’s why I crave your unique perspective. I want our students to see the potential of the swerve. Not just to swerve into other branches of art and design, but into neuroscience, or anthropology, or artificial intelligence. To be equipped to contribute in these areas of knowledge production.

At a presentation this morning, the conference was shown many extraordinary architectural projects for staging education outside the established institutions. Temporary, ad-hoc schools appeared before us: floating on a lake; inserted into pockets of urban space; in inflatable transparent domes; all documented in beautiful photographs. The hard edges, the typical disciplinary walls, seemed seductively to disappear into irrelevance. Until an alert voice in the audience spoke up! The tart criticism: ‘Designers today just see education as another element for their portfolios!’ I took it as a warning\*.

This is all I have for now, Leon. I know I shouldn’t expect to hear from you, but will you send me a signal? I am leaving the conference. I will walk through the park and look to the grass, the bushes, and the trees for guidance. I am receptive.

Yours,

James Langdon

\* The alert voice was Francisco Laranjo, quoted here from memory.

## BIOGRAPHIES

KRISTINA KETOLA BORE is a design critic, curator and educator based in Oslo, Norway. She holds an MA in Design Writing Criticism and is a co-founder of the platform The Ventriloquist Summerschool, a subeditor of the art journal Periskop, and lectures internationally at universities and cultural institutions. Her work investigates the social structures within and outside of design, in addition to participation and the role intersectionality and feminisms can play in the design field. These perspectives are also deployed in the act of curation, which has resulted in series of educational art programming for both youth and adults.

EVENING CLASS is a self-organised learning environment where participants can cultivate common interests, develop research and collectively decide the class's programme from our space in Aberfeldy Street, Poplar. We see long-term learning and open exchange as a necessary reaction to rising tuition fees and the shrinking of non-commercial spaces and activities in the UK. The programme currently consists of around 15 participants from different educational and cultural backgrounds, who form an active collaboration.

ADAM CRUICKSHANK is an artist and graphic designer based in Melbourne. With lots of help from others, he organises True Belief. [truebelief.com.au](http://truebelief.com.au)

OFICINA DE DISSENY is ARIADNA SERRAHIMA, KATHARINA HETZENEDER, & DIEGO BUSTAMENTE — a graphic design studio founded in Barcelona in autumn 2014. They make books and publications, visual identities, posters, music releases, websites and exhibitions, teach classes and are involved in various research-based projects, including Parallel School Cali and L'Automàtica, a letterpress and offset printing workshop.

CLARA DEGAY is currently studying graphic design at the National School of Fine Arts in Lyon, France. At the center of her research are subjects of pedagogy and literature — her work is concerned with finding metaphorical solutions linking the two. She believes in a horizontal form of teaching which creates exchanges and values transmission.

SOPHIE DEMAY is a graphic designer and educator based in London. Working across mediums, Sophie works in close collaboration with artists and contemporary art galleries on printed matter, exhibitions and publications. She teaches in the Master Graphic Media Design at the London College of Communication. She has been involved in alternative education projects (Department 21, Parallel School of Art) and has, since then, developed a strong interest in art and design education. She currently runs the Education Unit of the Expanded Designer, an undergraduate contextual programme at Camberwell College of Arts together with the Serpentine Gallery's education department. [sophiedemay.com](http://sophiedemay.com)

DECOLONISING DESIGN is a research collective founded in 2016 by Danah Abdulla, Ahmed Ansari, Ece Canli, Mahmoud Keshavarz, Matthew Kiem, Pedro Oliveira, Luiza Prado and Tristan Schultz — a group of design researchers, artists and activists stemming from or with ties to the Global South. Founded as a response to Euro-and-Anglocentric sociotechnical politics and pedagogies of design as both a field of research and praxis, Decolonising Design does not aim to offer an alternative perspective on design but rather questions the very foundations upon which the discipline was established. The aim of the platform is to provide an outlet for the marginal and the suppressed voices in design discourse to join and contribute to conversations that question and critique the politics of design practice and discuss strategies and tactics through which to engage with more mainstream discourse, and where they can collectively experiment with alternatives and reformulations of contemporary practice. [decolonisingdesign.com](http://decolonisingdesign.com)

JOÃO DORIA is a graphic designer based in Oslo, Norway. He received an MFA from the Yale University School of Art in 2014 and co-founded The Ventriloquist Summerschool. His work has been recently shown at “Odds and Ends” (Yale University Art Gallery/US, 2017), “Xe(rox) Paper + Scissors” (Geffen Contemporary at MOCA/US, 2017), “The Alternative Art School Fair” (Pioneer Works/US, 2016), “The Digital vs. the Archaic” (Van Eyck/NL, 2015) and “It’s a Book” (Leipzig/DE, 2015). He’s serves/has served as a guest lecturer and tutor at BA/MFA/M.Arch level in Norway at Westerdals ACT, Kunsthøgskolen i Oslo, The Oslo School of Architecture and Design and abroad at Konstfack, Beckmans Designhögskola, Aalto University, CalArts, VCUArts and the Otis College of Art and Design.

JACK HENRIE FISHER is a graphic designer, writer, and publisher who works within and across a variety of technical platforms and institutional spaces. He is a partner in Other Forms, an office for design and publishing. He edits, designs, and publishes the extra-disciplinary multi-form design journal Counter-Signals and the historical materialist rock fanzine Dum Ditty Dum. He teaches classes on typography, the internet, politics, and other things at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Jack is currently at work on an essay about the historical antagonism of the print medium with its commodity form.

JAMES LANGDON is the founder of the itinerant A School for Design Fiction, where Rosie Eveleigh, Christian Janisch, Simon Manfield, Peter Nencini, and Sun Young Oh are faculty.

FRANCISCO LARANJO is a graphic designer based in Porto (Portugal) and London (UK). His writings have been published on Design Observer, Eye, Creative Review, Grafik, Público, among others. He has been a visiting and guest lecturer at the Sandberg Institute (NL), CalArts (US), Royal College of Art, Central Saint Martins, London College of Communication, Kingston University (UK), Zürich University

of the Arts, University of the Arts Bern (Switzerland) and speaker at the University of Applied Arts Vienna (Austria), University of South Australia (AUS), University of Porto, University of Lisbon, University of Coimbra, ESAD (Portugal), among others. Francisco has a PhD in graphic design methods and criticism from the University of the Arts London and an MA in Visual Communication from the Royal College of Art. He is co-director of the Shared Institute, a research centre for design and radical pedagogy.

CHRIS LEE is a graphic designer and educator based Buffalo, NY, and Toronto, CA. He is a graduate of OCADU and the Sandberg Instituut. He was the designer and an editorial board member of the journal *Scapegoat: Architecture/Landscape/Political Economy*. He has contributed projects and writing to the *Decolonising Design*, *Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, *The Copyist*, *Graphic*, *Volume*, and *Counter Signals* and has facilitated workshops in the US, Canada, Scotland, the Netherlands and Croatia. He has lectured at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, *ArteEZ*, The Sandberg Instituut, The Design Academy Eindhoven, and OCADU. Chris is an Assistant Professor at the University at Buffalo SUNY, and a member of the programming committee of Gendai Gallery. He is design research fellow of Het Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam (2017/18), and a participant of the fifth edition of the Summer University of the Bibliothèque Kandinsky at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. [cairolexicon.com](http://cairolexicon.com).

THE SERVING LIBRARY was founded in New York in 2011 by Stuart Bailey, Angie Keefer and David Reinfurt, and based in Liverpool since 2016, The Serving Library is a non-profit organization that variously serves as a publishing platform, a seminar room, a collection of framed objects, and an event space. The enterprise is rooted in a journal published biannually as *Dot Dot Dot* from 2000-10, *Bulletins of The Serving Library* from 2011-17, and now annually as *The Serving Library Annual*. It is released simultaneously online (for free) and in print (for a fee) every autumn. The enterprise is rooted in a journal

published biannually as Dot Dot Dot from 2000-10, Bulletins of The Serving Library from 2011-17, and now annually as The Serving Library Annual. It is released simultaneously online (for free) and in print (for a fee) every autumn.

JACOB LINDGREN is a graphic designer, researcher, and writer from Chicago, a partner of the studio Platform, and an organizer and participant of the self-organized learning group Open-End-Ed.

SILVIO LORUSSO is a designer without qualities, an artist without a gallery and a writer without spell checker.

ESTHER MCMANUS' work explores approaches for collective learning, where publishing, art and education are all seen as practices of learning. Esther currently teaches in both HE and informal contexts; as a tutor at UCA Farnham, and through informal workshops which explore education as co-production and collaborative practice-based research.

LEIGH MIGNOGNA is a Brooklyn based graphic designer and half of the design studio L+L. She received an MFA in Visual Communication from Pratt Institute and currently teaches in Pratt's Graduate Communications Design program.

MARK OWENS is a designer, writer, and curator working between New York, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia. He holds an MFA in graphic design from Yale University and an MA in English and literary theory from Duke University. His work as an independent graphic designer and writer has appeared in the pages of Dot Dot Dot, Visible Language, Grafik, PIN-UP, and Bricks from the Kiln. In 2010 he co-founded the independent publishing imprint Oslo Editions with curator Alex Klein, and in 2012 was awarded a Warhol Foundation Creative Capital Arts Writer's Grant for the completion his forthcoming book, Click, Click, Drone: Design, Material Culture, and Post-punk Aesthetics. He has served as a visiting

critic at Yale, RISD, and Art Center College of Design, and as visiting faculty in the MFA program at California Institute of the Arts and PennDesign at the University of Pennsylvania.

SIGNALS FROM THE PERIPHERY was an international graphic design event organized by ELISABETH KLEMENT and LAURA PAPPA, graphic designers based in Amsterdam. Their work encompasses various activities together and apart, such as teaching, curating, organising and publishing. They have been organising the Asterisk Summer School since 2011 and in the summer of 2017 curated Signals from the Periphery in Tallinn Art Hall, a project bringing together urgent developments in graphic design with a focus on practices that extend the field.

FRANCES PHARR is a NYC-based artist, designer, and educator working in digital, print and experiential media. She received an MFA in Visual Communication from Pratt Institute, and currently teaches in Pratt's Communications Design program.

JOE POTTS is a graphic designer, educator, artist, and writer working with found and synthesized images, sound, typography, and language. He teaches design and typography at Otis College of Art and Design and the University of Southern California, and is the founder and director of the Southland Institute (for critical, durational, and typographic post-studio practices).

ROBERT PREUSSE is a graphic designer, research, and partner at operative.space. He completed his MA at the Centre for Research Architecture at Goldsmiths London and BA at the Berlin University of the Arts Visual Communications in the New Media Studio Class and the Klasse Visueller Systeme. He's a previous participant and organizer of Parallel School and part of the Verin der Gestaltung.

STEFANIE RAU has a background in visual communication and media theory, and has been involved in exhibition,

publication and self-organized collaborative educational projects. Her artistic practice takes the approach to think through objects, situations or places to unravel their histories and implicated cultural, political or theoretical connections, and explores writing as performative or voiced articulations. With her practice she aims to inhabit an artistic space in between disciplines and is interested in offering different perspectives and critical understandings that manifest in the form of essays, lecture performances and essay films.

WILLIAM STREET is a graphic designer based between Portsmouth and London UK, with a primary interest in typography, identities, books, exhibition design, signage and curation. William operates in the overlap between graphic design, art, culture, and pedagogy, often seeking situations to rethink current modes of practice.

TILL WITTEWER is an artist, writer and researcher. He creates research-based narratives which he often presents as speculative propositions to act upon. They come in the form of essays, publications, lectures, and performances. He organizes initiatives to implement these propositions as well as platforms for critical exchange and learning. Till lives and works in Berlin and Hannover.

SEAN YENDRYS (last but not least) is an independent graphic designer and educator based between Berlin, Germany and Montreal, Canada. He most often works collaboratively with artists and architects on a range of projects. He has previously taught at Parsons in New York (2015–2017), and given lectures and workshops with institutions including Pratt Institute, PennDesign, Bergen National Academy of Art and Design, and ECAL; starting in October 2018 he will be teaching at Estonian Academy of Arts in Tallinn. He is the founder and program director of the A School, A Park summer program in Montreal. He received his BFA from Concordia University and MFA from Yale University.





**EXTRA-CURRICULAR** is a reader of texts on and around the topic of self-organized learning, curriculum, experiments, and alternatives in graphic design education. Occurring both within and separate from existing institutions, these other forms of learning and organization question how such learning takes place, for whom, and the ideologies inherent in existing models, among many other things. An (admittedly) incomplete inventory inspired by the widespread activity and educational turn (or shift) in the field, this book aims to serve as a point of departure for further discussion and experimentation.

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