



# Revisiting Black Mountain

## Cross-Disciplinary Experiments and Their Potential for Democratization

**Contributions by** Caroline Adler, Sascia Bailer, Lucy Bayley, Paolo Bianchi, Johanna Bruckner, Annemarie Bucher, Boris Buden, Brandon Farnsworth, Simon Fleury, Jeanne van Heeswijk, Martin Jaeggi, Andres Janser, Gilly Karjevsky, Susanne Kennedy, Ronald Kolb, Ronny Koren, Jochen Kiefer, Steven Henry Madoff, Mieke (Annemarie) Matzke, Daniel Späti, Raqs Media Collective, Dorothee Richter, Olga von Schubert, Bitten Stetter, Cornelia Sollfrank, Asli Uludag



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# Editorial

## Dorothee Richter, Ronald Kolb

Experimenting as a form of teaching, democratic coexistence, interdisciplinarity, the self-determination of students and teachers, and working in art and design to develop and reconstruct society: Black Mountain College, founded in 1933, served as a space for artistic and social utopias for two decades and has remained a starting point for discussions on the conditions for successful teaching and research in the arts and design through to today.

And as one historical example—in addition to many other pedagogical reform projects—Black Mountain College could, in hindsight, be seen as an education project to enable subjects capable of self-empowerment, of working together in common spaces and inventing new forms through this process.

These cross-disciplinary experiments and self-empowering strategies just might be urgently needed in times of so-called Post-Democracy and Post-Facts, which imply a reformulation of the public sphere. Is there a potential in the cultural sphere that might offer a space for democratization? Does the impact of new working methods linked to digital technology drive further interconnections and resources that create other public spheres? Might this be a catalyst for new patterns of a communal exchange? And what does this mean for the teaching and learning of arts and design, for the structures, formats, and content of learning/teaching, for an institution?

The symposium “Revisiting Black Mountain College: Cross-Disciplinary Experiments and Their Potential for Democratization (in Times of Post-Democracy)” asked these questions in relation to anti-democratic tendencies in many countries worldwide. How can education still hold up democratic values, while at the same time presumably measuring its success by careers in the market? The symposium—from 25–27 May 2018—was organized by Prof Dr Dorothee Richter in conjunction with the exhibition and event programme “Revisiting Black Mountain” (documented under <https://blog.zhdk.ch/revisit>) initiated by the Zurich University of the Arts (especially through the now retired Head of the Department of Performing Arts and Film, Hartmut Wickert and the Head of the Department of Cultural Analysis, Christoph Weckerle) under the direction of the “Kollegium Kuration” (Bitten Stetter, Brandon Farnsworth, Dorothee Richter, Jochen Kiefer, Martin Jaeggi, Paolo Bianchi), with the aim of opening up projects from different disciplines, of artistic and research-based practices in equal measure, and the idea that it should be open to the participation of all groups at the university—students, researchers, and lecturers.

This new interest in other forms of learning is also connected to the cooperation platform “Shared Campus,” a bold initiative by the ZHdK working together on experimental educational formats at eye level with partner universities from Hong Kong, Kyoto, Singapore, Taipei and London. To work at eye level means that one also has to work on other forms of teaching and learning. In our globalized cultural world, deep cultural knowledge – both locally and globally – is a central requirement for artists and cultural practitioners working in diverse geographical, cultural, and social contexts; therefore, a vibrant network of international practitioners as well as the

knowledge and experience necessary for navigating and being aware of such complex situations is a pre-condition in every contemporary cultural practice.

The symposium showed connections, interferences, contradictions, confrontations, and dialogues. We invited cross-disciplinary radical cultural practitioners as well as educators specifically interested in educational experiments. The invited speakers from various disciplines presented diverse formats of engaging with educational methods:

**Bernard Stiegler** (philosopher), **Alfredo Jaar** (artist), **Hongjohn Lin** (curator), **Susanne Kennedy** (choreographer), **Steven Henry Madoff** (author, curator), **Lisette Smit** (curator), **Raqs Media Collective** (artists, curators), and **Jeanne van Heeswijk** (artist, activist) with lecturers (designers, musicians, theoreticians, curators) of the ZHdK, including: **Swetlana Heger** (artists), **Dorothee Richter** (curator, author), **Gerald Raunig** (theoretician), **Nina Bandi** (theoretician), **Sabine Harbeke** (dramaturge), **Brandon Farnsworth** (musician), **Annemarie Bucher** (artist), **Daniel Späti** (designer), and **Cornelia Sollfrank** (artist).

This issue brings together contributions from participants of the conference and adds further contributions by **Andres Janser**, **Olga von Schubert**, **Caroline Adler**, **Boris Buden**, **Lucy Bayley**, **Sascia Bailer**, **Simon Fleury**, **Gilly Karjevsky**, **Asli Uludag**, and **Mieke Matzke**.

The interview by **Ronald Kolb** with **Bitten Stetter**, **Brandon Farnsworth**, **Dorothee Richter**, **Jochen Kiefer**, **Martin Jaeggi**, and **Paolo Bianchi**—all professors or lecturers at the Zurich University of the Arts—provides an internal perspective of today's curriculum-based universities in relation to an education model like Black Mountain College—which can be seen as the opposite.

The contribution by **Andres Janser** introduces the exhibition **REVISITING BLACK MOUNTAIN × MUSEUM FÜR GESTALTUNG ZÜRICH**, he curated at Museum für Gestaltung Zürich, which ran in parallel to the project, and gave historical insights into Black Mountain College.

**Daniel Späti** presents the cooperation platform *Shared Campus*, a ZHdK initiative for international education formats launched by eight arts institutions.

Steven Henry Madoff's contribution *Black Mountain: Pedagogy of the Hinge* gives thorough insights into the history of Black Mountain College and its migratory background and describes the form of the college as a formless network or assemblage.

Dorothee Richter follows the argument related to a renewed interest in other forms of knowledge production—as seen in Black Mountain College—in our contemporary society in her contribution *Teaching to Transgress*. She connects John Dewey's educational theory with Fluxus' Robert Filliou, bell hooks, and Jacques Rancière's and Jacques Derrida's theories.

*Commoning the Institution—or How to Create an Alternative (Art School), When “There Is No Alternative,”* the contribution by Cornelia Sollfrank, brings the “Commons” into an educational framework and discusses it with the example of the ERG Saint-Luc Graphic Research School.

In ***Emphasizing the “Co”-Factor: Practicing, Teaching, and Learning (Fine) Arts Outside the Curricula***, Annemarie Bucher discusses alternative formats of teaching outside of an institutional framework. The contribution tells us about methods Bucher created in FOA-FLUX, an art and education project founded by Dominique Lämmlli and her.

In his text, ***Ambiguous Dramaturgies and Crude Curation***, Jochen Kiefer looks into theater practices and fine arts-related curating—their similarities, their differences, and their overlaps, and what they can tell us about education practice.

The interview with **Mieke Matzke** (member of She She Pop) by Dorothee Richter pursues the question of what the cross-genre and experimental teaching of Black Mountain College could be in art and theater today.

The artistic contribution by Susanne Kennedy, ***The Infinite Game of Becoming***, comes as a play/script to us, combining theatrical elements with philosophical questions about the hegemony of man.

Brandon Farnsworth directs his attention in ***“We have created a parody of these austere rituals which didn’t exist in the past”: Revisiting Music Education*** to music education and its relation to other artistic disciplines with even stricter educational limitations, frameworks, and compartmentalization.

Johanna Bruckner’s text is based on her artistic works ***Terra Vague: Against the Ghosts of Land*** and ***Total Algorithms of Partiality***. The works are informed by Brazilian architect Sérgio Ferro’s key ideas on questions of the socio-economic transformation of built space as the politics of the material and of social class.

Olga von Schubert, Caroline Adler and Boris Buden introduce the project ***New Alphabet School (Haus der Kulturen der Welt: 2019–2021)***, a long-term project at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin. The series of events follow an open school-like method with “forms of collectively produced knowledge, making it possible for the participants to detect and address its incommensurability within the established knowledge regimes.”

The contribution ***Everyone is just watching what’s happening...*** reports on a collaborative exercise by Sascia Bailer, Lucy Bayley, Simon Fleury, Gilly Karjevsky, and Asli Uludag at a workshop event of *Un-Learning Place* at Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

Jeanne van Heeswijk talks with Ronny Koren about her long-term, community-based project ***Philadelphia Assembled*** (2013) at the Philadelphia Museum, and about her manifold methodology of community learning, collective care, and the “Training for the Not Yet.”

In ***Dreams of Equal Division of Toxicity*** Raqs Media Collective metaphorically speaks of the care of life, of oneself, and of community in relation a taking care of toxicity.





Dance Performance *Merce and Dogs* by Friederike Lampert and students Contemporary Dance, ZHdK, 2018



Prelude *Chance, Idea, Strategy: the (Un)Possible Teaching* with Paolo Bianchi, Brandon Farnsworth, Martin Jaeggi, Jochen Kiefer, Dorothee Richter, Bitten Stetter and "No Class", Kathrin Vesper, Festival "No Discipline", Theaterhaus Gessnerallee, Zurich, as well as with Margarete Jahrmann (Design ZHdK) and Steffen Schmidt (Musicologist ZHdK). Moderation: Christoph B. Keller, Senior Editor Art and Society, SRF, ZHdK, 2018



Audience at the conference, ZHdK, 2018



Bernhard Stiegler at the conference, ZHdK, 2018



Alfredo Jaar at the conference, ZHdK, 2018

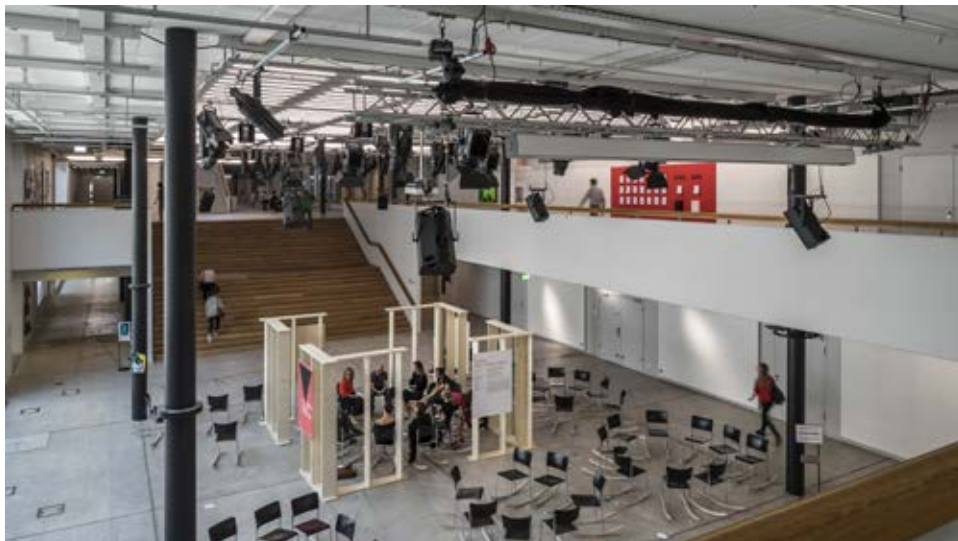


First row, from left to right: Cornelia Sollfrank, Dorothee Richter, Jeanne van Heijswijk at the conference, ZHdK, 2018





Project *Musicians with streetcred(ibility)*, on the wall: Posters from the Project *Drawing-Happening with the artist Peter Radelfinger*, ZHdK 2018.



Workshop *Labor des Aushaltens*, ZHdK, 2018

# An e-mail conversation on the background of the *Revisiting Black Mountain* project at ZHdK with Bitten Stetter, Brandon Farnsworth, Dorothee Richter, Jochen Kiefer, Martin Jaeggi, Paolo Bianchi by Ronald Kolb

The interview partners were all in the core group of the Revisiting Black Mountain project from within different departments: Bitten Stetter, Design Department; Brandon Farnsworth, Music Department; Dorothee Richter, Continuing Education and Department of Cultural Analysis; Jochen Kiefer, Department of Performing Arts and Film; Martin Jaeggi, Department of Art and Media; Paolo Bianchi, Department of Cultural Analysis.

The questions were posed by Ronald Kolb.

The group expresses notably different positions on the innovative nature of Black Mountain Collage and the project “Revisiting Black Mountain College”. The overall project, which was spread over nine months with forty different artistic, curatorial and design projects developed by students and lecturers throughout the building of the Zurich University of the Arts, presented a variety of experiments, of embedded concepts of creativity and authorship, of creative or artistic work, and of curating and design. Therefore, we also wanted to keep the different opinions in this email conversation as an engine for further discussion.

## **1. Can you briefly describe how the members of group found each other and what the original idea was behind the project? Was there a specific interest or motivation in your particular discipline?**

**Jochen Kiefer:** In the working group “Kuration / Curation” at the ZHdK, a group has regularly come together to compile the values and views of curation in the disciplines involved and in particular also for the respective teaching formats. It quickly became clear that this discourse is important, but that it is also central to develop a common practical perspective that transcends the disciplines. In other words, to curate something together. In this phase, the Head of the Department of Performing Arts and Film, Hartmut Wickert (Wickert retired in the meantime) and the Department of Cultural Analysis DKV, Christoph Weckerle suggested bringing the exhibition on Black Mountain College at Hamburger Bahnhof from Berlin to Zurich. Interdisciplinary arrangements in the curriculum were evident at Black Mountain College—and at the same time connected to experimental and cooperative work between lecturers and students, which was strongly influenced by visual art and design. The obvious question of whether Black Mountain College could or should therefore be a kind of role model for the ZHdK triggered contradictory, utopian, and in turn reflective, but in any case motivating reactions. A revisiting could be a mirror and/or a desire machine for reflecting on art and design studies today and at the same time doing so by artistic

means. It quickly became clear that showing the same exact exhibition from the Hamburger Bahnhof in Zurich would not make sense. Addressing Black Mountain College in the heart of an art college (and not as a collaboration between a museum for contemporary art and a university) would offer the opportunity to make visible forms of teaching and learning in teaching, experimentation and research, and finally as artistic reflections.

**Dorothee Richter:** Curating means that the most diverse artifacts, installations, objects, events, performances, screenings, and texts are combined and introduced into new constellations. In this respect, in the neoliberal world we presently inhabit, it is also a term that unites certain imaginary productions. Thus, with the idea of the curator as a professional profile, an authorship is designed that is independent, project-based, globally active, and networked. A desire production, as I said, that awakens desires and extends the concept of curating—a kind of meta-production—to many fields. In fact, of course, this depends on all kinds of factors. For example, the fact that other immaterial labor, self-employment and perceived independence are often bought at the price of precarious working conditions.

Interestingly, the request for the Black Mountain project came from the two heads of departments of the ZHdK, who asked for a renewal of teaching and learning in the university. But this would provoke (in my opinion) an interdisciplinary and radically democratic approach. In short, the whole thing was a contradiction in terms. In any case, in our small group this led to amusement. I joined on the group's suggestion, as the member who would be concerned with the curation of this event, as my expertise lies precisely in the curatorial: I lead two courses of studies which deal with curators, the CAS/MAS in Curating, as well as the PhD in Practice in Curating; in addition, I intend to set up a digital platform with Ronald Kolb as research on curatorial practice, and I publish the web journal *OnCurating* ([www.on-curating.org](http://www.on-curating.org)).

**Bitten Stetter:** The starting point was the search for a confrontation between curation and mediation practices at the ZHdK and the founding of a space for thinking about curatorial practices in the Toni-Areal [the Zurich University of the Arts building]. Within this discussion, the participants of the interest group discussed inter- and transdisciplinarity and reflected on forms of curation and teaching in their own disciplines. Over the course of the meetings, we became interested in the exhibition *Black Mountain: An Interdisciplinary Experiment 1933 -1957* at the Hamburger Bahnhof museum in Berlin. Here, we were intrigued by the mediation and the topic, but above all by the questions about current university teaching that arise through an exhibition like this one. After all, Black Mountain revolutionized higher education and left behind a very specific image of teaching and learning. And last but not least, we were driven by the question of what the Black Mountain College and ZHdK models have in common, because, in fact, the models couldn't be more different. The radically different model of Black Mountain College, according to the idea, should therefore be used explicitly as a mirror for teaching at the ZHdK, in order to discuss (im)possibilities experimentally, playfully, and critically. At best, we hope that dealing with past and present models will lead to new visions of the future, which may be contrary to the existing ideas of teaching and learning at an art academy.

**Paolo Bianchi:** The working group Curation at the ZHdK sees itself as an exploratory group. The term “probing”, derived from the tool, stands for the assessment and estimation of certain conditions. In the context of curating and exhibition-making, it is necessary to activate one's “curatorial ego” in relation to art objects. It is the ability to “let the exhibits be”, to think of them as phenomena. This opens the door to negotiat-

ing the meaning of things introspectively. An exhibition like *Revisiting Black Mountain* has the potential to refer to the fact that its expressive value is always bound to a materiality and that the representational always needs its own appearance in order to be able to read and interpret it. The meaning of things is not *per se* inherent in the objects themselves but is only revealed in the “dialogue” between the pointing, the observer, and what is shown. At the same time, the art objects move into an alienating proximity and a revealing distance. They become rebellious, accusatory, and evoke another narrative and distance themselves from thought patterns. At this point, the topic and motivation of curating become one. Using this project as an example, the audience can be motivated by Black Mountain College as a topic to engage in an open-ended process. And to try out their own “curatorial self”.

**Brandon Farnsworth:** I am seeing an increasing number of musicians and composers who are interested in inter- or transdisciplinary projects. Many feel attracted to musical theatre. Here, the scenic elements and the performativity are already part of the artistic expression. Many musicians see this as an opportunity not only to occupy a seat in the orchestra, but also to implement their own artistic ideas. Yet, if I ask these musicians what they think of John Cage’s *Theater Piece No.1* or the interdisciplinary experiments of Black Mountain College, for example, I only encounter astonished glances. So, while many musicians want more than just an orchestral career, they often have little insight into artistic practices outside the classical repertoire and its specific performance traditions. I can confirm this from my own experience at several universities.

My motivation for this project starts from here: on the one hand, to offer musicians an opportunity to be able to engage with the history of experimental art during their studies and, on the other hand, to enable projects in the Department of Music that have the potential to be “wild”, experimental and connectable beyond the Department. The special thing would be to act out of the specific history and questions of music and not to imitate the performativity discourses of other disciplines.

## **2. What is interesting about the Black Mountain College model for the way you are currently teaching or for today’s teaching methods in general? Can you describe this desire to engage with Black Mountain College (and other historical models of experimental teaching)?**

**DR:** Art schools are historically based on a number of different models: the academy, the Bauhaus model, and contemporary approaches, which we are grappling with at the ZHdK. These models are based on fundamentally different constructions of creativity. Every art academy wants to provide its graduates with the greatest opportunities after graduation, as artists, curators, actors, conductors, musicians, designers, filmmakers, dancers. How to get from A to Z in this endeavor is in turn based on the respective creativity concept. Do you want to equip the students with management knowledge as much as possible in order to pave their way into the creative industries? Do you want to provide them with expertise in their field, or is critical thinking required, as well as the ability to cooperate that enables students to survive in an extremely complex world? The fascination with Black Mountain College lies in the fact that a kind of wild knowledge emerged, as far away as possible from ECTS, fixed timetables, and curricula, and that the artists and students present there enthusiastically worked together in unlikely and free constellations. They understood teaching and learning as a collaborative process, they grew, cooked and ate together,



they talked and lived together. However, the situation was certainly hierarchical: only wealthy students could afford to be there, and African-American students were also for the most part the exception at Black Mountain College. So, I see it as symptomatic when, after the Europe-wide process of schooling and unification, a desire for free, wild thinking and wild action arises.

The most important point of reference to Black Mountain College for me is Fluxus, of course. John Cage made his first attempts at minimalist instruction at Black Mountain College, travelled to Japan and to the International Summer Courses for New Music in Darmstadt, and appeared as a teacher of many Fluxus artists at the New School of Social Research in New York. There, experimental action led to new formats, a reevaluation of everyday culture and high art, and a radical change in the concept of authorship. Then, at the end of the 1950s/beginning of the 1960s, all of this began to revolutionize every concept of art that had previously been valid. Film, video art, happenings, events, democratic design, new music, and new extreme forms of dance and theatre all began here. The understanding of all art forms changed; art wanted to become political, and no longer only be there for the upper class. In production, too, the idea of an ingenious individual artist turned into group authorship. Since art was equal to life, at least as a slogan, this had far-reaching consequences; cooperative ways of living and gender roles were experimented with.

As such, I see experiments in art, in teaching and learning as fundamentally important, but only when teachers take risks, only when experiences are understood beyond getting to know practical or theoretical activities, and only when there is more at stake. Only then can something be taken from teaching—a joint action, a joint responsibility, a struggle for content. From this perspective, performative work in the arts combines with work on forms of living, the knowledge of social contexts, the drastic changes in infrastructure through digital media—all this informs interdisciplinary art and gives it depth and relevance.

**MJ:** For me, the “necessity” of dealing with BMC and other experimental teaching methods lies in the fact that, on the one hand, they offer an opportunity to question one’s own actions, even in a very critical sense if they lead to the insight that certain things are no longer possible under the given circumstances, that the limits of what is feasible become visible. Equally worth considering, of course, is the precarious nature of Black Mountain College, its end, its flaw in the ideal. And of course, the projections that Black Mountain College invites us to make can be used to define our own visions that may not necessarily have anything to do with historical reality.

The promise for the future that Black Mountain College still holds seems to me the constant reinvention of teaching and the institution, the variability and capacity to change. This resulted not least from the constantly reconfigured interactions between the arts, but also from the teaching content of humanities. To create an environment in which this is possible seems just as relevant to me as ever. Black Mountain College also remains forward-looking in its understanding of the school as a community of teachers and learners, in which this role is not so clearly distributed in every situation, where the school becomes a testing ground for all involved.

**JK:** The performing arts are art and media cannibals and have understood performance itself and its staging as an independent art form since the historical avant-gardes. In their dramaturgies, they use methods of the other arts to create an experience that can also be understood as performative work on the other arts. In this sense, interdisciplinarity is an integral point of reference for the performing arts. I believe, however, that the self-evidence with which Black Mountain College cooperated (without constantly addressing the subject of interdisciplinarity and thus putting the

disciplines in their own right again), can be stimulating for trying out artistic methods cooperatively and seeing how far they lead and how productive they are. It is in this pragmatic sense, like at Black Mountain, where the utopian potential could reside.

As far as further suggestions for performative practice are concerned at the moment, in my view it is not so much the diffusion of the avant-garde in Black Mountain that is important, but the idea that art and design are capable of producing their own forms of knowledge as aesthetic spaces of experience. At Black Mountain College, experimentation is often coupled with an action-relatedness and performativity that aims at changing everyday practices that affect the processes by which art itself emerges. This may indicate to us that the talk about the social art form of the performing arts should not (only) be thought of in terms of production aesthetics, but that it also obliges us to question social relevance in relation to the conditions of our own actions. For me, this is also one of the main potentials in terms of the innovativeness of an art academy: not only in the training of creativity techniques, but also in the freedom to test and reflect on them in a way that hardly seems possible in the art business and its (sub)markets. It would be a mythical construct to see this discourse already in Black Mountain. In the largely ideologically uninhibited and pragmatic experimentation of the collectives, however, for me there is the potential to introduce something different, something different from the outset. Black Mountain itself seems to me to be more of a random innovation, perhaps even a model of unintended conceived new forms. In my view, this can explain part of the reverberation emanating from a college built in 1933 right in the American heartland. It would be unclear to me what real innovation could really be planned.

**BS:** Black Mountain College has been experiencing a romanticized resurrection for years, precisely because personal responsibility, self-organization, self-sufficiency, and self-empowerment are back in high demand. In times of standardization and commodification and times of reminiscence and of closeness to nature and depression through consumerism, the ideas of the college trigger longings for freedom and alternative forms of living and working and thus question supposedly immovable structures in the context of life and work. From this perspective, taking a look at structures, learning and teaching models, and the relationship between teaching and learning bodies, as well as the location and the link between education and life, seems interesting.

Yet, a closer look at the failure of Black Mountain College also seems necessary, since concepts such as community, collectivity, and the idea of community are currently being uncritically positivized.

In principle, it is imperative to deal with different pasts but also current, new and innovative models, since access to knowledge and forms of mediation are changing significantly in the age of digital transformation, and thus the values and needs of the “managers” and “users” of a university are in a state of upheaval.

**PB:** BMC offers an exciting potential for stimulation especially with regard to the form of teaching and learning through an emphasis on experimentation. There are the psychological perceptual experiments of Josef Albers, based on systematic testing. Then there are the inverse experiments in which theoretical concepts are obtained through practical experience. Worth mentioning are heuristic and trial-and-error experiments on the effect of colors and shapes. This continues in the possibility of failed projects in working with variants and variations, and in action-related experiments according to the motto “how and not what.” All this leads to experiences with an open outcome.

The pedagogical practices and creativity models used at Black Mountain College are more interested in the process than in the results and products. From this perspective, there can be no right or wrong results, only right or wrong approaches. Derived from this, the motto is: “to teach method, not content” and “to emphasize process, not results.” Students should learn to make intelligent decisions and to think independently. They were asked to search for things themselves and to find them independently; they were supposed to learn instead of imitating them. The aim was to reach “totalization” with intuition and reason (Paul Klee, Josef Albers). All in all, the focus was on conveying a process-oriented approach.

The focus of the training was on “art”. This meant a cross-disciplinary combination of fine arts, theatre, music, literature, architecture, mathematics, physics, chemistry, geography and history. This was influenced by pragmatic aesthetics (John Dewey). A synergetic continuity between art and everyday experience was sought. This led to the understanding of art as an educational practice. This, in turn, took place in conjunction with performative aesthetics, participatory visualization strategies, and delimiting art practices.

Four special things stand out at Black Mountain College: 1) the life of the community; 2) the experimental; 3) the aesthetic-educative models (e.g. Spectodra as an early form of happening, an interplay of art and knowledge, a hybrid linking of music, dance, drama, painting, stage design, and light); and 4) the social effectiveness of art.

Building on the Bauhaus tradition (creative artist community, combining of art and crafts), a campus life with seminars, table/dinner conversations, field work (instead of sport), and kitchen duty will emerge. All in all, the transgressive concept of art existed there and at that time was fascinating, concerned with the transgression from artefacts towards aesthetic events. This resulted in a hybrid, disparate, non-causal sequence of performative actions. An aesthetics of representation and of the work was transformed into an aesthetics of presentation and process. “Action” became a medium of art and art a medium of (social) action. Seen in this light, Black Mountain College is highly topical.

### **3. What do these approaches, methods, and attitudes mean today in the omnipresence of the digital?**

**BS:** If we speculate about a university in the near or distant future and rely on the positive aspects of Black Mountain College, an art academy of the future could teach independently of location and adapt to the working forms and ways of digital nomads. But it could also be a university that is partially consciously opposed to networking and urbanization. A place of retreat with consciously applied digital withdrawal, where lived experiences, self-sufficiency, and DIY strategies are once again at the center. Not a place that refuses digital transformation and technologization, but a place that cultivates a conscious and new approach to media and technologies and multi-optionality. In the context of trends, transparency, and knowledge-sharing, the boundaries between teachers and learners could also dissolve. Current teaching models such as the “Open School” in Austria are already propagating this today, and intrinsically motivated learning could once again become more important.

**MJ:** That’s a tricky question, because on the one hand artistic and pedagogical concepts developed at Black Mountain College can be carried forward into the age of the digital, especially the approaches in the field of the trans- and intermedia. On the other hand, Black Mountain College also raises the question of the importance of real places, the *genius loci*, which is an integral part of the Black Mountain College myth.

However, the digital should not simply be read as an antithesis to location. Networking with the outside world, the American cultural metropolises that distinguished the College, would be much easier under the sign of the digital. The idea of a digitally networked Lake Eden campus has its appeal and points to possible future perspectives in which the *genius loci* and the digital would complement and provide feedback for each other.

**DR:** Bernard Stiegler once spoke of a global hallucination through digital media. Our consciousness is produced by a great machine without us becoming fully aware of it, and if one assumes that subjectivity is formulated and reformulated in ongoing processes, the constitution of the subject inevitably changes. A self-assured subject of the central perspective is pushed back in favor of an infantilized, casually formulated half-subject. Decisions that are made on an algorithmically produced supply of images are firmly anchored in our everyday lives, i.e. every time we surf the net. Every art form, every piece of information, every financial transaction is conveyed through 1 and 0 operations; this means an incredibly high degree of abstraction, and, as we are now experiencing, it is increasingly difficult to find out who controls which digital operations. I do not see the arts as a counter-world to the digital (sounds, images, and movements have long been produced digitally), but as an urgently needed way of dealing with the omnipresence of the digital. The quasi “cumbersome” materiality of many arts can also cause a distancing from exuberant, hallucinatory visual worlds.

**PB:** Mankind today is at the beginning of a radical age: the fourth industrial revolution will epochally reduce the difference between man and machine. Nevertheless, the potential of creative human intelligence remains indispensable for artificial intelligence. The *Revisiting Black Mountain* project seeks to have an impact beyond the contemporary pressure to perform and the overhyped hysteria for creative industry. It plunges into the reality of two different concepts and contexts of art mediation—Black Mountain College at Lake Eden and the ZHdK in the Toni Areal. Both examples make it clear that it is fundamentally valuable to activate creativity as a resource. This activation should try to subject the analog-digital phenomena to a zigzag course, whereby the relationship between the analog and the digital turns out to be something processual. Pedagogical practices and creativity models do not passively follow the course of a waterfall, but instead occur actively through circularity and along the loops in the dynamics of a spiral movement: “forwards” and “upwards”.

**BF:** If we see Black Mountain College as a prime example of current transdisciplinary working methods, it still has a lot to tell us. Of course, it is fundamentally different from our institutional framework.

For me, the special situation at Black Mountain College is the concentration and presence in one place over a longer period of time, which we can hardly imagine today. You had no choice but to deal with the students and teachers. i.e. the different skills and personal backgrounds also became effective in this sense as a social experiment. If I look at this from today's perspective, I imagine this situation to be quite unique. I often work transdisciplinarily together with artists and academics from different disciplines and backgrounds. But a comparable situation is only a dream for us. It's much easier than ever to be present anywhere in the world, maintain contacts, etc., but these remain comparatively fragmented. However, it takes such moments of intensive and concentrated cooperation to create the conditions for successful collaboration. With every project, I am reminded again and again how much time it takes to reach a common denominator at all, on which serious work can only begin.



The Schwarzenberg project by Benjamin Ryser, which I supervised, is interesting in this respect: a group of musicians and people interested in music are invited to spend a weekend in Emmental in order to understand hearing as a political practice. The focus is on community-building processes of mutual recognition.

**JK:** Against the background of digital technologies, I am most interested in the significance of the analogue, what it means when everyday spatial experience transcends the sensitive glass of the displays and in the future migrates more and more scalably into the virtual. The aesthetic experience in bodily constituted performances can then be understood as a dual-sense laboratory, as a laboratory of the virtual and the analog. Since imaginations and ideas have found their reflection ever since the idea of the aesthetic, the spirits and ghosts of the analogue return to the stage today, and the rebirths of a co-presentational human image based on presence become the increasingly strange appearance of wondrous “people”.

Xanti Schawinsky, the Swiss comrade-in-arms of Oskar Schlemmer at the Bauhaus stage in Dessau, founded a theatre laboratory at Black Mountain College. This Spectodra, as he calls it, is directed entirely towards the sensualization of knowledge, towards knowledge that shows itself aesthetically, towards vivid abstractions. This Spectodra would undoubtedly only be reenactable as a parody of modernity. A “Spectodrama” of the present would perhaps not be driven by a love of geometry, but rather inspired by atmospheres and affections of the virtual, by non-ontological phenomena, by the spirits of the analogue, by the comprehensibility of the incomprehensible, by the sensitization to the untouchable.

#### **4. “Black Mountain” as a wish machine: What visions of the future are linked to the overall project? What could it initiate?**

**JK:** Wish machines are unconscious processes at the source of Deleuze/Guattari’s concept formation that cannot be modelled by even the most complex algorithms. At the very least, every art academy is wrapped up in the desire for this kind of wish machine—with all necessary purposeful and market-related legitimations. Otherwise, the art academy would lose its social function and innovativeness. In my opinion, this idea is a central idea for the Revisiting Black Mountain project in Zurich.

**MJ:** If the project can initiate a discussion about teaching and school institutions and thereby bring people into conversation who weren’t previously in an exchange, it would already be successful for me. In the utopian ideal case, a culture of joint reflection at the ZHdK on school and teaching would develop from this project. In the realistic ideal case, these would be approaches that would continue to grow. The project raises the question of whether and how a school can think about itself. The Revisiting Black Mountain project is an attempt to find an answer to this question and thus, of course, also an invitation to pursue this question further, possibly with completely different approaches and perspectives.

**BS:** We would like students as well as lecturers and designers of the university to understand the exhibition as a reflection vessel and space for thought and to reflect on current and future developments and social, socio-economic and political changes, because they have strong influences on our understanding of values, but also our understanding of teaching. Migration, scarcity of resources, and self-organization are not only topics that have shaped Black Mountain College, but also current topics that continue to occupy our society.

**BF:** After more than three years in the Toni Areal, many traditional borders and old territories can still be felt at the school. In the course of the work process on the *Revisiting Black Mountain* project, however, many small moments of exchange and cooperation were created. From my point of view, these contribute to a serious change of the school.

**PB:** Providing an impetus inevitably means developing an idea and a vision of what is to be initiated. In our revisiting project, the vision combines with a look back to a retrovision. Looking back, we plunge into the era of Black Mountain College. This doesn't mean a nostalgic backward shift, but, on the contrary, a foresighted consideration of the existing, the past and the future.

So, is it about finding standards in the past to judge the present? In the myth or in the memory of a "golden age" in order to draw from a distant past? To regard the past as a cultural, political, and psychological treasure trove? Retrovisionary thinking is neither oriented inwards nor backwards, rather it dissolves outdated structures and mental stagnation, critically rethinks its own history, and renews itself again and again. Retrovision stands for the "past as future" (Jürgen Habermas, 1990). But it does not stand for the seemingly irresistible tendency to choose models of the past as patterns for interpreting the future. In fact, the focus is less on faith in the past than on the memory of it. Revisiting thus means, in the present time of the ZHdK, to make possible a moment of remembrance of Black Mountain College that could lead us to new shores, to new spaces and depths.

**DR:** I can well imagine that through "meeting points" in terms of content, other collaborations between students and teachers are possible across disciplines (and possibly across departments)— interest-driven teaching and learning, which, as Derrida called it, could go in the direction of an university without conditions, in project work, in studios and as talks, with invited guests... I hope that the university takes that risk. With the *Revisiting Black Mountain* project, I really like the fact that students and lecturers could all submit projects, that theoretical and practical parts have intertwined, and that the symposium offered opportunities to invite international cultural practitioners as well as showing and discussing projects that were being developed at the ZHdK. As bell hooks puts it, there is a great opportunity in academic and artistic learning (and teaching): "The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom."

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# Revisiting Black Mountain x Museum für Gestaltung Zürich

## Andres Janser

Black Mountain college was a place of lived utopia, a vanishing point of modernity, which has remained a projection screen for creative and social ideas to this day. Founded in 1933 by John Andrew Rice, Theodore Dreier, and others, the college differed greatly in many respects from the schools of its time. The intention was that experiences with art should facilitate learning in all subjects. One's own experimentation and self-administration were assigned just as much importance as joint undertakings outside the immediate area of teaching. Among the important teachers who felt drawn by these unusual ideas were numerous immigrants from Europe who had fled from terror and war. Textile designer Anni Albers, painter Josef Albers, and stage designer Xanti Schawinsky brought teaching concepts from the Bauhaus with them to North Carolina. Starting in 1941, the summer courses—each of which were given by guest teachers—became a second mainstay of the college. Increasingly, a productive kind of tension emerged between object- and event-based aspects: together with his students, R. Buckminster Fuller developed his geodesic domes, John Cage presented his first happenings, and Merce Cunningham founded his dance company. The film director Arthur Penn or the painters Cy Twombly and Robert Rauschenberg attended school here. When the Albers couple left for Yale in 1950 and the poet Charles Olson became director of the college, its profile changed. A decline in student numbers led to the further worsening of the college's financial situation, finally leading to its closure in 1957.

### **Town / Country**

The impulse for the founding of Black Mountain college was provided by the dismissal of the classicist John Andrew Rice, the engineer Theodore Dreier, and two other teachers from a school in Florida. In the woods of North Carolina they found an affordable campus for their vision of a liberal and democratic school that would offer a high share of design subjects. Although far removed from the intellectual centers in New York or San Francisco, the college was nevertheless connected with urban life and thought: the teachers and students came from the cities, as did the funds from private patrons, which provided the support on which this residential college was dependent.

### **Everyday Life / Experimentation**

Experimentation and experience were key terms at Black Mountain College. Initially, the teaching methods of Anni Albers and Josef Albers, which were based on materials and perception, had a formative influence. From 1948, composer John Cage and architect R. Buckminster Fuller shifted the focus to performative experiments, which accepted the possibility of failure. Under Charles Olson this tendency continued in the 1950s: the faculty increasingly consisted of writers, artists, and composers whose experimental methods differed strongly from those employed by European academics in earlier years.

### **Individual / Community**

The periods between the lectures given at Black Mountain College were just as important as the teaching itself. Students and teachers lived together on campus; the dining hall was a meeting point for the midday meal that was taken together and in

the evening often served as a venue for performances or dance events. The voluntary farming work was intended to encourage resourcefulness, pragmatism, and contact among students and teachers, but it was also economically necessary in order to secure the existence of the college and its financial independence. The erection of the studies building was a paradigm of the meaningfulness of such communal activities on two levels.

### **Object / Event**

Black Mountain College was an important catalyst for one of the decisive developments in art during the second half of the twentieth century—the move away from the object and the traditional Western understanding of form and toward the dematerialization of art, toward the event-based, and the dissolution of boundaries between different media. This development was already indicated by Schawinsky's "specto-drama," which was more animated sculpture than drama. In 1951, John Cage initiated the first happening here, in which accident and simultaneity became important. In an offshoot of the college known as the Gate Hill Cooperative, Stan VanDerBeek developed these approaches further in his "Movie-Drome," a multimedia spectacle.

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**Andres Janser** is lecturer in the MA in Art Education, specialization exhibition & mediation, at the ZHdK and exhibition curator at the Museum für Gestaltung Zürich.





Exhibition „Revisiting Black Mountain“ at Museum für Gestaltung Zürich, 20 April – 3 June 2018, © ZHdK

# Shared Campus

## Daniel Späti

Shared Campus is a cooperation platform for international education formats and research networks launched by seven arts institutions. Close cooperation is imperative to tackling issues of global significance. The arts, especially, can, and indeed ought to play an important role in this respect. Shared Campus establishes connections that generate value for students, academics and professionals by developing and offering joint transcultural education and research activities. These collaborative ventures enable participants to share knowledge and competencies across cultural and disciplinary boundaries. The platform is designed around thematic clusters of international relevance with a distinct focus on transcultural issues and cross-disciplinary collaboration and is partnered with Hong Kong Baptist University, Kyoto Seika University (SEIKA), LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore (LASALLE), School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong (SCM), Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA), University of the Arts London (UAL) and Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK).

### Core aims

To consolidate joint interests, complementary competencies, common resources and infrastructures among partners, in order to develop and implement joint international education formats, research collaborations/networks, as well as collaborative productions or services.

To develop a sustainable teaching, learning and knowledge platform along cross-disciplinary themes of international relevance with a view to extending the existing teaching and learning environment and to create new educational and mobility opportunities for students (e.g. joint masters, structured mobility, co-teaching across the partner institutions, etc.).

To implement advanced teaching and learning methods in the context of digitalization and to develop new standards for international programmes and cooperation considering ecological criteria.

To embed transcultural awareness as a basic stance, and transcultural collaboration as its fundamental practice.

To develop a high-quality education and research label (Shared Campus) in order to strengthen the partners' strategic influence in the global education environment.

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**Daniel Späti** is trained as a designer, is an organizer and curator of cultural events, and teaches at ZHdK mainly in cross-disciplinary and international contexts. In recent years, he initiated an MA semester program called “Transcultural Collaboration” and is now further developing a collaboration platform involving art universities from East Asia and Europe. His research focuses on event culture and city development.



*Oolong*, Transcultural Collaboration, 2016

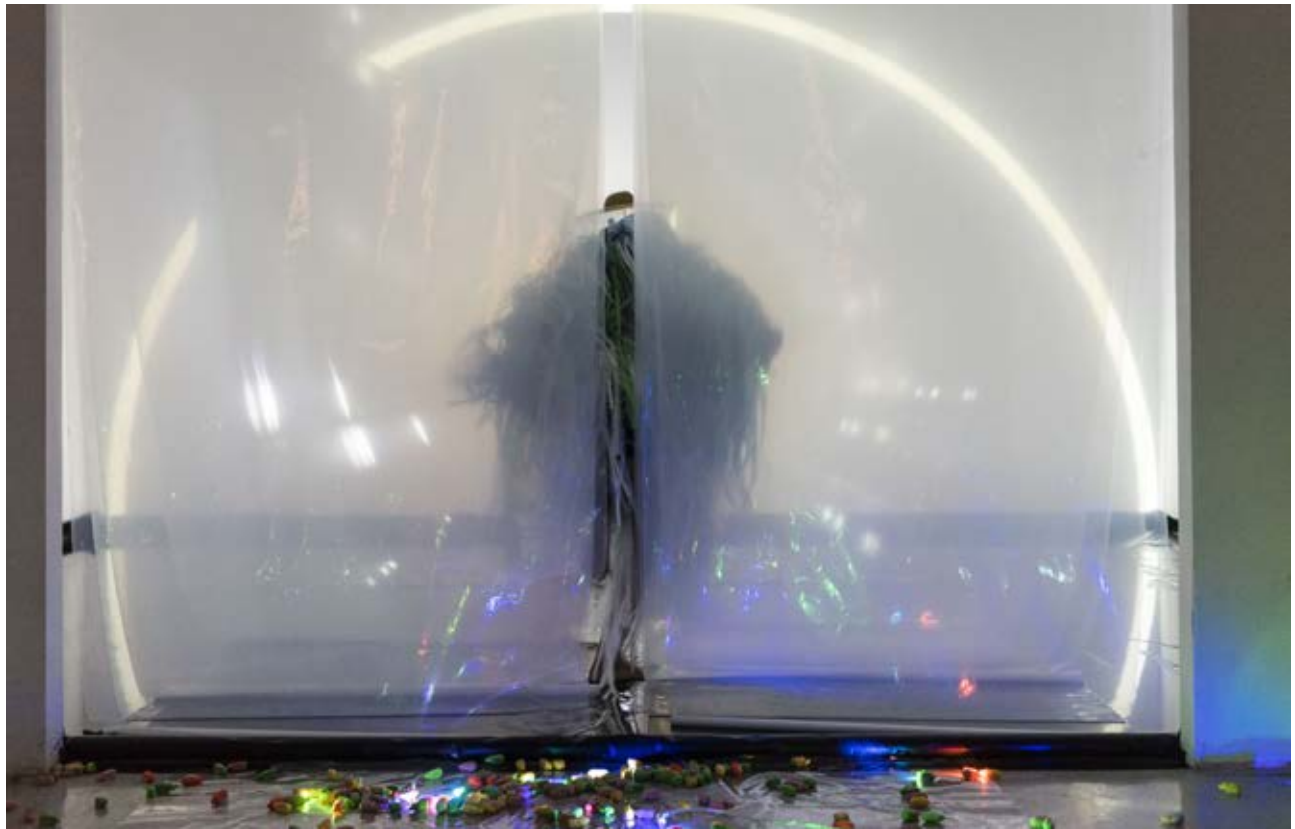


*Someone Else's Secret*, Transcultural Collaboration, 2017



*0.142921*, Transcultural Collaboration, 2016





*Someone Else's Secret*, Transcultural Collaboration, 2017



*Dull Boy Jack*, Transcultural Collaboration, 2017



*Standing Like a Post*, Transcultural Collaboration, 2017



# Black Mountain: Pedagogy of the Hinge

## Steven Henry Madoff

The dialectic between usefulness and uselessness and the way they have fed into horizontalized practices of interdisciplinary art have a prestigious history in modernism. There is the intention of a purposeful uselessness present in the work of the Dadaists and Marcel Duchamp, for example. Previous to this, early modernism offers the socially determined intention of usefulness in the works of William Morris and his colleagues of the Arts & Crafts movement, particularly preserved in the 1859 Red House, with its red tile roofs and entirely hand-designed interior, in Bexleyheath, and then following this example, in the art and design of the Bauhaus and of the Russian Constructivists. At approximately the same moment as William Morris, we see an equal aesthetic will-to-inclusivity in the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Richard Wagner's processional, mythically based music-dramas. Order is obsessively followed in Wagner—social order, time, and compositional order—while we see around the time of the catastrophe of the First World War (remember that Wagner's theory of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* follows another war, the failed 1849 revolution in Germany to create a democratic union of principalities) that artists such as the Dadaists and Duchamp have highly different ambitions toward inclusivity that question and derail artistic, social, and sexual orders—even the order of physics, in Duchamp's imagination. He, along with the Dadaists, therefore, sought to promote a loosening of laws and lawfulness per se, a deracination, a particular nomadism of rule, while contrary to this, the Constructivists and the Bauhaus prized rationalism and a machinic lawfulness. The social antagonism I speak of in Dada and Duchamp flies in one direction, while Morris, Wagner, Constructivism, and the Bauhaus go in the other. Indeed, Duchamp's production is always inwardly turned, always hermetic, even in his own thinking of a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, such as *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (1915-23), as the *Green Box* notes of 1934 indicate. While for the others I've mentioned, there is always a strain of collectivity. And the goal of the total work of art—the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Wagner, which Kandinsky also spoke of as “monumental art” and which Gropius invoked in his initial brochure for the Bauhaus as the *Einheitskunstwerk* (the uniform work of art)—is in service to theater, architecture, light-industrial production, and social good. All of these artists, works, and movements feed into our contemporary idea of the interdisciplinary in artistic production.

Nonetheless, this isn't a simple historical dialectic. Instead, this is a complex system of fluctuation and exchange. These systems are based on reciprocal relationships of erosion, friction, and fluidity between aesthetics, technologies, and changed sociopolitical topographies that stimulate different pathways of artistic development and contaminate one another. This contamination leads to a hybridization of the “useless” and the useful, which is what happens when the Bauhaus comes to the United States at Black Mountain College—and, in fact, is negatively clarified further in the evolving form of Andy Warhol's Factory and its profound effect on art and pop culture afterward, as I'll elaborate on further.



Portrait of John Andrew Rice, founder of Black Mountain College



Lee Hall porch, Black Mountain College, 1933-1941

But first, some Black Mountain College facts: the school was established in 1933 by John Andrew Rice, 1888-1968, after he was dismissed as a classics professor at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, and it operated until 1957. Located in North Carolina, near the town of Black Mountain, the college didn't offer a degree and based itself on the English model of tutorials and independent study at Oxford, where Rice had been a student. Although his inspiration was also based on his earlier education at the Webb School in Buck Bell, Tennessee, which engrained an independence of thinking, focusing on discussion, process, and discovery rather than rote memorization.<sup>1</sup> At Black Mountain, the students were allowed to create their own curricula. No specific track of courses was required, and each student set up their courses with an advisor. No grades were given, though grades were recorded for transferring credits without being given out to the students. The college was divided into two-year programs of junior and senior divisions. The junior years were spent studying an array of subjects, while the senior years were meant for specializing in a field of choice, which was based on independent studies and tutorials. Students had to pass a comprehensive exam that covered the selected first two years' curriculum. To graduate, there were written and oral exams given by outside examiners, who were eminent in their fields, such as Jacques Barzun, Marcel Breuer, Paul Goodman, and Franz Kline. It was a co-ed school, which was rare at the time, and all the students, along with the faculty, ate together, worked together to maintain the campus, and even built its buildings. The faculty ran the school, and there were no trustees or deans, but there was a remarkable advisory board that included John Dewey, Walter Gropius, Carl Jung, Max Lerner, Wallace Locke, John Burchard, Kline, and Albert Einstein, among others.

Crucial to the school and its historical significance is the arrival of Josef and Anni Albers shortly after the closing of the Bauhaus in 1933. Albers re-established what was called the *Grundkurs*, the foundation course, from the Bauhaus at Black Mountain. That meant for the art students a basis in materials and the belief in creativity through



Dining Hall and lodges, Eden Lake campus, Black Mountain College, after 1941



Josef Albers drawing class, 1939, including among others Robert de Niro, Sr.

experiment. Anni Albers took up what she had done at the Bauhaus, too, and taught weaving. Xanti Schawinsky came over from the Bauhaus and continued the theatrical work that he had been part of with Oskar Schlemmer, and Lyonel Feininger did some teaching as well. These ties are significant, but they also point to two distinctions from the Bauhaus that must be made instantly. First, the foundation course does not become the cornerstone of a disciplined and highly ordered pedagogical scheme at Black Mountain. It is simply an offering among many in the loose structure of the college. Second, even though the spirit of experiment was something shared with the Bauhaus, the education at Black Mountain was never wed to the concept of the industrially useful nor was Black Mountain ever subsumed by national political issues, only a democratic ethos under the influence of John Dewey's 1916 *Democracy and Education* and its project of an ultimately agrarian-founded individualism that confirmed Rice's own educational experience. No dramatic shift in government policy tore the college down, as Lenin's ideological project did to the movement of the Russian Constructivists in the young Soviet Union or as the Nazis did to the already depleted Bauhaus in Germany. The concept of the individual was ultimately liquefied by the state with regard to both the Russian Constructivists and the Bauhaus, while the ideal of individualism was intrinsic to the pedagogical scheme at Black Mountain—a sensibility fostered by the American-type democracy of Dewey, as I've just mentioned, along with the deep-seated establishment of psychoanalysis among the intellectuals and artists in America at the time.

This spirit of individualism and self-determination in entrepreneurial capitalism culture will have its own profound influence on artistic practice and its pop imagination—thus, as I've noted, Warhol's Factory, which it can be said unconsciously inherited Black Mountain's unfettered culture, yet turns the rectitude of that individualism to a premonition of today's neoliberalist valuations of the commodified self. This is to say that while the Factory shares with Black Mountain an implicit engagement with connectivity and collectivity, its ends are certainly not toward a collective of care.



Josef Albers, *Gay Desert*, 1945-54



Buckminster Fuller at Black Mountain College with models of geodesic domes, 1949

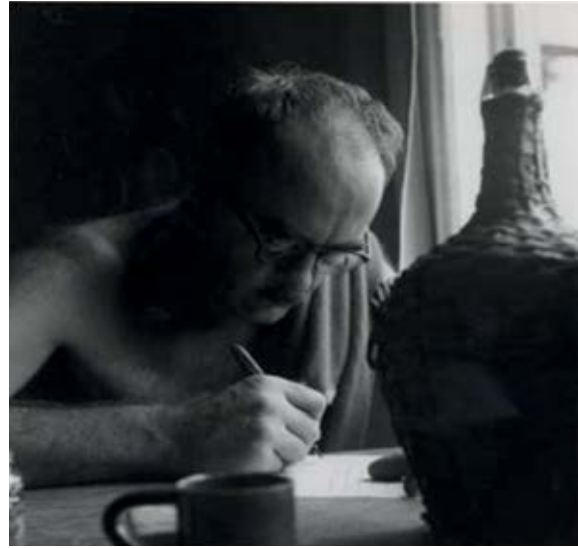
Of course, to speak of the connective and collective is to speak of a network model that is in turn intrinsic to the interdisciplinary, of what I'll call discipline-objects in a dynamic, vectored relationship, toward a sense of unity, of an ambition toward a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which is true of both Black Mountain and the Factory. Yet this is also to say, particularly about Black Mountain and its educational goal, that it was not about the freeing of oneself from a single discipline, but instead about the freedom to bring to one discipline everything else. That is the centripetal seed of interdisciplinarity within the radically decentralized pedagogy of the school.

As important as the pedagogical model of Black Mountain is, the general atmosphere it engendered should be considered as well. As the sculptor Richard Lippold said of his time at the college, there was "the joy of finding this freedom of living unbound by the conventions of society." There was "the exquisite and delightful balance of the freedom of personal life or activity of the students, free to learn about themselves and their relationship to life, to each other, to anybody who came there."<sup>2</sup>

In this light, an utterly crucial component of Black Mountain and its legacy is its summer institutes from 1944 (when the first of them was led by Albers in art and in music by Heinrich Jalowetz and Fritz Cohen) to 1953, which brought together an astonishing range of talents. Over the years, a sampling of the faculty and visiting faculty at Black Mountain included: the Albers, the theater critic Eric Bentley, Ilya Bolotowsky, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, John Chamberlain, Robert Creeley, Willem and Elaine de Kooning, the dancer and choreographer Agnes de Mille, the poet Robert Duncan, Lyonel Feininger, Buckminster Fuller, Clement Greenberg with Helen Frankenthaler in tow, Gropius, Franz Kline, the critic and literary scholar Alfred Kazin, Jacob Lawrence, the great ceramicists Shoji Hamada and Bernard Leach as well as Peter Voulkos, the sculptor Richard Lippold, the photographers Barbara Morgan, Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind, Beaumont and Nancy Newhall, and Robert Motherwell, Ben Shahn, the poets Charles Olson and Hilda Morley, the great director Arthur Penn, the



John Cage in his Model A Ford, 1952



Charles Olson at writing table, Black Mountain College, 1951, photograph by Jonathan Williams, with recording of *Letter 27: Maximus to Gloucester*, written in 1952

composers Roger Sessions, Morton Feldman, and Lou Harrison, the painters Jack Tworkov and Ted Stamos, and the pianist David Tudor. Among the students were the artists Robert Rauschenberg, Susan Weil, Kenneth Noland, Ray Johnson, Dorothea Rockburne, Kenneth Snelson, Cy Twombly; the poets John Wieners, Ed Dorn, Fielding Dawson, and Joel Oppenheimer; the writers Francine du Plessix Gray and Suzi Gablik, and the dancer and choreographer Paul Taylor.

Into this extraordinary atmosphere, Cage and Cunningham introduced themselves. They were there first for the 1948 summer institute and then again in the summers of 1952 and 1953. The relationship yields one of the most important works in the history of interdisciplinary art, Cage's *Theater Piece No. 1* of 1952. This is what Francine du Plessix Gray wrote in her casually punctuated journal entry of August 1952, which describes her recollection of the piece:

At eight-thirty tonight John Cage mounted a stepladder until 10:30 he talked about the relation of music to Zen Buddhism while a movie was shown, dogs ran across the stage barking, 12 persons danced without any previous rehearsal, a prepared piano was played, whistles blew, babies screamed, Edith Piaf records were played double-speed on a turn-of-the-century machine...<sup>3</sup>

And Cage remembers the piece this way:

It was at Black Mountain College that I made what is sometimes said to be the first happening. The audience was seated in four isometric triangular sections, the apexes of which touched a small square performance area that they faced and that led through the aisles between them to the large performance area that surrounded them. Disparate activities, dancing by Merce Cunningham, the exhibition of paintings and the playing of a Victrola by Robert Rauschenberg,





Ben Shahn, *Scots Run, Virginia*, 1937



Willem de Kooning, *Excavation*, 1950



Cy Twombly, *Untitled*, 1954



Harry Callahan, *Eleanor*, 1951, 1951



Robert Rauschenberg, *Merce Cunningham at Black Mountain College*, 1952



Paul Taylor, *Duet*, 1957. Peter Gena claims this was first made in collaboration with Robert Rauschenberg at Black Mountain College in 1954.

the reading of his poetry by Charles Olsen or hers by M. C. Richards from the top of a ladder outside the audience, the piano playing of David Tudor, my own reading of a lecture that included silences from the top of another ladder outside the audience, all took place within chance-determined periods of time within the over-all time of my lecture.<sup>4</sup>

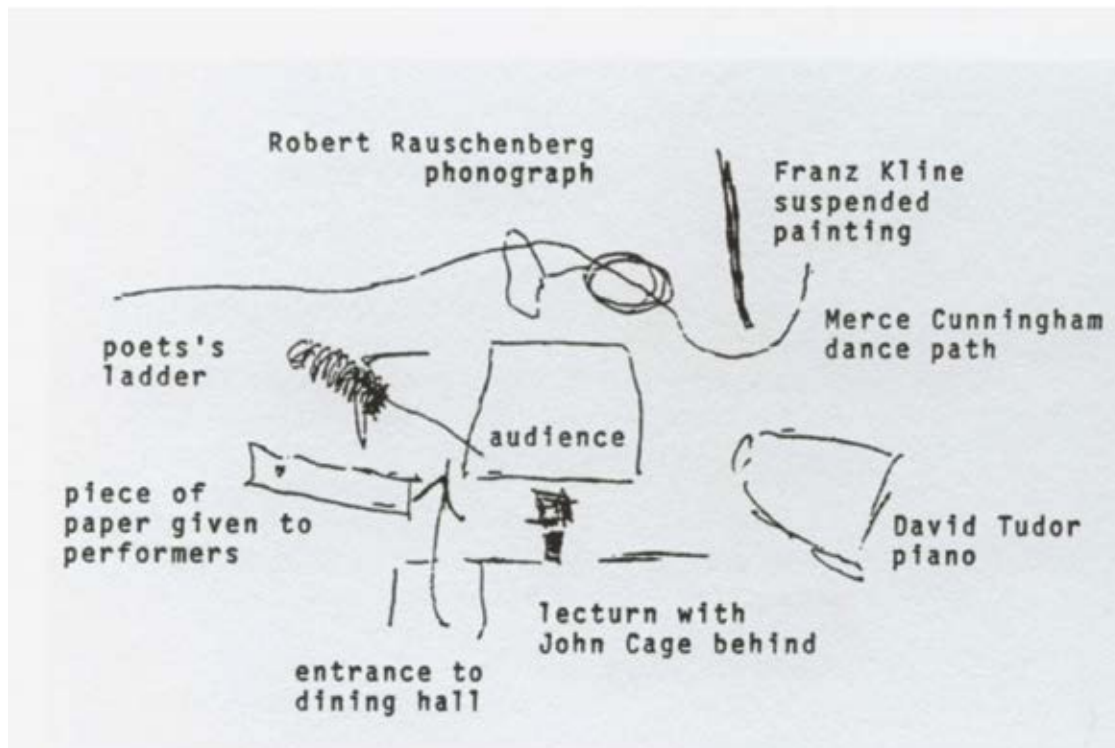
*Theater Piece No. 1* is an exemplar of a totality of connectedness that pierces the paradigm of art as a formally impervious, bounded thing—an exemplar in a long line that would include at least Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich in 1916, later Dadaist performative works, and subsequent Surrealist activities—and suggests an uninterrupted reciprocity between artifice and world, between contingency and plan. This practiced indeterminacy is a way to see its distinction from the functionality, for example, of the Bauhaus—or at least as indicated by the rigid structure of its pedagogy from the time of its 1925 incarnation in Dessau. And of course, there is the realpolitik of the fate of the Russian Constructivists, whose practices went from art interacting with life to life (e.g., political life) dictating the means and content of art, ultimately bringing them to dissolution. But what we see in Cage's piece is something characteristic of Black Mountain's ambience: a chance-based inclusivity that does not lead to the dilution and destruction of the individualism of artistic practice. Inclusivity is the very substance of an art in which all things are or may be ready-mades that are pulled into the vector of production as directed by the artist as a watchful and fully central exhibitor of presences.

A further thinking along these lines would say that the absence of political argument in the American milieu of Black Mountain (its singular and uncontested assumption of a narrowly defined democratic governance, particularly striking given that prominent members of its faculty and advisory board fled European oppression) and the absence of the intention to destroy the fundamental principles of a “bankrupt” social or aesthetic order, as with Dada and Duchamp, illuminated the makeshift poly-eventfulness of this work by Cage for incidental theater. In fact, there is an intriguing sense of a paradoxically imposed limit of freedom within Cage's theater piece, which is really a transcription of Duchamp's notion of “canned chance.” Remember that Duchamp said: “My ‘Three Standard Stoppages’ is produced by three separate experiments, and the form of each one is slightly different. I keep the line, and I have a deformed meter. It's a ‘canned meter,’ so to speak, canned chance; it's amusing to can chance.”<sup>5</sup>

Cage called this “purposeless purpose,” and in *Theater Piece No. 1* it was bracketed by the time compartments of his plan. As Cage noted in his own description of the work: “During periods that I called time brackets, the performers were free within limitations—I think you would call them compartments—compartments they didn't have to fill, like a green light in traffic.”<sup>6</sup> Though I would reverse this and call it purposeful purposelessness or, in the terms with which I began, a useful uselessness: finding in the deployment of random events a meshwork of endlessly malleable expressions to be joined. Cunningham exploited chance in his own way, summarized in his idea for *Theater Piece No. 1*, that no single place on the stage was intended to be the front for the dancer. This allowed an infinitely shifting center for the choreographed work, or rather, in the place of a center is an everywhere that creates a more porous relationship between dancer and audience.

To think across boundaries is to think from within a bounded form. This can be the individual materiality and traditions of an artistic discipline. It can be the architectural structure of a gallery as a container of what we can call “discipline-objects.” Or it can be pedagogy's formulation as a site of transfer and exchange among disciplines. Each is a





M.C. Richards floor plan for John Cage's *Theater Piece No. 1*, August 1952

concern of spatiality, and the question of space in which the interdisciplinary happens suggests the most basic physical necessity “to house” in the sense of Heidegger’s thoughts about dwelling found in his 1951 essay “Building Dwelling Thinking,” in which he traces the word for building in German, *Bauen*, back to the Old English word *buon*, which means to dwell. He then links *buon* through a series of variables to the German verb to be, as in *ich bin*, I am, and makes a bridge between I am and I dwell. Dwelling is to reside in the place of being, in the place of origin. To dwell is a construction of the self, a building of and for the self. To be without dwelling is to be without the roots of origin, to be without the home in which self *is*. Heidegger goes on to correlate this being-in-dwelling with preserving the self, which is to be at peace in the dwelling of the self. This is poetic, but it is also a metaphor of significance in thinking about interdisciplinarity, in which the home, so to speak, of each discipline must be in its dwelling as discipline-object, while the very nature of interdisciplinarity proposes the deracination of individual discipline-objects that are then conjoined in a new dwelling, a new self that is based on fluctuation, movement, omnidirectionality, asymmetry—in other words, the dynamics of nodes within networks. We see movement in this disciplinary sense based in trauma, as was the homelessness and consequent art of Dada. Yet we also see this in the example of Black Mountain, where the loose interrelation of disciplinary connectivity is one of a far more optimistic dwelling-as-being.

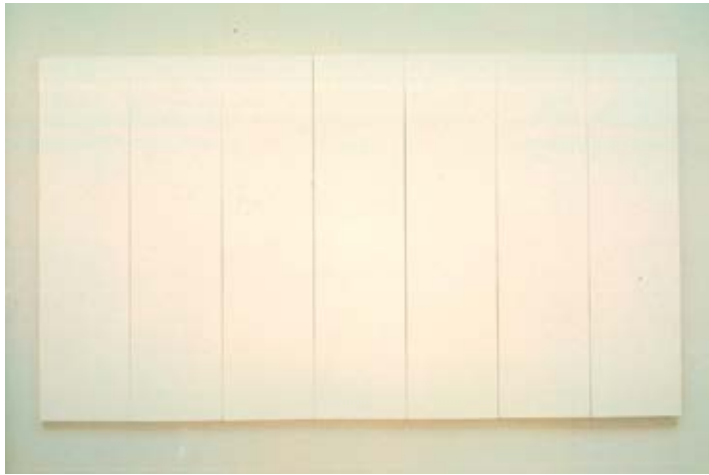
Heidegger, in his thinking about dwelling as the preservation of the self, is describing a form of boundedness. Yet we see in the example of Black Mountain that preservation is a viral condition of collectivity, an uprooting of curricular structure, that sets its example within the democratic context as a means of entrepreneurial selfhood that is at once individualistic and for the group. It comprises a volte-face of decentered centeredness and centered decenteredness, and always centrifugal, always outward toward a horizon of emancipatory imagination. This new mobility as preservation of the self finds itself brilliantly embodied in the pedagogical model of Black Mountain, as

it does in the summer institutes. At the same time, it is interesting to consider that the conditions of Black Mountain could have led to a more frequently practiced interdisciplinarity, once Cage had opened the way, and yet they didn't. Still, what we see seeping into the pores of educational production at Black Mountain is the hospitality of discipline interaction, which, as Derrida says of hospitality, is always a question of the foreigner entering, and here can be understood as a profound welcoming of the material interaction of disciplines, such that their strangeness to one another is engaged, entered into, questioned but embraced, and so becomes a conviviality of disciplines that soon emerges more fully.

“Porousness” and “conviviality” are significant words to describe the environment of practice at Black Mountain. Conviviality is a fundamental condition of the college: the conviviality of shared learning, working, and living together. Porousness can be understood as a dilation that permits the contiguity of activities that traditionally were separated. The condition of erosion precedes this—a wearing away that loosens strictures, such that the porous is an opening in the texture of making. In the context of Black Mountain, pedagogical and existential porousness cohabit, they dwell together, and are a spatial apparatus of the contingent. For the openness of Black Mountain returns us to the idea of contingency and chance; a reminder of Duchamp's canned chance, though not to ironic effect. For canned chance exists in specific relation to boundedness, to the deformed meter that is still a meter, to structure and control, and offers another boundary, just as the loosened pedagogy of Black Mountain is at once an opening, while it remains within a specific, if extraordinarily broad and loosened, function.

That's to say that what we see at Black Mountain is the joining of a casual formlessness of content distribution and a formal transmission of material technique. Within this experiment, any number of nonlinear and contradictory flows emerged, from the self-limiting exercises of Albers to the preoccupation with chance introduced by Cage and Cunningham, to the Projectivist verse of Charles Olson (who was Black Mountain's final rector), as Marjorie Perloff summarizes this poetry, with “its strong dismissal of ‘closed’ verse and concomitant adoption of the line as coming ‘from the breath, from the breathing of the man who writes, at the moment that he writes.’ It is the ‘LINE’ that speaks for the ‘HEART,’ even as the syllable does for the ‘HEAD’: ‘the LINE that's the baby that gets, as the poem is getting made, the attention.’ Olson's ideas relate directly to his famous proclamation that ‘FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN THE EXTENSION OF CONTENT.’”<sup>7</sup> This means again an opening of form, and that openness stretches back from Olson's Projectivist aesthetic to Mallarmé, whose notion of an environmental inclusivity, an ambience of material miscibility and evanescence, returns us to the idea of the porous.

Lewis Hyde writes in his book, *Trickster Makes This World*: “Before a body can come to life, every separation, every boundary, must be breached in some way; each organ must have its pores and gateways through which something (lymph, blood, bile, urine, electricity, neurotransmitters) may flow. Unless they incorporate internal forces of transgression, organic structures are in danger of dying from their own articulation.”<sup>8</sup> This is the environment in which the trickster thrives, like Hermes, who, as Hyde says, swings on a hinge between dark and light, imagination and rule-giving, truth and lies. Hyde calls Hermes the “god of the hinge” (209), and this can be said of Black Mountain's education as a pedagogy of the hinge, shifting the joints of conventional educational order in the name of a porous and convivial interdisciplinarity of thinking and making, a momentum of horizontalizing practices.



Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting (seven panels)*, 1951

This isn't so much a container of random elements as a form of autopoietic assemblage, much as Deleuze describes assemblage as "a multiplicity which is made up of heterogeneous terms and which establishes liaisons, relations between them, across ages, sexes and reigns—different natures. Thus, the assemblage's only unity is that of a co-functioning: it is a symbiosis, a 'sympathy'. [...] These are not successions, lines of descent, but contagions, epidemics, the wind."<sup>9</sup> And while this is poetic, it captures the sense of the autopoietic, of self-organization and self-determination permitted by Black Mountain in its inculcation of interdisciplinarity brought into production under the aegis of its democratic *demos* of students, teachers, and makers. In relation to form and formlessness, in fact in the relation of uselessness and usefulness in terms of the conventional narrative of a curriculum, Black Mountain's pedagogy of the hinge gave itself the privilege to be less shapely, to become, in Deleuzian terminology, a Body without Organs, a continually re-boundaried, networked body that granted itself a formal formlessness as a progenitive field of contingency and mobility, of a trickster sensibility, as the young Rauschenberg showed himself to be, and as Cage's *Theater Piece No. 1* dilated.

In his essay "Cage and Rauschenberg: Purposeful Purposelessness Meets Found Order," the composer Peter Gena notes that Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* and Cage's *4'33"*, done in 1951 and 1952 respectively, "proved to be a profound inspiration to artists of all disciplines. In the winter of 1954, Paul Taylor, a Cunningham dancer who also led his own company, executed *Duet*, a collaboration with Rauschenberg. It consisted of Taylor standing and a partner sitting—both motionless throughout the performance. In the early 1960s, Nam June Paik produced *Zen for Film*, a lengthy work of clear film that accumulated scratches, etc., with each showing. Paik preferred to create a 'living movie' by meditating in front of the light during the screening, an imposition antithetical to Cage's premise of non-intention in *4'33"*. Around the same time, the Austrian Peter Kubelka and the American Tony Conrad independently created imageless films that exclusively employed the four extreme elements of film: light, darkness, sound, and silence. Conrad's *The Flicker*, as the name suggests, alternates between light and dark, accelerating to a frenzy with a single tone increasing in intensity and pitch. Kubelka's 6-1/2-minute film, *Arnulf Rainer*, employs long sections of light accompanied by white noise, and darkness accompanied by silence."<sup>10</sup> And of course, it is hard not to think that Rauschenberg's "Combines" of the 1950s and after weren't influenced by his time at Black Mountain or that his famous pronouncement, "Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in that gap between the two),"<sup>11</sup> doesn't resonate with the thought of Cage and the model of Black Mountain.



Robert Rauschenberg, *Monogram*, 1955

But it is just as important to recognize that Cage's presence at Black Mountain was limited in time and was only one presence among many strong voices, from Albers to Buckminster Fuller, Gropius to Greenberg, Olson to Creeley, to students such as Rauschenberg, Twombly, Noland, and Taylor. The conviviality of voices is what establishes Black Mountain as a viral paradigm for the productive contamination of thinking between disciplines and the proliferation of crossing paths. Black Mountain's stigmergic environment, its profusion of connections, and its shifting of the joints of verticalized knowledge are its network condition and its triumph. Cage's version of a networked work that was at once based in Zen Buddhism and an idyllic democratic modernism bears the fruit of *Theater Piece No. 1*, which burns historically in the mind of cultural practice as a reterritorialization that gave witness to the unclosing potential of formlessness, to a reformulation of what it is to dwell as a mobility of the self-preserving self, to the endless route of the interdisciplinary, and stands as a moment born from the porous spirit of Black Mountain in the history of network aesthetics.

Network aesthetics is concerned with modalities of asymmetrical connectivities among discipline-objects in interaction with what I call viewer-agents, but these are not frictionless encounters. Black Mountain offers an idea of pedagogy as a utopian democracy, which is to say a frictionless model, though the reality of the college, including its social relations and finances, were far from frictionless. Nonetheless, its attempt at a formless unity within a structural form is of particular consequence at our political and technological moment, in which formations of subjectification are under hydraulic duress from both pressures. Self and group are undergoing radical re-formation and will only continue to do so. These pressures are creating new limitations on the self—the self-as-citizen, the self-as-arbiter-of-the-self, while the sudden incursions of artificial intelligence into every fold of life will increasingly and drastically unify the most fundamental ontological ground of self-as-human in contrast with machinic intelligence, such that the idealization of the democratic, free self that Black Mountain embraced offers what can only be called a rearward horizon of nostalgic potentiality and an inquiry into forward rehabilitation.

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**Notes**

- 1** Ruth Erickson, "A Progressive Education," in *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College 1993-1957* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 77.
- 2** Quoted in Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain College* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 156.
- 3** Vincent Katz, *Black Mountain College: Experiment in Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), 139.
- 4** John Cage, "An Autobiographical Statement," *Southwest Review*, Vol. 76, No. 1 (Winter 1991), 59-76.
- 5** Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 1987), 46-47.
- 6** Katz, *Black Mountain*, 139.
- 7** Marjorie Perloff, "After Free Verse: The New Nonlinear Poetries" in *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, ed. Charles Bernstein (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 91.
- 8** Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischievous, Myth and Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 258.
- 9** Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 69.
- 10** Peter Gena, "Cage and Rauschenberg: Purposeful Purposelessness Meets Found Order," in the exhibition catalogue for *John Cage: Scores from the Early 1950s*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, February 8–April 18, 1992.
- 11** Robert Rauschenberg "Statement" in Dorothy C. Miller, ed., *Sixteen Americans* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), 58.
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# Revisiting Black Mountain College. Teaching to Transgress

## Dorothee Richter

Every art university wants to give its graduates the greatest opportunities after graduation, as artists, curators, actors, conductors, musicians, designers, filmmakers, or dancers. How to get from A to Z in this project is based on the respective creativity concept. Do you want to equip the students with management knowledge in order to pave their way into the creative industries? Do you want to provide them with expertise in their field, or is critical thinking required above all, as well as the ability to cooperate that enables students to survive in an extremely complex world?

In the following argumentation, I want to emphasize the historical moment of the renewed contemporary interest in other forms of knowledge production. So, the wish to install new forms of learning and teaching seems sometimes to be fueled by the idea of a shortcut, to get to innovative results, but without deep changes in organisations. The intensive work on structures and attitudes could be circumscribed somehow. Of course, this reminds us of *The New Spirit of Capitalism*,<sup>1</sup> the theoretical attempt to grasp the neoliberal reorganisation of work, without reorganising where the profit is going.

So, to understand what other forms of knowledge production in contemporary universities might entail, I would like to have a look at historical positions and movements that struggled for new perspectives in art and education.

The fascination today with Black Mountain College consists in the fact that a kind of wild knowledge developed, conceivably far away from ECTS points, fixed timetables, and curricula—that the artists and students presented there worked together enthusiastically, in unlikely and free constellations. They understood teaching and learning as collaborative processes; they cultivated, cooked, and ate together; they talked and lived together. The situation was certainly hierarchical, however, and only wealthy students could afford to attend the college. The admission of African-American students was a major exception at Black Mountain College. Gender differences definitely existed, but in some respects were also questioned, since a relative freedom to follow what one wanted was available.<sup>2</sup>

I therefore see it as symptomatic that, after the Europe-wide process of schooling and standardisation, there is a desire for free, wild thinking and wild action. One can classify our project to revisit Black Mountain College as typical for the situation today.<sup>3</sup>

As it happens, the very reason for founding a new school for further education was that the founders John Andrew Rice, Theodore Dreier, Frederick Georgia, and Ralph Lounsbury were controversially dismissed as faculty from Rollins College for refusing to sign a loyalty pledge.<sup>4</sup> The disobedient colleagues together developed a concept for the new Black Mountain College, founded on three cornerstones: “complete democratic self-rule, extensive work in the creative arts, and interdisciplinary study.”<sup>5</sup> I would therefore argue that a disobedient attitude is inscribed in the myths and the ideological settings of Black Mountain College.





1926 as sketch wall carpet by Anni Alber

Already the theorist whose ideas inspired BMC, John Dewey, mentioned in *Art as Experience* in 1934<sup>6</sup> that he considered participation, not representation, the essence of democracy. He also insisted on the harmony between democracy and scientific methods: an ever-expanding and self-critical community of inquiry. As Jesse Goodman remarks, this has far-reaching consequences: “Drawing upon the thinking of John Dewey and recent critics of schooling and society, this paper argues for viewing education as a vehicle for critical democracy. From this perspective, schools are seen as forms for cultural politics that reflect, mediate, and potentially transform the societal order within which they exist.”<sup>7</sup> The notion of democracy appeared to be quite radical, being very advanced for the time; however, from a contemporary viewpoint, equality was positioned as the equality of white men.

The other important inspiration for experiments at Black Mountain College came from ideas originating in the experimental art and architecture university of Bauhaus. The Bauhaus University was closed in 1933; the German fascists understood very well that the concern for better future living conditions for a diversity of people was not part of their cultural agenda. In addition, some lecturers had to flee Germany due to political or so-called “racial” reasons (whatever the Nazis understood as “race”). Overnight between November 9 and November 10, 1938, in an incident known as *Kristallnacht*, Nazis in Germany torched synagogues, vandalized Jewish homes, schools, and businesses, and killed close to 100 Jews.<sup>8</sup> After years of suppression, severe persecution now started, and some German Jewish intellectuals managed to leave Germany in time, because after 1938 even this became illegal.

So, from the beginning, policies inside and outside of the art institution influenced the beginning of Black Mountain College. One of the most surprising and often neglected outcomes of this horrible development is that in Tel Aviv one can find



typical Bauhaus buildings. Emily J. Levine names as German Jewish refugees in the US: “Anni and Josef Albers, as well as their colleague Xanti Schawinsky, former student of Oskar Schlemmer, psychoanalyst Fritz Moellenhoff, and director of the Cologne Opera, Heinrich Jalowetz, for whom Arthur Schoenberg sent a letter of recommendation from Los Angeles. (Wives were also in tow, usually as poorly paid as they were highly trained in literature and the arts.)”<sup>9</sup> In the first years, Josef Albers could not speak English, and Anni Albers acted as his translator, which might signify the situation women found themselves in at the College.

How to deal with students, how to project a utopian horizon, concepts which inform an attitude as teacher or student that could be thought of as interpellation. This term coined by Louis Althusser implies that the way a subject is addressed has a deep impact on the formulation (or production) of his/ her subjectivity. Insofar as any pedagogical input would have far-reaching consequences, it influences the construction of subjectivity, the relation between singularities and communities, an understanding of gender roles, and so forth. This could, of course, also be argued from Foucault’s theoretical perspective, as he sees that the control function is internalized as a main feature of the scopic regime of modernity. Emancipatory education and emancipatory cultural production would embrace diversity, would question their own paradigms, would ask for equality—notwithstanding that certainly at Black Mountain College, for example, no such thing as gender equality existed, or that the students were white, with one exception, or that, of course, a hierarchical situation existed. Even so, the situation opened up, and many unspoken or outspoken concepts of an institution or genre boundaries were called into question. Yet, from Black Mountain College onwards, (and, of course, this is an arbitrary beginning of new approaches to education), the seed of radical education flourished, and I want to follow up quickly on some of them to position our contemporary longing for other learning experiences.

As a very influential figure, Robert Buckminster Fuller is repeatedly mentioned; he experimented with geodesic domes on the basis of a human-environment ecosystem. As he had dedicated his life to finding new solutions for humanity, he must have been an impressive person. In addition, the short engagements of John Cage as a summer lecturer at Black Mountain College proved to be important. Emma Harris informs us: “Despite his lack of students, for Cage the summer was significant. Robert Rauschenberg had returned in the summer of 1951 with Cy Twombly and remained through the 1952 summer. Rauschenberg’s all-white paintings which Cage first viewed that summer were inspiration for his reputation-breaking silent piece *4’33”* which is dedicated to Black Mountain student Irwin Kremin and which was first performed by David Tudor on August 29, 1952 at the Maverick Concert Hall in Woodstock. New York.”<sup>10</sup>

Another most mysterious and most influential incident turned out to be the performance of *Theater Piece No. 1* of 1952 by Cage, and while stories about the event differ, it is clear that many teachers were involved and some random system was used to perform it.<sup>11</sup> Especially because there is no photographic documentation of the enactment, *Theater Piece* developed into a legendary myth.<sup>12</sup>

In the following years, John Cage decidedly influenced New Music and Fluxus and other neo-avant-garde movements. In his later position as a lecturer at the New School of Social Research in New York, major Fluxus artists were students in his classes. Fluxus means not only event scores and editions, but also a complete change of paradigms concerning production (in groups or collaborations), distribution (bypassing the

gallery system and museums and doing events at auditoriums, at smaller spaces, in the public space and distributing editions through a “mail-order Flux house”), and reception (also in groups, or as mass editions). Furthermore, in many cases the position and therefore the projected image of the artist and the public was completely transformed, as the audience was invited or even forced to participate, which signifies, of course, a completely changed interpellation of the audience. Along these lines of re-reading all positions, one obvious outcome is an entirely changed idea of learning and education. This transgression was enabled by using notation to describe events; these scores made it possible to use everything as material. The following examples demonstrate this:

Event score by Fluxus artist Eric Andersen:

1961 Opus 9

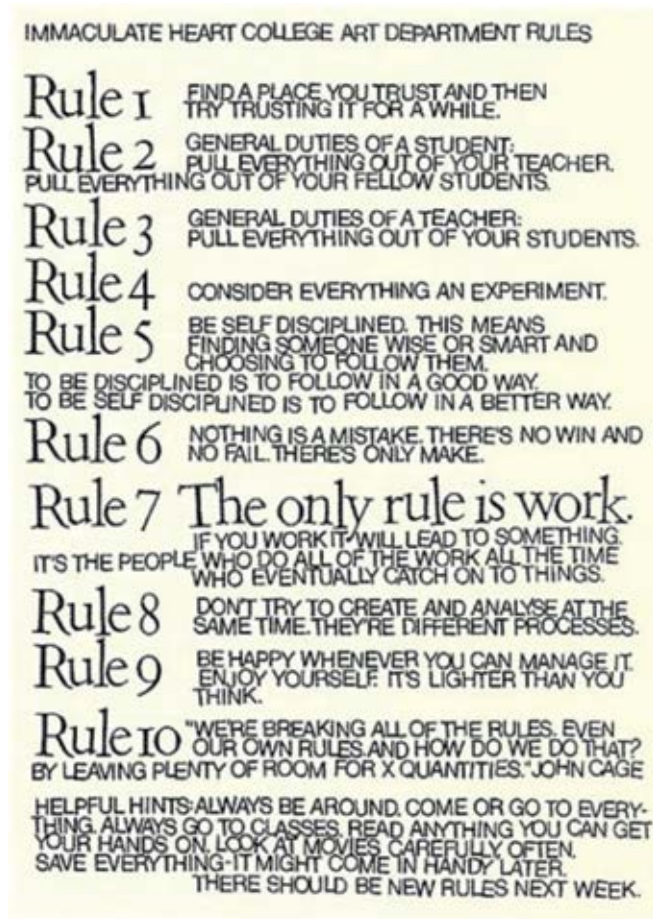
Let a person talk about his/ her ideal(s).

Or, by Yoko Ono, an edition for which she pierced a little hole into cardboard, which was called *A Hole to See the Sky Through*, or Fluxus artist Robert Filliou with this poetic piece from : *Whatever I say is irrelevant if it does not incite you to add up your voice to mine*.

The well-known book by Robert Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts by Robert Filliou, and the Reader if he wishes, with the participation of John Cage, Ben Patterson, George Brecht, Allen Kaprow, Marcelle, Vera and Bjoessi and Karl Rot, Dorothy Iannone, Diter Rot, Joseph Beuys. It is a Multi-book. The space provided for the reader's use is nearly the same as the author's own.*<sup>13</sup> This signifies an emphasis on the reader as an active contributor, in the way Roland Barthes<sup>14</sup> later describes in the death of the author that an active part of constructing a narrative is on the side of the reader, and in the way he sees writing as a process that is embedded in a broad discourse. The notion of the single author is an invention of modernity.<sup>15</sup> In Robert Filliou's artistic approach, it is notable that he also invited the children of some of the Fluxus artists to contribute, mixing up the position of scholar and teacher, or of subjects and objects of pedagogy. And in our context, it is important to note that he included political statements, like the article on street fighting, in which he draws parallels from the Resistance against the Nazi Regime to protests against racial discrimination in the US to students' revolts in Europe.<sup>16</sup>

He shares this attitude, which meanders between politics and aesthetics, with many radical pedagogues, like, for example, Sister Corita Kent, a nun, activist, and artist who was affiliated with Black Mountain College. A list of “Some Rules for Students and Teachers,” was first attributed to John Cage, but was later discovered as being written and printed by Kent. It was developed as part of a project for a class she taught in 1967-68, and only the last rule was added by Cage. I will just quote two of the rules: “RULE SIX: Nothing is a mistake. There's no win and no fail, there's only make.” (Sister Corita Kent) And the last rule added by John Cage: “RULE TEN: We're breaking all the rules. Even our own rules. And how do we do that? By leaving plenty of room for X quantities.” Again, for Kent, the connection of art, social justice, and political slogans was evident, especially in her later years. Her involvement in politics and her disagreement with the Catholic Church led her to leave the convent and to found a free community. Her work is today conceived in the realm of feminist positions and is shown at women's museums.

New forms of learning spread in art and philosophy contexts; like in the beginning of the century when workers engaged in self-education, now student groups read and



1967-1968

discussed Marx and Hegel in self-organized seminars. Since the student revolts in the West around 1968, female students demanded to not only just participate in fights on general human rights, but they also understood their position as involved in a power struggle. Gender was observed as a construction of exclusion. Demands by women to equal rights were based on different theoretical notions, which combined psychoanalytic approaches (Freud and Lacan) with post-Marxist positions and theories of power (Foucault) in order to develop new theoretical constructions, like those by Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, and Julia Kristeva.

In Italy, “Diotima” was founded in 1975 in Milan by philosophers (Luisa Murano and others), a group of feminists who started to have discussions and publish together. This took place in the context of the “Libreria delle donne di Milano.”

At the core of their concept is a theory of a politics of relations between women, which they called *affidamento* (Italian: to confide in one another). In the practice of *affidamento*, women confer authority and power on each other. This policy leads to a new “symbolic order” in their view, which can only arise, however, if the relationship with the mother is valued as the first relationship. Of course, this position was rejected by other feminists who thought of this approach as too essentialist, especially since the notion of a symbolic order, which draws on Lacanian theory, excludes “women” as subjects from any symbolic order. So, the symbolic order as such and the non-existing female position determine each other. And just to avoid misunderstandings, this is of course a statement that fundamentally critiques patriarchy, and the symbolic order of

# LIBRERIA delle DONNE di MILANO



patriarchy. Women are seen as per definition as a crossed-out subject as a counterpart to male subjectivity, which defines patriarchal society. Nevertheless, the idea of *affidamento* was brought back into the cultural realm by British feminists in recent years in London (Helena Reckitt, Irene Revell, and Lina Džuverović) in the arts, who have based their recurrent reading groups on this notion. The group operates between a public and a non-public, hidden, private event and discusses the intersection of different modes of suppression and subalternity. Undoubtedly, the notion of *affidamento* informs an (oppositional) attitude in the current symbolic order and therefore strengthens the position of “women.” Of course, the idea of *affidamento* also proposes that women organize systems of support for each other, which again would change a teacher-scholar relationship. In this example, it became obvious that the question of power lurks beneath any reformulation of pedagogy. In the concept around *affidamento*, the actual differences in access to power are acknowledged; the preconception of any act would be to agree on the idea that women should especially focus on supporting other women, which, of course, also mimics the existing old boy networks.

Like in the example of *affidamento*, the practice of a theory and the theory of a practice became extremely close in the discussions around education and the access to the arts. In 1987, the publication by Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (original title *Le Maître ignorant: Cinq leçons sur l'émancipation intellectuelle*, published in 1987), became an important reference for intellectuals and artists. Disguised as a novel, Rancière argues for learning as a process of opening spaces for the development of skills and abilities; the “schoolmaster” gives way to others to use the space made available through his ignorance. For Rancière, emancipation becomes a political act of affirming and awakening the equal intelligence of all people. As a post-Marxist, he is convinced that all men have equal intelligence, and he follows the notion that under favorable conditions, all men and women would have the possibility of producing valuable cultural artifacts and intellectual concepts. As you can see, this idea would not be applicable to grades in education. In Rancière’s view, the fixation of a social order is always part of the police order. The fight between different social groups over the possibility of participating in social processes, in aesthetics, in the distribution of the sensible, is part of an ongoing political process. Dissent with the police order would be always the basic component of any political process. This would imply a deep change in any institution that would be willing to embrace new forms of knowledge production.

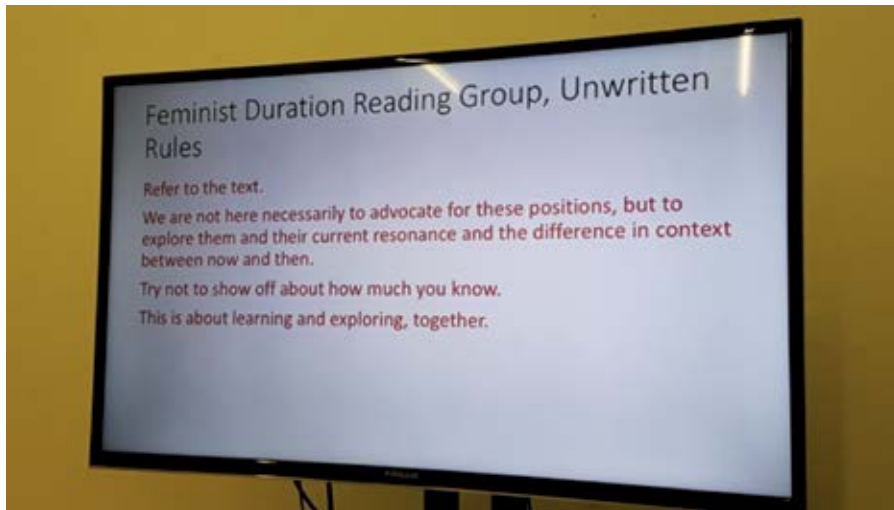
In my subjective genealogy of pedagogical concepts, which are related to contemporary arts and (art) education, bell hooks is an important voice in recent discussions. As

an African American feminist literary scholar, she advocates feminist, class-transgressing, and anti-racist approaches. The intersectionality of different layers of oppression come together in the specific situation of the addressee. Somehow surprisingly, her notion of resistance is based on the concept of love, which was emphasized even more in later years. In 1994, she wrote: “The academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.”<sup>17</sup> In this approach, the attitude of the teacher/professor once again plays a major role; if the counterpart of a pedagogical situation is treated with respect and care, the encounter allows development. Her approach also operates on the precondition of a complicity between teachers and students, as the access to higher education for black students was not a given at all. Black and or female students (or in the most difficult case, black female students) would not have the same assurance that the institution of higher education is his/her given privilege, and he/she would need somebody to encourage and side with him/her. This might enable you to see the constructive character of all institutional rituals, because only if you are able to see your right to be there can you utter your concerns and demands and strive for the power in the system. In the new neoliberal reconfiguration of universities with short-term contracts for all lecturers and professors, this right is not a given for the teaching staff either, let alone for the students. Again, to implement more democratic systems in teaching/learning, the preconditions must be also revised.

When Jacques Derrida travelled to US universities on a lecture tour, he felt the urgency to formulate the programmatic “university without conditions,” based on the impressions from this trip; it is a model he positioned in 2002 against contemporary universities that work hand in hand with industries, be it in connection with technical innovations or, I take the liberty to add, anything that might be called creative industries. In his words, he demands the positioning of a university in resistance to “economic powers (to corporations and to national and international capital), to the powers of the media, ideological, religious, and cultural powers, and so forth – in short, to all the powers that limit democracy to come.”<sup>18</sup>

From his viewpoint, it is important to claim the free space that a university can provide, without the idea of immediate utilization. A close relation to companies will not offer the freedom of scientific research. In the end the way into societal relevance, defined by a society in flux, with different parameters could be seen as being of major importance.

The social is related to the personal through the figure of the professor. Derrida insists on a specific attitude on the part of the professor. For him, the word “profess,” with its Latin origin, means to declare openly, to declare publicly: “The declaration of the one who professes is a performative declaration in some way. It pledges like an act of sworn faith, an oath, a testimony, a manifestation, an attestation, or a promise, a commitment. To profess is to make a pledge while committing to one’s responsibility. To make profession is to declare out loud what one is, what one believes, what one wants to be, while asking another to take one’s word and believe this declaration.”<sup>19</sup> This could, of course, be interpreted in many ways: the duty to position oneself politically, to commit to teaching/learning as a shared process, to be reliable, and to be available for answers.



Screen during a talk by Helena Reckitt

The drive, the urgency we feel to re-evaluate teaching and learning is not only a symptom for the Europe-wide process of schooling and standardization. The situation nowadays is often described as a post-democracy and as a post-facts era; elections are manipulated by Whatsapp or Facebook in the US and in Brazil, meaning making algorithms are working, unseen and untraceable, but what they spread are ideological constructions based on images and texts. This works, even if the messages as such might be highly absurd.

This implies a reformulation of the public sphere. A public sphere can be seen as the moment of articulated conflicts between interests; this cannot happen anymore when the conflicts are disguised, when they are hidden behind a screen of impenetrable post-facts and disguised interests. Along these lines, Bernard Stiegler claims that extensive TV consumption creates a globally synchronized hallucination. One might see this as hegemonic pedagogy that influences all addressees, everyone with access to a computer. These hallucinations are also locally loaded; they are pushed to reinstall reactionary forces. The reactionary connotations differ insofar as they reinstall national discourses related to the respective country. The outcome is undoubtedly an emotionalized, pathetic post-factual meaning-making machinery with very extreme political effects in countries around the world. That is why we, as group of people (students/teachers) should install cells—cells of friendship, of a sisterhood/brotherhood. Perhaps the university could be place where this can sometimes happen. It is not by chance Derrida considers democracy the place where “everyone is able in the same way to be quite different.”<sup>20</sup>

As tentative findings I would like to emphasize the following parameters for an emancipatory education, not of course as a method, but as a line of thought that would help to identify where one stands in the education complex.

- Participation, not representation
- Schools potentially transform the societal order
- Concern for better future living conditions for a diversity of people
- Working together, self-empowered learning
- Questioning one's own paradigms
- Experimental forms, transgressing genre boundaries
- Relation of art, social justice, and political activism





Poster by the Silent University, Ahmet Ögüt

- Changing the teacher-scholar relationship (ignorant schoolmaster)
- Can students influence and develop their projects and study programmes?
- *Affidamento*, as a support system for female identified subjects
- What role do grades play?
- The possibility of participating in social processes beyond the university
- Is dissent possible? What are the conditions for learning and for teaching, is there a secure space to speak from?
- Professor = declaring publicly, committing to responsibility
- > democracy to come (democracy in suspense)

In many of his later texts,<sup>21</sup> Jacques Derrida forcefully and with great persuasiveness repeatedly refers to the so-called founding paradox of democracy: according to Derrida, a democratic constitutional state cannot itself be founded by democratic means, it has to resort to more or less subtle violence for its foundation, thus abolishing a generally violent state by force. The negation of the rule of law, the violent state, is itself negated in a violent way and thus leads to its—doubtful—positive setting and recognition. Sovereignty and democracy are therefore always in suspense and in negotiation.



One of the contemporary artistic projects that operates in the negotiation spaces of democracy is The Silent University,<sup>22</sup> which was founded by Ahmet Ögüt. “The Silent University is a solidarity based knowledge exchange platform by refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. It is led by a group of lecturers, consultants and research fellows. Each group is contributing to the programme in different ways, which include course development, specific research on key themes as well as personal reflections on what it means to be a refugee and asylum seeker. This platform will be presented using the format of an academic program.”<sup>23</sup> The art scene gives the project visibility and, of course, also funding; the question is whether it also operates in the political sphere, which means if it actually helps the members/lecturers, who “had a professional life and academic training in their home countries, but are unable to use their skills or professional training due to a variety of reasons related to their status,”<sup>24</sup> to find a position in their host societies.

The Silent University was founded in collaboration with the Delfina Foundation and the Tate and was later hosted by The Showroom. It operates internationally, which one might see as an answer to the worldwide interpellation through digital media, but of course it is also just connected to the international discourse of contemporary art. Other spaces of appearance were founded in Sweden in 2013, in collaboration with Tensta Konsthall and ABF Stockholm, and it spread as well to Hamburg in 2014, initiated by Stadtkuratorin Hamburg, to the 2015 Ruhr Festival. As the website indicates, the Silent University has also been established in Amman, Jordan, initiated by Spring Sessions from May 2015 on, and in Athens. Of course, the moment of self-empowerment seems to be extremely important for the project. Some questions remain: Is this construction sustainable, how are the actual learning situations performed, and does the project enable the participating lecturers and students to transfer it into a more durable structure? Are connections to further education institutions, universities, and NGOs also established?

From our experimental work with students, I would like to describe one project:

**“How We Live Now – Art System, Work Flow, and Creative Industries.”**

We wanted to start where the students are positioned in the art field, in a neoliberal work organization as their future. Our aim was to bring their own situation together with a more theoretical debate of contemporary contexts. For this production, we read and discussed Michel Foucault’s concept of gaze regimes of modernity, which is based on the Panopticon sketched by English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham. The panopticon shows that the most effective control of behavior is instituted when a guard is situated in a tower in the middle of the building and the inmates do not know when they are actually being watched and when they are not. That means that they are motivated to act as though they are being watched at all times. Thus, they are effectively compelled to regulate their own behavior.

Michel Foucault takes this concept as the metaphor of modern disciplinary societies, and their function to establish power.<sup>25</sup> The Panopticon creates a consciousness of permanent visibility as a form of power, where no bars, chains, and heavy locks are necessary for domination. The function of control is in a way internalized. The state citizen controls himself or herself.

We cross-read that with the promise of contemporary cultural work and its neoliberal outlines: “You are free, but, by the way, also without social security.” The students had

to write down their own experiences, experiences that were connected to what the text and its interpretation speaks about. The text of the film is based on written stories provided by students; they were transformed by the author Renata Burhardt into short scenes. For me, it is important in working with students to understand the relation between theory and the specific living conditions and vice versa, and to develop things with an open end. The film as such can be shown, of course, by all participants, as a trigger to initiate discussions, as a part of an exhibition, and so on. In the process, we actually played some of the scenes with the students, or the students spoke as a choir, "You are free to leave now...". The film as such was then edited and composed by Ronald Kolb and me; we used a lot of material that was shot as a by-product, the in-between moments, the working together, sharing a cigarette, rehearsing. The texts were spoken by two voices over the visual material. All these moments emphasize the alienation that is inscribed into the material. The shared working process and the moments when everybody shared their experiences strengthened the group and provided an understanding of everyone's own experiences as something that has a social and political context. It objectified, historicized, and contextualized living and working in the art field.

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## Notes

**1** Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso Books, 2005).

**2** See also video clips: <https://www.widewalls.ch/black-mountain-college/>, accessed Feb. 1, 2019.

**3** The the Bologna declaration was signed by education ministers from 29 European countries in 1999. see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bologna\\_Process](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bologna_Process)

**4** See Jennifer M. Ritter, "Beyond Progressive Education: Why John Andrew Rice Really Opened Black Mountain College," *Rollins Undergraduate Research Journal* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2011), accessed Feb. 1, 2019, <https://scholarship.rollins.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1044&context=rurj>.

**5** William C. Rice, introduction to "Black Mountain College Memoirs," by John Andrew Rice, *The Southern*

*Review* 23, no. 5 (1989): 569, here quoted from Ritter, "Beyond Progressive Education."

**6** John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934).

**7** Jesse Goodman, "Education for Critical Democracy," *Journal for Education* 171, no. 2, Language Culture and Schooling, Boston University, Boston (1989): 88.

**8** *Kristallnacht* or the Night of Broken Glass, also called the November Pogrom(s), was a pogrom against Jews carried out by SA paramilitary forces and civilians throughout Nazi Germany on 9–10 November 1938. The German authorities looked on without intervening. The name *Kristallnacht* ("Crystal Night") comes from the shards of broken glass that littered the streets after the windows of Jewish-owned stores, buildings and synagogues were smashed. Jewish homes, hospitals and schools were ransacked as the attackers demolished buildings with sledgehammers. The rioters destroyed 267 synagogues throughout Germany, Austria and the Sudetenland. Over 7,000 Jewish businesses were damaged or destroyed, and 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and incarcerated in concentration camps. [British historian Martin Gilbert wrote that no event in the history of German Jews between 1933 and 1945 was so widely reported as it was happening, and the accounts from foreign journalists working in Germany sent shockwaves around the world. The Times of London observed on 11 November 1938: "No foreign propagandist bent upon blackening Germany before the world could outdo the tale of burnings and beatings, of blackguardly assaults on defenseless and innocent people, which disgraced that country yesterday." See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kristallnacht>.

**9** Emily J. Levine, *From Bauhaus to Black Mountain: German Émigrés and the Birth of American Modernism*, in *Los Angeles Review of Books*, accessed Sept. 1, 2018, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/bauhaus-black-mountain-german-emigres-birth-american-modernism/#>.

**10** Mary Emma Harris, “John Cage at Black Mountain: by Mary Emma Harris A Preliminary Thinking,” *Journal of Black Mountain College Studies* 4, accessed Mar. 31, 2019, <http://www.blackmountainstudiesjournal.org/volume-iv-9-16/mary-emma-harris-john-cage-at-black-mountain-a-preliminary-thinking/>.

**11** Levine, *From Bauhaus to Black Mountain*.

**12** See also the description in the article “Black Mountain: Pedagogy of the Hinge” by Steven Henry Madoff in this issue.

**13** Usually quoted as: Robert Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts*, Koeln, New York, republished in 2014. The whole book is in German and English, and between the section of each language is space on each page for the reader to become an active contributor. “Lehren und Lernen als Aufführungskünste von Robert Filliou und dem Leser, wenn er will. Unter Mitwirkung von John Cage, Benjamin Patterson, George Brecht, Allen Kaprow, Marcelle, Vera und Bjoessie und Karl Rot, Dorothy Iannone, Diter Rot, Joseph Beuys. Dies ist ein Multibuch. Der Schreibraum des Lesers ist beinahe so umfangreich, wie der des Autors,” also known as *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts* by Robert Filliou, and the Reader if he wishes, with the participation of John Cage, Ben Patterson, George Brecht, Allen Kaprow, Marcelle, Vera and Bjoessi and Karl Rot, Dorothy Iannone, Diter Rot, Joseph Beuys. It is a Multi-book. The space provided for the reader’s use is nearly the same as the author’s own.”

**14** Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977).

**15** « La mort de l’auteur » is an article that was first published in English under the title “The Death of the Author (en),” *Aspen Magazine*, n° 5/6, 1967, then in French in 1968 in issue 5 of the journal *Mantéia*, based in Marseille and close to *Tel Quel*. The article was then published as part of the anthology, *Le bruissement de la langue. Essais critiques IV*. See [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roland\\_Barthes](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roland_Barthes), accessed Sept. 24, 2018.

**16** Filliou, *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts*, p. 208 German version, p. 209 English version.

**17** bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 14.

**18** Jacques Derrida, “The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition (thanks to the ‘Humanities’, What Could Take Place Tomorrow),” in Tom Cohen, ed., *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 26. “Consequence of this thesis: such an unconditional resistance could oppose the university to a great number of powers, for example to state powers (and thus to the power of the nation-state and to its phantasm of indivisible sovereignty, which indicates how the university might be in advance not just cosmopolitan, but universal, extending beyond worldwide citizenship and the nation-state in general), to economic powers (to corporations and to national and international capital), to the powers of the media, ideological, religious, and cultural powers, and so forth – in short, to all the powers that limit democracy to come.”

**19** Derrida 2002 “The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition,” 31–32.

**20** Ibid.

**21** Jacques Derrida, *Gesetzeskraft. Der »mystische Grund der Autorität«* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1991); Jacques Derrida, *Das andere Kap. Die vertagte Demokratie: Zwei Essays zu Europa* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1992); Jacques Derrida, *Schurken: Zwei Essays über die Vernunft*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2002).

**22** See <http://thesilentuniversity.org/>

**23** See <http://thesilentuniversity.org/>

**24** See <http://thesilentuniversity.org/>

**25** Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977).

### **Dorothee Richter**

Professor in Contemporary Curating

Since 1998, Richter has held lecturing posts at the University of Bremen, the Merz Akademie Stuttgart, the École des Beaux Arts in Geneva, and the University of Lüneburg alongside the travelling Exhibition/Archive “Curating Degree Zero Archive”. CDZA travelled to 18 different institutions, mainly in Europe, 2003-2008. From 1999 to the end of 2003, Richter was artistic director of the Künstlerhaus Bremen, where she curated a discursive programme based on feminist issues, urban situations, power relation issues, and institutional critique. In 2005 she founded the Postgraduate Programme in Curating, CAS/MAS at the ZHdK.

2012 she founded the PhD in Practice in Curating programme as a collaboration between the University of Reading and the ZHdK, in both institutions she holds a professorship. Curatorial projects among others: *Fluxus Festival at Cabaret Voltaire* (2008), *New Social Sculptures* at Kunstmuseum Thun (2012) *Speculative Curating, Performative Interventions* at Migros Museum for Contemporary Art (2016/17), *Small Project for Coming Communities*, Stuttgart, Zürich (2019).

She has co-curated numerous symposia, like *Re-Visions of the Display* (2009) with Jennifer Johns, Sigrid Schade; *Institution as Medium. Curating as Institutional Critique?* with Rein Wolfs (2010); *Who is Afraid of the Public?* at the ICA London with Elke Krasny, Silvia Simoncelli and the University of Reading (2013); *Third, fourth and fifth spaces: Curatorial practices in new public and social (digital) spaces* with the Manifesta Journal and the Institute of Contemporary Art of the ZHdK (2013), with the Manifesta in Zürich *Work, Migration, Memes, Personal Geopolitics*, (2016), at the *De-Colonizing Art Institutions* (2017) Kunstmuseum Basel; *Movements in Feminism / Feminisms in Movement: Urgencies, Emergencies, Promises*, (2018) with Elke Krasny, Belvedere 21 Vienna; *Curate Your Context: Methods on and of Curating* (2019), Institut national d’histoire de l’art, Paris.

She is directing in cooperation with others the OnCurating Project Space. ([oncurating-space.org](http://oncurating-space.org)). She is the editor in chief of [www.OnCurating.org](http://www.OnCurating.org), an online and print magazine on curatorial practice and theory. Her own PhD dealt with Fluxus, “*Fluxus: Art – Synonymous with Life? Myths about Authorship, Production, Gender and Community*”. In 2013, she released a film together with Ronald Kolb: *Flux Us Now! Fluxus explored with a camera*, which was screened for the first time at the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart in April 2013, at the Migros Museum in Zurich 2013, at the Museum Tinguely 2015, Ostwall Museum Dortmund 2015, Lentos Museum Linz 2017, Kunstmuseum Ulm, 2019, and different European art academies ([www.fluxusnow.net](http://www.fluxusnow.net)) .

# How we live now – Art System, Work Flow and Creative Industries

Filmed at Gasthaus zum Baeren/ Museum Baerengasse.

Reading theory and relating this to own experiences a group of students from Lucerne, University of Art and Design, MA Fine Art and ZHdK, Postgraduate programme in Curating did produce scenes together with the author Renata Burkhardt.

Concept: Dorothee Richter and Sabine Gebhardt Fink,  
Direction and Editing: Ronald Kolb and Dorothee Richter  
Assistance Mirjam Bayerdoerfer  
Postproduction: Ronald Kolb

Participants: Francesca Brusa, Angelika Bühler, Nadine Lopez,  
Mirjam Bayersdörfer, Carolin Reichmann, Mariana Bonilla, Alejandro Mondria,  
Greta Schindler, Anja Soldat, Makiko Takahashi, Margrit Barle, Julia Bolli,  
Charlotte Coosemanns, Atalja Reichlin, Cindy Hertnach, Raphael Karrer,  
Frederic Bron and others.







# Commoning the Institution – or How to Create an Alternative (Art School), When “There Is No Alternative.”

## Cornelia Sollfrank

What does an art school have to do with open source, feminism, or institutional psychotherapy? For the average art school, probably very little. Some individuals may use free software on their PCs, there might be this or that seminar on feminist theory, or a feminist artist teaching, but certainly, when it comes to institutional psychotherapy, no matches at all.

The reason for asking this question is an experiment undertaken by the Brussels-based art school *École de recherche graphique* (e.r.g.),<sup>1</sup> or rather its current director. Laurence Rassel was appointed as Director in July 2016 and has since worked toward transforming the school, making into a site of commoning, or, as she calls it, “a site for collective instituting.” The tools she is using, her “kit for surviving the institution,” and making it into a “less toxic” place, stem exactly from these three diverse fields: **open-source software, feminism, and institutional psychotherapy**. Together they provide certain working principles that Rassel combines into a unique conceptual framework that is meant to reconfigure the workings of the institution as a whole.<sup>2</sup>

We invited Laurence Rassel to participate in one of the research meetings we have organized as part of the research project *Creating Commons*.<sup>3</sup> In this research project, we investigate art and cultural projects that develop new models of access to and use of cultural resources. For our research, the notion of the “commons” provides the theoretical framework for investigating how new forms of organization can constitute evolving realities that point beyond the growing commercialization of culture and its damaging effects. Our phenomenological approach takes existing projects as a starting point, and the majority of the projects we are looking into are self-organized projects run by small groups and initiatives. Considering a publicly funded art school in this context is due to the fact that e.r.g. has become an *experimental zone* in which processes of commoning and alternative ways of dealing with resources take place *within* a traditional institution.

### The Commons Framework

For the analytical framework of our phenomenological research, we found the structural definition of the commons conceived by political economist Massimo de Angelis most useful. In his words, “Commons are social systems in which *resources* are pooled by a *community* of people who also govern these resources to guarantee the latter’s sustainability (if they are natural resources) and the reproduction of the community. These people engage in *commoning*, that is a form of social labour that bears a direct relation to the needs of the people, or the commoners.”<sup>4</sup> While the model originates in historical ways of sharing natural resources, it has gained new momentum in relation to a variety of natural and cultural resources, constituting a third paradigm of production – beyond the state and the private sector.

The commons, however, should not be idealized as a “solution”; they are as much a symptom of a global crisis into which capital has maneuvered itself, as they are a “fix” to the most urgent systemic failures: “It needs a ‘commons fix,’ especially in order to deal with the devastation of the social fabric as a result of the current crisis of reproduction.”<sup>5</sup> At the same time, commons have the potential of creating “a social basis for alternative ways of articulating social production, independent from capital and its prerogatives. [...] Indeed, today it is difficult to conceive of emancipation from capital – and achieving new solutions to the demands of ‘buen vivir’ social and ecological justice – without at the same time organising on the terrain of commons, the non-commodified systems of social production. Commons are not just proclaiming a ‘third way’ beyond state and market failures; they are a vehicle for emerging communities of struggle to claim ownership to their own conditions of life and reproduction.”<sup>6</sup> In that sense, commons can be understood as an experimental zone in which participants can learn to negotiate responsibilities, social relations, and peer-based ways of production.

### Commoning the Art School

Although Laurence Rassel herself does not frame her work directly within the context of the commons, applying this framework to her organizational and managerial project demonstrates that her main references show substantial parallels to the concepts of the commons, and thus provide productive overlaps. At e.r.g., like in any other art school, the “community” is one of people who did not choose each other and who have to deal with an inbuilt hierarchy: workers, teachers, collaborators, students, and admin staff. “Resources” in the form of public funding broken down into maintenance, human resources, and working material can only be partly up for negotiation by the members of the institution. The most interesting aspect with regard to commons, however, is how processes of commoning can be encouraged, how they instigate new forms of learning and unlearning, new forms of subjectivation, and, lastly, produce not just different kinds of social relations, but with that, different cultural works.

Commoning here parallels the notion of “instituting,” the verb Rassel uses to describe the process of forming an institution. It is the opposite of the already “instituted,” the crystallized, frozen, and established that often is equated with the noun “institution.” For Rassel, “instituting” means the co-existence of both, of “becoming” and “having become,” at the same time. And it is important to maintain a balance, i.e. to give space for the process of instituting to constantly evolve and not allow the “instituted” to take precedence. Based on the inspiration provided by institutional psychotherapy, it is important that the whole “community” of the art school is involved in this process. The members inhabit a “common territory” that is constructed not by conformity but rather its opposite: the multiplicity of individuals. It is the result of an action composed of the “differences in presence,” and the common is always understood as a “common doing” rather than a fixed group.

In that sense, art schools could be conceived exactly as the kind of *experimental zone* in de Angelis’ sense. If they are given the opportunity, all participants can learn to negotiate responsibilities, social relations, and peer-based ways of production—beyond their specialized tasks. The relative freedom of the art school provides the ideal breeding ground for such experimentation, a laboratory for re-learning democratic forms of organization, for developing a sense of collectivity in a social setting that all too often pushes individuality and singularity to their extremes. In Rassel’s own words, “The paradoxical

task then is to sustain the collective, the common, while preserving heterogeneity and the singularities in place.”<sup>7</sup>

The inspiration for Rassel’s models for work processes comes from open source/free software culture, but also from institutional psychotherapy. The school is a hierarchical place, governed by texts and decrees but also by consciences that reveal themselves there as brutal, feverish, and urgent, generating a desire to reach a “whole” and a desire to question “the whole,” and nevertheless build a common. By opening up this layer from “read-only” to “read, write, and execute,” the very structure of the school can be turned inside out—to serve new purposes. People can get involved and affect the structure by their history to be made. The process is the collective development of the “how.”

### Quotes from the Interview

#### “Experimenting with Institutional Formats”<sup>8</sup>

Before looking at some sections of a live conversation with Laurence Rassel, it is interesting to highlight her personal background. After having been trained to become an artist herself, she traversed a variety of institutions, from small and self-organized to large and publicly funded, eventually re-entering the art school in a leadership role. Before Rassel was appointed to become the head of e.r.g., she had been the artistic director of Fundació Antoni Tàpies in Barcelona, an institution created in 1984 by the artist Antoni Tàpies to promote the study and knowledge of modern and contemporary art. One of her big achievements when working with this large institution was the opening up of the foundation’s archive. Before that, she had been involved for eleven years in a small collective in Brussels, constant,<sup>9</sup> a non-profit association and an interdisciplinary feminist artslab, active in the fields of art, media, and technology where issues related to intellectual property as well as gender and technology have been central. The experience she has amassed by assuming very diverse roles and inhabiting these different corners of the art world has been essential for her process of becoming and certainly helped her take a radical look at an institution of higher education whose role is to produce future artists—but that can obviously be much more...

#### Open-Source Software

“For me, what was always interesting in free and open-source software was the GPL license, the fact that, you know, you open the source code and you give the

authorization of transforming, copying, modifying, and we distribute with the same, open access to that. And also that you document it properly, so other people can make use of that, and you cannot predetermine the use of the software—somehow.

So, for me, it's my brain saying, ah, it's interesting for an institution to imagine it as a machine or as a structure—that you can open as a software as a dispositive that is you, at least, give access to how it works [...] That means that the people who participate in that machine can transform it, copy it, or use it for other purposes. And also, this idea that it was self-sustainable, that the machine can take care of herself, because the participants have the possibility of repairing the software, finding the bugs, being protected from the viruses. If you are not alone taking care of the machine, then the machine could live longer somehow."

### **Institutional Psychotherapy**

"Institutional psychotherapy, I discovered [it] through a seminar that took place in Barcelona on François Tosquelles, a Catalan psychotherapist who was active before the Republican war in Spain. During the war, he was a psychotherapist inside the Republican Army, and he created a group caring for soldiers, and he said that it was necessary to have different competencies and knowledge about the entire body and mind. So, there were artists, nurses, sex workers, other soldiers; I mean, whatever was necessary to take care of a person. The basic idea, in short, is that institutional psychotherapy was based on the idea that if you want to take care of a person, you have to take care of the institution, that if the institution is sick, the people who are patients there will be as sick as the institution is.

And also that everything counts, that the way the garden is done, the cleaning is done, or the cooking is done affects how the people live or are. And also this idea that the nurse, the cleaning person, the gardener have their say, their part in the care function, or the cure function. One of the principles that is important, is that the patients are actively relating to their cure; so they participate in their cure. This idea that the people working inside the institution are active [means] to give them the agency, the power to act and not to be told what to do, how to do it, and so on and so forth. But you think that the institution is done by the people who are in it. Also basic stuff, right?

For me, it was one night [when] I realized that the way the cultural institutions, the museum, how they were affected by the change in politics, the push that they should raise more private funding, save public funding, the pressure of quantification, numbers,

figures, and how [they were] told there was no alternative, you have to learn that, you have to raise more money, you have to attract [a bigger] audience, you have to be nice with the nationalists, and—whatever. But there must be an alternative! And so, don't ask me why, I said, okay, we are under attack, I mean symbolically, or not symbolically for some people, how can we think [about] that? And I thought, but during the war, those people [Tosquelles and his colleagues, author's note] were able to imagine something else. So, it's not that I can apply institutional psychotherapy directly to the school, but it can affect me. And the way I can act as director.

Guattari said, when someone asked him, "What do you bring to people?," and he said that it's not so much about what we bring, but the fact that we try to be as less toxic as possible, that we are not reproducing the alienation that is outside in the world. Because this is what also we asked, and the patients can also ask for. There is not someone who tells you how to behave, and what to do. It is the self-consciousness of the institution at work. That is something that it is important for me, the tool of [asking], what are we doing and how do we do that?"

### **Feminism**

"Feminism for me [started] when I became a cyberfeminist and feminist in 1997, and I can tell you the exact day [...] It was at this seminar on Marxist feminist analysis of cinema. It was like your eyes are opening, you're not blind to the system anymore. It's really about the condition of who, whom, in which condition, and what for. And, so to be careful of how the systemic machine is working; and so for me, it's totally connected and embedded, to be careful, full of care, about who and how; the words presentation, identity [...] and feminism becoming more complex, means this idea of questioning authority, hierarchy, nature, the system, the power structure [...] Feminism, for me, was really a tool, and it has been a reading companion. So, it's just one of my tools. Maybe I'm becoming more complex, and my tools are numerous, but in a way they are all the same, about deconstructing [...]"

"I believe that how the structure works will affect the art that is produced and the artists who are out in the world. They don't have to produce art, but as citizens, as human beings in relation to the world, the way the school works will affect, transform, or sustain them somehow. Some of the students, now, are working collectively, [and the question is] how does it affect the grades, or the forms, and what can we bring to them so they are conscious about their choices in terms of form of production and so on. I mean, it's amazing what they

have. Donna Haraway is like normal stuff for them, or queer, gay, or trans; there are trans people [...] Paul Gilroy came [...] I mean, they have access and can decide for themselves, [they have] the choice; this knowledge about the condition of production and distribution [...] And this is why I'm interested in art, but it's really the possibility of hybrid workspaces. Where in the world can I say that I'm working from feminism, free software, institutional therapy—and science fiction—and be the director of an institution? I mean, this kind of possibility of hybridity, for me, is the privilege of what could be called art. If I imagine I would be somewhere else, I would not be a director of anything [...].”

practice, and theory. She was co-founder of the collectives women-and-technology, - Innen and old boys network, and is currently a research associate at the University of the Arts in Zürich for the project “Creating Commons.” Her recent book, *Die schönen Kriegerinnen. Technofeministische Praxis im 21. Jahrhundert*, was published in August 2018 with transversal texts, Vienna. For more information, visit: [artwarez.org](http://artwarez.org).

Both the interview with Laurence Rassel, “Experimenting with Institutional Formats,” as well as her talk “Rethinking the Art School” are available online on the Creating Commons website: [creatingcommons.zhdk.ch](http://creatingcommons.zhdk.ch)

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## Notes

- 1 [www.erg.be](http://www.erg.be)
- 2 The relevance of these three concepts will be explained by Rassel in the interview excerpts below.
- 3 Creating Commons is funded by the SNF (Swiss National Fund) and based at the Institute for Contemporary Art Research (IFCAR), Zurich University of the Arts (ZHDK); co-researchers are Felix Stalder und Shusha Niederberger, <http://creatingcommons.zhdk.ch>.
- 4 Massimo De Angelis, “Economy, Capital and the Commons,” in *Art, Production and the Subject in the Twenty-first Century*, Angela Dimitrakaki, and Kirsten Lloyd, eds. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 201.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 211.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Laurence Rassel, “Rethinking the Art School. Institution, instituted, instituting, common, commoning,” lecture abstract, available online at: <http://creatingcommons.zhdk.ch/?p=429>.
- 8 The interview was conducted by Cornelia Sollfrank and is available in full length online: <https://vimeo.com/275522913>
- 9 <http://constantvzw.org/>

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**Cornelia Sollfrank** (PhD) is an artist, researcher, and university lecturer living in Berlin. Recurring subjects in her artistic and academic work in and about digital cultures are artistic infrastructures, new forms of (political) self-organization, authorship and intellectual property, techno-feminist

# Emphasizing the “Co”-Factor: Practicing, Teaching, and Learning the (Fine) Arts Outside the Curricula

## Annemarie Bucher

Since the 1970s, we have been witnessing globalization as a rapidly growing worldwide interlinking of economic, social, cultural, ecological, financial, and political activities. These ongoing processes have had and still have an enormous impact on life in general and on its subdomains, such as communication and knowledge production, in particular—and on the arts. Various forms, styles, and conceptions of art are now appearing at the same time, just as protagonists from the arts are exchanging ideas and experiences across the world. To cut a long story short, we are facing manifold ways in which art is understood, discussed, and practiced.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, art education is not immune to these large-scale transformations.

### Shifting Art Curricula in the Course of Globalization

Art curricula and education programs are currently undergoing a fundamental shift, one that raises questions about how art should or can be taught.<sup>2</sup> In Switzerland, these questions became evident with the implementation of academic degrees in the arts. The institutional history of Zurich University of the Arts<sup>3</sup> illustrates how curricular reorganizations went hand in hand with institutions being renamed, or breaking away (e.g., when the F+F School became a private art and design school in 1971), or merging (e.g., when Zurich and Winterthur schools of music, theater, art, and design were united under one roof in 2007).

In the course of globalization, new functions of art, new roles of artists, and new art strategies have been promoted and have become effective. They include a growing interest in social transformation processes and in civic empowerment. Individual artists, art collectives, and art networks across the world are increasingly fostering direct relationships and involvement with their surroundings (living environments). As such, they play an active part in ongoing political, social, and cultural change processes. To describe this extension of artistic practice, Dominique Lämmli has introduced the terms “Art in Action”<sup>4</sup> and “artists working reality.”<sup>5</sup> Obviously, these developments affect art schools and how the arts are taught. They challenge prevailing habits and open up new perspectives, as various roadmaps and position papers on art education suggest.<sup>6</sup>

The current precarious state of artist training is rooted to some extent in the Western tradition. The idea of autonomous art, which has long implicitly shaped art education in Western Europe, has been questioned from various viewpoints. This concept reflected the dramatic changes in the production structure of the arts after the French Revolution, when artists received fewer commissions from the nobility and a broader, dispersed market evolved instead. Ultimately, the notion of autonomy heightened the artist’s exclusive position in society as a genius, bohemian, or critical mind.

Increasing globalization meant that the concept of autonomous art not only received worldwide acclaim, but also revealed certain limitations. Comparing different art



traditions reveals that the rise of autonomous art did not initiate an ontological turn, i.e., a total disengagement of the arts from all obligations. Rather, the concept of autonomy masked the artist’s dependency on a free art market. Thus, it concealed and absorbed other entanglements of art, and its functions in the public, social, and political realm. Hence, it is far from certain that the artist’s dependency on a corresponding art market is the only option for the future.

These multiple perspectives, merely hinted at above, point to the particular challenges of teaching and learning the fine arts today. To find a reasonable answer, it is essential to consider art education in terms of globalization, diverse traditions, institutional histories, teachers’ profiles and roles, and students’ demands.

### **The Affirmative Impact of Tradition**

Traditions undoubtedly impact the present. Thus, a brief survey of the history of Western European artist training brings to light predominant concepts of passing on knowledge and experience about art. This history involved various seminal turns. For instance, ancient and medieval art workshops emphasized hands on-training and thus relied strongly on collaboration and “corporate” identities. In contrast, classical art academies of the eighteenth century referred to theories, principles, and canons. They also upheld the axiom of uniqueness. This was based largely on the artist’s academic stance and his or her claim to distinguished individual authorship. Later, twentieth-century modernist art schools based their training on crafts, technical skills, and abstraction—beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. These art schools had emerged from late-nineteenth-century ambitions to reunite the liberal arts and applied arts and manufacturing, and to reform art and design education. Artists were converted into the avant-garde of a new modern lifestyle.

These reformatory endeavors brought forth several new schools of art and applied art in Europe, and it was from one such school that Walter Gropius founded the Bauhaus. Together with his “comrades-in-arms and arts,” Gropius called for an educational structure in which all artistic disciplines and media would contribute to a modern society and lifestyle. Surprisingly, in the face of frantic modernization, he suggested returning to attitudes toward art and crafts once characteristic of the medieval age, i.e., before art and manufacturing drifted far apart.

The modernist concept of teaching and learning spread worldwide and developed even further. The example of Black Mountain College<sup>7</sup> illustrates how standard educational norms were replaced by a new experiential concept in the second half of the twentieth century. Founded in 1933 in rural North Carolina as a private alternative to traditional higher education institutions, the College followed the pedagogical and democratic ideas of John Dewey. Pragmatist and experiential perspectives dominated its teaching and learning both in theory and in practice. The goal was to educate autonomous individuals, not categorical individualists. The College clearly opposed traditional norms of higher education and therefore attracted some distinctive faculty and students.<sup>8</sup> Its innovative methods can be described as integral learning, co-learning, and co-teaching among teachers and students. Another formative moment was the community: students and teachers lived together on campus and had to find ways to organize their lives. No wonder that cooking and gardening were important activities and may well have contributed (implicitly) to expanding the traditional concept of art to basic life skills such as gardening or cooking. The campus was also said to be a community of (racial) diversity given the decision to admit black students. Its innovative teaching and learning structures helped this small liberal arts

college to gain an impressive reputation. After its closure in 1956–57, it became a sort of myth, one that influenced and still shapes educational discourse at art schools worldwide. Its ideas and visions were doubtless revolutionary in its day. But can Black Mountain College still serve as an adequate role model for artist training today?

### **Departure Toward Collaborative and Active Formats**

In our daily routine, we mostly think of (art) education within the existing institutional framework (curricula and departments, courses and subjects, credits and examinations). Yet, besides considering administrative contexts, we urgently need to discuss how to make sense of teaching and learning art and how to link art education to contemporary real life.

As I mentioned, globalization has brought forth new functions of art, new roles of artists, and new art strategies. These include a growing interest in social, political, and environmental issues, as well as in civic empowerment and transformation processes.<sup>9</sup> Individual artists, art collectives, and art networks are increasingly engaging more directly with their surroundings, and thus play an active role in ongoing political, social, and cultural transformation processes. This obviously impacts art schools and artist training.

In the face of these challenges, I would like to put forward two basic claims for discussion. First, art—including the classical triangle of artist, artwork, and recipient—implies agency. This term refers first to the philosopher John Dewey<sup>10</sup> and his understanding of art as an active process for engaging with the real world, and second to the anthropologist Alfred Gell<sup>11</sup> and his concept of the art nexus, of art being embedded in a wider social and cultural context. A second seminal claim concerns the policy/attitude of “cross” and “trans,” which points to transdisciplinarity and transculturality. Transdisciplinarity has become a basic configuration in research and transculturality has become a prerequisite in the wake of globalization. How to integrate these crossover moments into an existing art curriculum?

### **Hands-on Experiences and Action Teaching**

On the one hand, the search for new modes of teaching and learning enters theoretical debates,<sup>12</sup> which are often divorced from reality. On the other, it leads into the field of practical experiences, where outcomes count most. How to tie teaching and learning closer to real life?

Amid constantly shifting ideas and realities, I recognized the benefit of establishing an alternative to existing institutional forms. In 2009, artist and philosopher Dominique Lämmler and I founded FOA-FLUX, also to bring our previously separate (yet related) projects under one roof.<sup>13</sup> This independent research venture enabled us to operate and network flexibly in transdisciplinary and transcultural contexts, moreover beyond institutional logics. FOA-FLUX meant (and still means) that prescribed concepts do not interfere with constantly changing realities. Instead, the open modes of collaboration made it possible to create powerful teams able to engage in innovative knowledge production and to produce unexpected results. The FOA-FLUX approach has helped us to develop new modes of collaboration, not only for art practice but also for teaching and learning. It has meanwhile become an essential archive and resource for constantly reassessing art practice, research, and teaching in global and local contexts. It promotes and provides a home for an alternative mental infrastructure aimed at empowering collaborative knowledge production, teaching, and learning.

### Outside the Curriculum: Rethinking Contemporary and Traditional Art along the Bhutan-Switzerland Axis

In 2010, FOA-FLUX and Choki Traditional Art School (Thimphu/Bhutan) initiated an exchange project that is ongoing (with occasional breaks and depending on funding).<sup>14</sup> Choki Traditional Art School (CTAS)<sup>15</sup> is a private educational institution. It offers training in selected traditional Bhutanese arts to disadvantaged and underprivileged Bhutanese youth. Besides enabling students to find employment and become self-sustainable, CTAS preserves and promotes the country’s traditional arts.

Collaboration between FOA-FLUX and Choki Traditional art School (CTAS) is rooted deeply in the uncovering and reshaping of the arts and art contexts paradigmatic of globalization. Its foundation was laid when the directors of FOA-FLUX and CTAS met in Zurich for the first time and suddenly discovered their shared awareness that particular art practices and art education were intimately entwined with local cultures, traditions, and economies.



Workshop on Contemporary Art at Choki Traditional Art School in Thimphu, 2013. Photograph: © FOA-FLUX



Joint Production of Artist’s Books at Steindruckerei Wolfensberger/Switzerland 2015. Photograph: © FOA-FLUX

The project aims to rethink the functions, categories, and practices of art across cultures and in awareness of postcolonial and other contexts. It involves the comparative investigation of an art education that is dedicated to exploring and teaching contemporary European and Bhutanese-Buddhist art traditions. But how to deal with a multitude of coexisting and even competing art notions and practices as well as with varying educational modes and expected language problems? We decided to move directly into collaborative practice and co-designed and co-organized a first workshop in Bhutan. We operated with a very low budget and private funding. From the outset, dialogue and negotiation were pivotal.

The complex exchange process involved constantly rethinking positions, renegotiating interests, and using media suited to making this process visible. The outcome was a jointly produced mural in Bhutan in 2013 and two artist books in Switzerland two years later. The collective wall painting on the CTAS campus resulted from exchanging art concepts and teaching modes, from joint action, and from rolling wave planning. It revealed amazing novel formal and discursive qualities. Today, the mural marks a visible milestone in this project. Crucially, it extends far beyond the mere conception and production of a physical artwork and functions as a tool for negotiating and exchanging knowledge and visions across conceptual, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. It is truly “trans.”

The two collaboratively produced artist books—*LUCKY SIGNS* and *4FRIENDS*<sup>16</sup>—bear witness to in-depth collaboration in the arts. They reveal the rapprochement between and coexistence of diverse notions and traditions of art in one and the same object.

Over time, this exchange project has slowly evolved into a stream of interrelated agreements, events, and productions undertaken jointly in various places at different times. It uses art to produce knowledge symmetrically for collective benefit. Neither CTAS nor FOA-FLUX was interested in rubber-stamping existing and imaginary dichotomies, such as “we and the others” or “contemporaneity and tradition.”

**reallabs.university: Global Networking and Local Knowledge Production**

reallabs.university<sup>17</sup> is an open global educational endeavor organized by practitioners and researchers from around the world. It fosters joint learning, joint problem-solving, sustainable development goals, and using the arts as a creative tool. The idea for reallabs.university was seeded by FOA-FLUX and further developed at a kitchen table



Co-creation of a mural on the campus of Choki Traditional Art School, Thimphu. 2013. Photograph: © FOA-FLUX



Joint Production of Artist’s Books at Atelier Dominique Lämmlli/Switzerland 2015. Photograph: © FOA-FLUX



Mural on the campus of Choki Traditional Art School, Thimphu. 2013. Photograph: © FOA-FLUX

meeting in Zurich by members of Wooferten,<sup>18</sup> Jatiwangi Art Factory,<sup>19</sup> and FOA-FLUX. Its current shape is based on the advice and feedback of many associates. Instead of referring exclusively to the Western idea of a university as an independent and mostly elitist educational institution, reallabs.university expands its basic principles to *persaudaraan*, *zämehalt*, and *kwai fong*, i.e., concepts highlighting the intrinsic value of close, loyal, and dedicated friendship. Inspired by Barefoot College and similar grassroots movements, and also by the pedagogy of the oppressed of Paulo Freire,<sup>20</sup> reallabs.university advocates a bottom-up approach to gaining knowledge. It provides action learning and practice-based research on local real-life problem situations. In this way, the arts function as a pivotal creative tool for driving knowledge production and empowerment processes from the ground up.

A first series of workshops (on cultural landscape development, land use, collaborative community-organized agriculture) took place in 2017 at Jatiwangi Art Factory in West Java, Indonesia. Topics were developed from within concrete problem situations, and the arts functioned as tools for collaborative problem-solving and research. All in all, reallabs.university promotes alternative action education in the arts, with the aim of boosting context-sensitive and problem-oriented socially and environmentally sustainable (art) production.

### **Within the Curriculum: Collabora©tion Luzern**

In the 2017 and 2018 summer semesters, FOA-FLUX was invited to teach a compact module<sup>21</sup> at Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (LUASA). The module involved students from different departments working on a specific topic for eight weeks. The first module focused on public interaction and the school's spatial environment, the second explored food waste. To avoid a consumerist, fully planned program, we initiated an open collaborative process instead. This embeds learning in experience. After a short introduction to our methods, we invited students to co-develop module contents, a timeframe, and a structure. We held preparatory meetings and facilitated pragmatic modes of exchanging and sharing knowledge and material resources. Both courses were extremely productive, with tangible and performative results such as zines, artist books, stickers, a temporary poster exhibition in public space, cooking performances, walks, bin-diving, a final exhibition, and more.

This teaching format first required ample negotiation and time to grow a productive atmosphere and instill team responsibility. Second, it challenged the concept of evaluation otherwise prevailing at LUASA. The open working process, collective authorship, and permanent collateral reflection exceeded ordinary assessment. And yet, it provided a unique opportunity to share knowledge, experience, responsibilities, and materials, and to create a genuine sense of collaborative authorship.

Our mission at FOA-FLUX is to work together with artists and artist groups across cultural and linguistic boundaries in order to support the diversity of artistic engagement with realities and to empower art to achieve change. The “Co-factor” is the main driving force behind our efforts. All our projects and collaborations have revealed that going into practice together creates inclusive environments, ones that allow different perspectives and positions to enter into dialogue. But is it art? This perpetual question, we argue, matters less and less. The diversity of art production and reception has not only increased but also invalidated universal evaluation criteria.<sup>23</sup> The essentialist question “What is art?” is replaced by a functionalist one: “Does it work?” Or: “Does art change things?”



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**Notes**

- 1** Hans Belting, Andrea Buddensieg, and Peter Weibel, eds., *The Global Contemporary and the Rise of New Art Worlds* (Cambridge, MA: ZKM/MIT Press, 2013); James Elkins, Zhivka Valiavisharska, and Alice Kim, eds., *Art and Globalization* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010); Jonathan Harris, ed., *Globalization and Contemporary Art* (Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Dominique Lämmli, *Art in Action: Make People Think! Reflections on Current Developments in Art* (Zurich: FOA-FLUX, 2014).
- 2** James Elkins, *Why Art Cannot be Taught, A Handbook for Students* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press: 2001); Steven Henry Madoff, *Art School: Propositions for the 21st Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009).
- 3** Hans-Peter Schwarz, ed., *ZHdK. Den Künsten eine Zukunft. Publikation zur Gründung der Zürcher Hochschule der Künste* (Zurich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2007).
- 4** Lämmli, *Art in Action*.
- 5** Ibid., *Artists Working Reality: Connecting People* (Zurich: FOA-FLUX, Zurich). See also Dominique Lämmli, “Globalisiertheit der Kunstproduktion und die Rolle künstlerischer Forschung,” in Jens Badura et. al, eds., *Künstlerische Forschung – Ein Handbuch* (Berlin/Zurich: diaphanes, 2015); Dominique Lämmli, “Artists Working Reality: Towards the Capability Approach, a Means of Evaluating Art in Action,” in *Hong Kong Visual Arts Yearbook 2016* (Hong Kong: Department of Fine Arts and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2017); Dominique Lämmli, “Collaborative and performative painting: A tool for joint learning and research,” in Donatella Bernardi, ed., *Art & Crisis* (Zurich: Zurich University of the Arts and JRP | Ringier, 2018).
- 6** UNESCO, *Road Map for Arts Education, Building Creative Capacities for the 21st Century*, The World Conference on Arts Education: Lisbon 2006; UNESCO, *The Seoul Agenda: Goals for the Development of Arts Education*, The Second World Conference on Arts Education, Seoul 2010; ZHdK Institute for Art Education (IAE), “Another Roadmap for Arts Education/ Another Roadmap School, International Network” (<https://colivre.net/another-roadmap>; <https://www.zhdk.ch/forschungsprojekt/426616>, accessed August 30, 2018).
- 7** Eva Diaz, *The Experimenters: Chance and Design at Black Mountain College* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).
- 8** These included above all the contributions of Joseph Albers, a Bauhaus master and one of the many German immigrants in the US after 1933. At the Bauhaus, he had developed a new pedagogy of art that he was able to continue at Black Mountain College until 1947. He introduced many fruitful elements from the European avant-garde such as self-organization, interaction (of color), an appreciation for of artisanry, etc. Another, though more eccentric, key figure was Buckminster Fuller, who tried to create a better world through technology. Many of his inventions were ultimately flops, but others such as the geodesic dome can still be found around the world.
- 9** Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012); Tom Finkelpearl, *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Annemarie Bucher, “Co-art: Remarks on Collaboration, Community Building, and Addressing the Public in Contemporary Art Projects” (Zurich: FOA-FLUX, 2014), [foa-flux.net/texts/](http://foa-flux.net/texts/), accessed August 30, 2018.
- 10** John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: Norton, 1934).
- 11** Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- 12** See, for instance, the collection of essays: Pascal Gielen and Paul de Bruyne, eds., *Teaching Art in the Neoliberal Realm. Realism versus Cynicism* (Amsterdam: Valiz antennae, 2013).



Field trip during the workshop on cultural landscapes at Jatiwangi art Factory, West Java, 2017. Photograph: © FOA-FLUX



Having lunch together. Workshop on cultural landscapes at Jatiwangi art Factory, West Java, 2017. Photograph: © FOA-FLUX



Final exhibition of the IDA modul Collabora@tion LU, 2016, Hochschule Luzern. Photograph: © FOA-FLUX



Up-cycling materials and implementing ideas, working situation during IDA modul Collabora@tion LU, 2017, Hochschule Luzern. Photograph: © FOA-FLUX



Workshop on cultural landscapes at Jatiwangi art Factory, West Java, 2017. Photograph: © FOA-FLUX

**13** See [foa-flux.net](http://foa-flux.net). (accessed August 30, 2018). Both founders have transdisciplinary backgrounds, including art practice, art history, curating, philosophy, cultural studies/anthropology, landscape history, pedagogy, and didactics.

**14** <http://foa-flux.net/contemporary-and-traditional-art/>, accessed August 30, 2018.

Collaboration also involved other institutional partners, e.g., National Institute for Zorig Chusum (NIZC) in Thimphu, Zurich University of the Arts (ZhdK), and Schule für Holzbildhauerei in Brienz. See further Annemarie Bucher, Sonam Choki, and Dominique Lämmli, “Tigers and splashes: An action-oriented exchange on art and education between Bhutan and Switzerland,” in Arnd Schneider, ed., *Alternative Art and Anthropology: Global Encounters* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 163–181.

**15** See <https://www.chokischool.com>, accessed August 30, 2018.

**16** In 2015, we co-produced two artist’s books: *LUCKY SIGNS* and *4FRIENDS*. Both included paintings, collages, digital- and hand prints, and lithographic works.

**17** See [reallabs.university](http://reallabs.university), accessed August 30, 2018.

**18** Woofert Ten was an independent art space and a community building operation in Yau Ma Tei/Hong Kong. It has become a core part of the community’s habitat via contemporary art. <http://wooferten.blogspot.com>, accessed August 30, 2018.

**19** Jatiwangi art Factory (JaF) is a nonprofit organization in West Java/Indonesia that focuses on discourses of local rural life through arts and cultural activities, such as festivals and exchanges. <http://jatiwangiartfactory.tumblr.com>, accessed August 30, 2018.

**20** In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), Freire criticizes the “banking” approach to education—meaning that students are considered empty bank accounts that should remain open to deposits made by the teacher. Instead he advocates collaborative knowledge production and teaching.

**21** IDA-Module collabora@tion.

**22** <http://artandsociety.net>, accessed August 30, 2018, and [zhdk.ch/art-and-society](http://zhdk.ch/art-and-society), accessed August 30, 2018.

**23** As Nina Felshin’s book with the same title already revealed twenty years ago; see her work *But is it Art?: The Spirit of Art as Activism* (Seattle: Bay Press: 1995).

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Final exhibition of the IDA modul Collabora©tion LU, 2017, Hochschule Luzern. Photograph: © FOA-FLUX

# Ambiguous Dramaturgies and Crude Curation

## Jochen Kiefer

I would like to present some thoughts on how curators and dramaturgy can be linked—combined with a few hints on what this relationship has to do with the hybrid artistic, mediating, researching, performative, exhibiting, and documenting fields of presentation in *Revisiting Black Mountain*.

Although curating has long been understandable as artistic work, it is striking that it mostly refers and limits itself to contextualization, superordinate narratives, theoretical discourses, and forms of knowledge transfer. It is obvious that this is of great importance at a university. At the same time, however, against the background of an art school, the question arises as to what, in addition to presenting artistic discussions on the subject, of the artistic could also exist in curating?

At first, the philosophical significance of the *ready-made* seems to me to be central to how curation can be understood as art. Because the *ready-made* shows that contemporary art is characterized above all by the change of habitual perceptions. Thus, for what constitutes contemporary art, the aesthetic experience is central, but also—and this seems to me to be easily overlooked—a new hermeticism of the object as a constantly differently chargeable, yet ultimately inescapable and enigmatic, thing. With a view to the visual arts, a first art of curating could therefore be described as an institutional sovereignty of interpretation mediated by curators, which knows how to create an aesthetic experience in the staging of spatial relationships.

Since *Revisiting Black Mountain* was not only about contextualizing and relating forms of teaching and learning, but essentially about their transformation and reflection in and as an artistic process, and not about objects, but about the performativity of modes of perception of the institution, the curation also had to become processual, remain unfinished in a productive way, and above all learn to understand itself as ignorant in the field of different arts and disciplines.

### **Crude Curation – The Productivity of Ignorance**

Curating initially combines the contextualizing and discursive perspective on aesthetic phenomena with dramaturgy. But a dramaturgy that becomes effective in and as art acts in the midst of events, in the midst of the field of tension between social processes; moreover, it is communicatively involved in elaboration processes without which no aesthetic experience would arise at all. It has therefore learned, despite the observational perspective, to become effective as part of collecting processes that are self-dynamic and larger than themselves. And it has learned not to simply apply the knowledge that is available, but to repeatedly put it to the test of its performativity. Working at the theatre is therefore never the work on and with the *ready-made*. It's always unfinished per se. And as art, always crude art. Often broken by the raw, the repetition, the sweat of the bodies, the dialogue of knowledge, the resistance of the actors—their feelings, interests, intentions, whether private, played, shown, affected, or forced.

The work of dramaturgy in rehearsal and production processes is therefore more related to intervention than to the accompanying letter, more to the provocation of discourses than to the transfer of knowledge, more to the defense of the singular than to the understanding of the superior, more to the negotiation of what could be the case than to the rhetoric of legitimation. Dramaturgy is a test of reality and not a proclamation of realism.

To make all this productive needs more than curation in the aforementioned contextualizing and mediating senses in order to become an artistic process.

However, the forms of directing theatre, which in the tradition of the historical avant-garde have long guaranteed the art of the theatre, can no longer be reconciled with the demands of contemporary art, whether in state theatres or in museums at work. The processual openness and participativity announced here sound too easy from the mouth of too many directors like legitimacy strategies or well-intentioned marketing phrases.

If we regard the curation of contemporary art itself as an artistic process, then it becomes the sovereignty of interpretation; it must transcend the secure position of contextualization, knowledge, and criticism. In this transgression, it becomes dramatic when, quite in contrast to the common image of dramaturgy, it endures being inside and outside discourses. When it is prepared to deal with the open and the unfinished and to aim at the unpredictable, the ambivalent, and the ambiguous.

Maybe that's why it's better to apply dramaturgy to the arts than curating to the theatre at the moment.

### **Ambiguous Dramaturgies – The Productivity of Curation**

In *Revisiting Black Mountain*, we saw what we presented as traces of an art academy's artistic engagement with itself. In this respect, curation could also be understood as conceptual art, as an attempt to materialize the questions about the self-image of art schools as traces of the examination of these discourses. However, since the materials are always also related to the actors themselves, they were embedded in the performativity of the institution and repeatedly questioned the relationship to the institution. The art school thus became a place of self-observation for the society that populated it; it became a theatre on a temporary basis, a *black box* in which the performances, wishes, and utopias of the development of the arts and design took place.

What the theatre was able to learn from contemporary art refers less to the intersections with the visual arts (to the opening of the work to aesthetic experience, to the processual and the performative), but to a further central reference point of contemporary art—namely, to understand art as work on and it itself as institutional critique.

With regard to the theatre, it became particularly clear how dramaturgy could be understood as contemporary art. For the work on the institutionalization of theatre against the background of aesthetic questions and the work on participativity was not only the starting point of dramaturgical thinking in the Enlightenment, but it also concerns the current central fields of action and practices. Through the mediation of contemporary art and its curation, a dramaturgy understood in this way ties directly to the discourses of its origin and returns to the tradition of its practices at the theatre. Who could and should oppose the claims to unification of the world, the claims to sovereignty of interpretation, if not those who are at the same time part of the



production processes and part of their criticism, who are at the same time inside and outside the discourse of the theatres?

Participation in the dramaturgical sense therefore means not only an opening to the outside—it is not a format of mediation—but an opening to the inside, meaning the test of the reality of discourses in and for one's own work processes. The dramaturgical production of the public is not a membrane, not a diffusion of content, but first and foremost it means questioning the conditions of the possibility of an art of the present as an open process of transgressing actuality, appropriation, and meaning. It takes a dramaturgical art of mental undermining, of reversing and questioning values, of making contradictions and conflicts productive. And it needs the defense of pluralization and simultaneity, the defense of ambiguity and a sense of ambiguity.

### **At the End of Inter-Disciplining**

Curation, which has immigrated not only to the theatre but to all areas of art and life, is almost always associated with interdisciplinarity because of its potential to transcend borders. To what extent, however, the proclaimed interdisciplinarity accommodates the claim of opening up thinking, the potentiation of aesthetic experience, and the dramaturgical sense of ambiguity seems to me questionable. Because discipline has to do with rules, regulations, or laws and would be a bad advisor for artistic processes in their normativity. Or discipline means different scientific disciplines, which upon reflection and definition of their epistemology brings insights to the term. In my view, however, aesthetic experience is less about types of knowledge than about pointing out and making perceptible the potentials of knowledge and recognition. The problem with regard to the idea of interdisciplinarity in the arts is that arts and design, at least in the narrower sense, are not disciplines at all. And if by disciplines, one means specific techniques and procedures, crafts and languages, then one should actually try (rather metaphorically interesting) inter-techniques, inter-procedures, or inter-languages.

From the perspective of institutional critique, interdisciplinarity seems problematic above all when it makes the diversity of the arts the scene of commonplaces of aesthetic discourse. Interdisciplinarity thus becomes an *inter-disciplining*, the current form of social disciplining of the arts by the institutions.

In the discussion with Black Mountain College, it became increasingly clear that the focus here was not on plays of forms of interdisciplinarity, but rather on concrete social questions and problems as well as the self-evident multiplicity of the arts and scientific disciplines, wherein a dynamic, processual, and cooperative context emerged.

It is therefore not only true for theatre that curating becomes art if it is supported by real social relevance and is in a position not only to assert processual openness and participativity, but also to make it productive as institutional critique. In transgressing the discourses of interdisciplinarity, the plurality of the arts opens up to a processuality that understands her otherness as fields of gravity and forces of attraction.

If this is the case, not only the way of theatre and dramaturgy into contemporary fine arts is free, but also the incursion of curation into the theatre.

**Jochen Kiefer** is Head of the BA Dramaturgie at the Department of Performing Arts and Film and Professor for dramaturgy and Head of the practical field dramaturgy in BA & MA at the ZHdK.

# Utopian Forms of Communication

## Mieke (Annemarie) Matzke, She She Pop

**Dorothee Richter:** Inspired by Black Mountain College, we're interested in what cross-genre teaching, experimental teaching, and art/theater could be today. You, yourself, studied theater in Giessen, and now you are a professor. What do you think are the criteria for exciting and stimulating teaching that enable students to go their own way?

**Mieke (Annemarie) Matzke:** To start from a lack of knowledge, not knowing exactly where the students should go, and at the same time to create a framework in which this search can take place. This means, on the one hand, an openness in which they can develop their own practice, and on the other hand, a reduction at the beginning of their studies, so that a reduction can be created through this framework. And for me in my own studies, it was very important to be confronted with very different personalities, with very different aesthetics, that there was not only one perspective. In Giessen, we had very different guest professors, for example, a sound artist who worked with Robert Wilson or Barbara Mundel who, as a director and dramaturge, staged Baroque tragedies with us—in other words, different objects and procedures. I try something similar in Hildesheim, too, which means giving the students different approaches to different working methods and aesthetics. In the concrete act of teaching, it is very important for me to work in co-teaching, so that there are always two positions, and so that it becomes clear that in feedback my voice is only one possible voice.

They need to take a step forward in their development so that they can find out how they want to work. This means a double movement: it's about working on a project, about directing a production, and at the same time it's about developing one's own way of working.

**DR:** To create, so to speak, a space of possibilities?

**MM:** That's a very broad term. My experience is that space first needs a setting, a setting also by me as a teacher. This can either be a thematic setting or a formal setting. In one semester, for example, we offered "Dramaturgies of the End" as a final module. We then analyzed the staging with regard to its ends, read philosophical texts on the subject of the end, dealt with

Beckett's "endgame," but within this setting they are completely free to develop their own project ideas. The setting serves as a kind of heading; what forms they seek, how they work together, that remains open. It begins with this input, then they develop their own project ideas for a project that is then performed. It is also important that they see and criticize each other's work. In a final step, we analyze the process as a result of this scenic research: how could we formulate models for a dramaturgy of the end, what models have we found, and what does this have to do with our own working practice?

When I think about myself as a teacher in these forms, then I act on two levels: there is me as a teacher in a concrete project, and I also see myself as a teacher in an entire course of studies. I believe in the productivity of spaces; it is necessary to make spaces available for production. The students have the opportunity to acquire them, to work very independently, in which they are provided with spaces—spaces in which they can go and make projects. In addition, the course of studies as such is always reflected with the students. So, I always act on two levels; as a lecturer within the program, I also think about whom I invite. This can also be someone whose work and aesthetics are very different from mine, also to make it clear that it's not about teaching a certain way of working here, but about trying oneself out. In a regular semester, students have a seminar that is coupled with a practical exercise. If, for example, I do a seminar on spatial theory, then perhaps I have a practice part at the same time in which we develop installations, that is, one can then compare these spatial theories in a very concrete way: what do I gain from these spatial theories for the realization, and also how can I generate an understanding from my own practice for these spatial theories, and at the same time how can I also think differently about spaces with the background of these spatial theories?

Then there is the project semester, which for one semester suspends all times and rooms, in which the students from the various study programs and main subjects work together with the lecturers on a project three days a week. These projects then end in a presentation. The special thing about this is that an

entire department of 500 students work together on a single topic. Two years ago, it was the topic “Suspend,” and in 2018 it was “1968.” Within this thematic setting, very different projects can be offered that involve interdisciplinary working methods.

**DR:** How do you imagine the result in concrete terms?

**MM:** Under the umbrella “1968,” for example, there was a group that dealt with the women’s general assembly (“Frauenvolksversammlung”) at the theater in Bremen, which dealt with collective structures in theater. This legendary production was discontinued after only one performance. The group went to the archives, conducted interviews on this performance, and then there were excursions and re-enactments of events. At the same time, a production in its own right was developed, which also addressed today’s questions of cooperation at the theater.

For us, it is important that all projects take place in one location. Then a different productivity can be experienced, the projects invite each other, an exhibition is created at the same time and a film is made. There’s always the thematic bracket and the three days a week when people work together.

**DR:** And then how is this shown?

**MM:** Then it’s a kind of festival.

**DR:** I found it amusing, as you described in the publication *Das Buch von der Angewandten Theaterwissenschaft* about studying in Giessen, the two approaches to art practice and theory as two real architectural entrances. Generally speaking, at the moment there is a certain rollback at universities so as to reduce theory. How does the Giessen Model differ from the Hildesheim Model?

**MM:** In my time, theory and practice were not related to each other in the Giessen Model. There were theoretical seminars, and there were guest professors who came and did a project. When I studied, there was no permanent artistic professorship; that has changed with Heiner Goebbels and Xavier Le Roy now. When I studied, there were artists who came from outside, and there was no connection to theory.

In Hildesheim, one already notices in my person and in others, the connection between theory and practice; one realizes that both fields are strongly related to each



Students' project: *mimeesism*, screenshot

other. Ideally, the idea is to couple a seminar directly with an artistic exercise. In the best case, the seminar will then give rise to questions that will then be examined in practice, just as a certain interest in theory will emerge from practice. New questions will be raised by this connection: How can I describe what I am doing here as an artist in a different way, and how can I theorize it? The idea is to develop questions in artistic practice as well as in scientific practice—from the respective other perspective.

This is something I know very well from my own biography. For example, I developed the topic for my doctoral thesis from my own practice, from work on stage. The dissertation deals with forms of self-staging. What kind of form is that when I work on stage with my biography and at the same time design a theatrical figure, how can I grasp it theoretically? These were questions I could not answer in practice. In the same way, however, certain questions for practice can also arise from theory. There are certain questions that theater studies don't ask at all because they don't know practice that well, and therefore a different awareness of the theory of practice is at stake. Each practice also

implicitly develops models of a practice, and you can think about these again differently with theory.

Gießen is a pure theater studies program. Dance also plays a major role. In Hildesheim, we have all the arts, the students always have a main subject and a minor subject, and we therefore always have an interdisciplinary approach. The students come from a music practice, an art practice, or a video practice. In the best case, this also has a productive influence on the work in the theater. It was developed in the tradition of the Bauhaus or Black Mountain College. In the past, this was understood as poly-aesthetic education in Hildesheim, in the late '70s and early '80s.

**DR:** What I found very interesting in the publication is the idea of “a university under observation.”

**MM:** It's always about questioning one's own institution. There was a teaching assignment from a sociologist where she wanted to make an ethnography into a theater in Hanover. In order to try out forms of ethnographic research with the students, however, they first began to research their own department with certain ethnographic procedures. In the process, seminars were



Project semester, Photo: Andreas Hartmann



developed in which the students could direct themselves, in which they researched the history of their own faculty and the history of their own study program with interviews, etc. The students' own initiative is an important element of the study programs, so festivals are always developed by the students, whom we also accompany as mentors, but only if we are asked; otherwise, the students do everything themselves from conception to self-advertisement. In addition, the aim is to continue to develop the course of studies together, through feedback discussions, with the aim of encouraging students to make new suggestions on teaching formats. How could the program look different? We take up these suggestions in order to develop a new teaching format in a joint negotiation process.

**DR:** I'm also teaching in the Master of Fine Arts at the moment and worked very freely with them at first and was surprised that they very much liked the PowerPoint presentation with a condensed content and then requested it. I noticed that they wanted structured knowledge.

**MM:** Yes, we also have an introduction to theater studies and an introduction to performance analysis,

which is about developing parameters for the analysis of theater. This is a clear statement that is important.

**DR:** If you respond so strongly to all the wishes and ideas of the students, is there not also a lack of friction?

**MM:** There is a General Assembly in which you formulate their wishes, and we have a commission for implementation. It is a matter of a joint dialogue, it is a matter of understanding the course of studies as something to be shaped together, but also of setting clear formats for the joint dialogue. There are also fixed dates for this in the Master's program when they come with concrete proposals. There are definitely concrete questions about the degree program. The aim is to understand the course of studies as something that can be shaped, even though there is a module plan. It can be shaped in its structure.

**DR:** Is there any grading at all?

**MM:** We have very clear guidelines for grading. The practice is also graded, that is a completely scientific course of studies; they have to present again and again, or they write a term paper. In the theater sector, they



have six modules, each of which is graded. When only the thesis was graded, this was much more frightening.

The division into Bachelor and Master is difficult compared to the diploma program. The students first have to understand how the course works and what possibilities they have, and then they work on their projects. It used to be that they wrote their diploma thesis after five or six years. Now it's the case that they still need a long time to complete their Bachelor's degree, and then they think they have to go somewhere else for the Master's degree. That's not quite as logical as they build on each other, because we also see the Bachelor's degree as a very open course of study. Sometimes the Bachelor's degree is a bit more school-like, and I think this is an artificial distinction between it and the Master's degree.

It works within the Bachelor's degree and within the Master's degree, but the idea that you then graduate and then start again does not necessarily make sense for the degree program. When new students come to the Master's program, they need a long time to get acquainted. That makes sense partly, partly they study similar things, and partly I am skeptical whether this makes so much sense.

**DR:** Wouldn't it be better to spend five to six years intensively on one thing?

**MM:** Yes, and to be able to build up an intensive working relationship.

**DR:** In the narrower sense, the contents, even with the working methods there is an approximation with different study programs and subjects, but is it not more about a certain personal attitude of the teachers?

**MM:** In artistic study courses, it is quite clear that not everyone who studies will be able to work in the field. And so it is clear that from the outset there is a distinct competitive pressure—who am I as an artist? We don't have this pressure, because it's clear that many professions are possible with a degree. With us, this great openness makes it possible to ask the question: do I want to work as an artist or as a curator? Of course, we are then accused of training less in certain aspects of craftsmanship. Of course, no one is trained here who can play different roles every evening at a municipal theater, but there is certainly the possibility of developing your own artistic practice, and there are very successful examples. There are certain types of artistry in all study

courses and seminars to discuss gender justice. As I said at the beginning, the studies begin with a lack of knowledge, and later I become an artist or mediator.

**DR:** Then what do they do concretely?

**MM:** There are students who work as directors, and there are relatively many who successfully found independent theater groups and many who work as dramaturges. There are theater educators, in all areas of art mediation, from art journalism to festival curators, production managers; in the area of free production, we have graduates who are artistic directors, others end up in cultural politics.

**DR:** Now I'd like to know how the group "She She Pop" developed.

**MM:** That was already during my studies, actually from the experience that the predominant practice during my studies was that my male fellow students wrote pieces and then asked their female fellow students if they were on stage. We noticed that we wanted to work differently, we didn't want to reproduce a classic concept of directing and acting. During our studies we created a group, a working structure, in which we ourselves developed our performances, in other words we ourselves were in the function of the director, we wanted to change perspectives. After our first performances, we were confronted with the fact that first of all people talked about our bodies, which perhaps surprised us. From this, a certain question arose, namely the question of the representation of femininity—what is the image of the woman that was attributed to us, and how can we work with image disorders? "She She Pop" therefore became a feminist project for us. And this also in terms of a working structure that was characterized by changing positions, on the level of aesthetics as well, where the point was to show the audience other positions. When we noticed that we (as bodies) were very strongly compared, we started to turn on the light in the auditorium and look back, when the male gaze scans the body up and down, to quasi-return the male gaze.

**DR:** With such a large group, how can you make a living from it? Has that changed in recent years?

**MM:** You can live from it; we are one of the best supported groups in Germany. However, it is difficult to provide for a pension. But of course, it's a job in which you are evaluated continuously; even if you're employed





She She Pop, group portrait, 2015

at the Stadttheater, it might take five years. We have to keep submitting new applications for funding, but the fact is that we can make a living from it. I am rather surprised by the question—you can't do the work and tour internationally, and you don't have time for any other paid work.

**DR:** What can these approaches, the work of She She Pop, mean as methods in the present, in the omnipresence of the digital?

**MM:** It is always a matter of a new negotiation of a different relationship to the audience; the audience is always included in the sense of a testimony. It is therefore a question of participation, of a common physical presence. This is something that makes theater special in the age of the digital and also makes it necessary.

**DR:** Working in a collective, I imagine it to be difficult. I also very often work in two or three constellations, so I can hardly imagine how this works (with five to eight people).

**MM:** Theater has always been a collective art form, you're more than one. It's about having certain working structures in the collective; we try to separate it, i.e., there's an organizational level and an artistic level. On the artistic level, it's about finding new forms and procedures, setting each other new tasks, constantly changing positions. In the rehearsal process you need different roles; in the beginning you alternate more. These are long processes, they are negotiation processes. When the collective has reached an agreement, then it also happens very quickly: you write a text, someone continues to write, someone speaks it, you have the opportunity to work in parallel, so many different ideas are introduced. It is maybe harder to make a radical statement. In return, ideas are examined more closely, so that an idea can be further developed in the positive or an idea can be quickly disintegrated in the negative. We often try to make this process visible again on stage.

**DR:** What desires are driving you and the group to theater work?

**MM:** It's about creating your own space with the audience in which things can be negotiated and the belief that there is a political attitude in it. It's about showing utopian forms of communication on stage that are otherwise said to be impossible in society. If, for example, we have a conversation on stage between West German and East German female artists, how they are socialized as women and artists respectively. It is about creating situations in order to discuss questions that are socially necessary.

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**Annemarie Matzke** studied Applied Theatre Studies at Justus-Liebig University in Gießen. She did her doctorate on forms of self-staging in contemporary theatre at the University of Hildesheim and was a research assistant at the institute for theatre studies of the Freie Universität Berlin. Annemarie is a founding member of the group *She She Pop*; actress and dramaturge in various projects. Her main research focus are performance art, theories of acting; post-dramatic theatre in theory and practice; body and movement concepts. Since autumn 2009 she is professor for Performance Studies at the Institute for Media and Theatre of the University Hildesheim.

# The Infinite Game of Becoming

## Susanne Kennedy

*I want to teach the idea that gives many the right to erase themselves—the great cultivating idea...<sup>1</sup>*

In the beginning there was: HE. Man as the measure of all things so that he may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

He separated himself from the Greek chorus' dancing and recitation and pronounced "I": the birth of the tragic hero. From there he went out to conquer the world and all its inhabitants. He declared himself as "self" and everything else as "other." He declared himself as a rational and thinking being, and on stage he recounted his adventures: conquering the savages and killing the beasts.

The monologue of the imperialist about the universal human condition was exquisite: he told us how he was created in God's own image. HE made him a subject, an organism—a tragic Adam who was cast out of paradise because he was seduced by Eve. The protagonist shouts, he weeps, he implores, he moves the audience to tears. They see themselves in him! The applause was never-ending. The critics were raving about it.

But now! Suddenly in the middle of his performance, the face of our protagonist distorts, his words become slurry, unrecognizable, his movements that have been strong and decisive become weak and lifeless. There is a cry from afar, but it originates from his own chest. His eyes roll back into his head and there: he bursts into thousands of fragments!

His hard leather body armor has been pulverized, and he is now in the process of becoming a body without organs! The audience gasps with horror. They are made witness to this Dionysian castration process.

*No organ is constant anymore as regards either function or position,  
...sex organs sprout everywhere,...rectums open, defecate and close,...the entire  
organism changes color and consistency in split-second adjustments.<sup>2</sup>*

Our protagonist is "becoming-women, becoming-child, becoming animal, -vegetable, or -mineral; becoming-molecular of all kinds, becoming- particles."<sup>3</sup> In the end, he has become imperceptible. His becoming is never-ending and never finished. The play goes on and on. Hours become days become weeks and years.

The center stage seems empty, but in the margins there is movement and giggling. Strange beings human and non-human are stirring in the wings. They slowly advance from left and right.

They speak with voices and faces that are not their own. They move with bodies that have tentacles and feelers and tails, they crawl and float and are sometimes operated by remote control. They communicate in languages we have yet to learn.

The voices on stage trample the well-known rhythm underfoot. They howl and vibrate or become intensely quiet. These beings perform an exorcism. It is the human being that is being exorcized.

The creatures place our protagonist—or what is left of him, or rather what isn't left of him—one last time on the autopsy table to remake his anatomy.

Their dialogue sounds as follows:

– *Man is sick because he is badly constructed.*

– *We must make up our minds to strip him bare in order to scrape off that animalcule that itches him mortally.*

– *God, and with god his organs.*

Our Protagonist, who is no longer the protagonist, answers joyously:

*For you can tie me up if you wish,  
but there is nothing more useless than an organ.  
When you will have made him a body without organs,  
then you will have delivered him from all his automatic  
reactions and restored him to his true freedom.  
Then you will teach him again to dance wrong side out  
as in the frenzy of dance halls  
and this wrong side out will be his real place.<sup>4</sup>*

A few psychoanalysts who are still in the dark auditorium shout: “Stop, find your self again!” but their desperate cries fade away.

The protagonist's body has burst into a multitude of fragments. He is in the process of becoming and is no longer a “he,” but a “she” or an “it.” He or she or it has developed a body without organs. A body that has become part of everything else, be it animal or plant or robot.

This is a joyous happening. He no longer needs his voice to tell us how he killed his father and married his mother. He no longer needs a face to cry his tragic tears. The complex has vanished into the hot air of the theatre.

He/She/It has become imperceptible. He/She/It is no longer human, no longer has an “I” to speak of. He/She/It wants to utter the words “to be or not to be,” but the words can no longer be spoken.

Nature has taken its course, and the audience starts to realize in their delirium the dark truth: there is no separation! The body on stage has no borders because it is always already part of something else. And the spectators are forced to witness this transformative process.

Confusion is spreading: Where is the conflict of feelings? What is this strange happening on stage? Where is our hero?

More and more people are leaving the theatre. Some slam the doors in protest.

By now we have reached the scene where our protagonist has started to mingle with the other bodies, entities, beings, and forces on stage and beyond.

This is schizophrenic!

A terrible realization is dawning: There is no subject that lies behind the production, that performs the production!

This is unsupportable. “Start acting!” a spectator cries out in utmost agony. Others demand: What is your name? What is your gender? What is your nationality? Your intention? Your goal? Your language?

But our protagonist can no longer answer, nor does he desire to. Rays of light, birds, and nerve endings start bursting out of the fragmented body. No face. No mouth. No tongue. No liver. No guts.

And yet there are sounds. There is a humming and a growling. Cosmic sounds that accompany this “overcoming of man.” It is a beautiful and joyous celebration.

In the audience, people cry and shout, they want their money back. They snort with indignation: “This is outrageously ridiculous!”

The words have collapsed, not into nonsense, but into the bodies that produce and hear them.

*A new dimension of the schizophrenic body, an organism without parts which operates entirely by insufflation, respiration, evaporation and fluid transmission.<sup>5</sup>*

This body is “howling,” speaking a “language without articulation” that has more to do with the primal act of making sound than it does with communicating specific words.

Deep, pre-rational, unconscious forces are being harnessed and transformed in order to create something beautiful.

Our fragmented protagonist is growing and growing—beyond the borders of the theatre, the street, the city, the nation, the universe, and beyond.

Our protagonist who stopped being a protagonist approaches the unknowable and the unpredictable—this quest is full of surprises and suspense. He/She/It is utterly faithful to him-/her-/itself, moving through space and time: an ever-changing nomadic subject.

This body can no longer be called human—it has become mineral, it has become animal, it has become a multiplicity of possible new connections and affects with other bodies and, more broadly, with the Earth itself. This is pure theatre.

The boundaries and limits that this body encounters during his becoming are simply being incorporated: institutions, state borders, zones, ages, genders, death. This becomes a game—the infinite game of becoming. No one knows when this game began, for there is no beginning and no end.

This infinite play is not restricted by time, and the rules change constantly. Our infinite actor needs to adapt to them over and over again.

It is all moving and all becoming, combinations of fluxes with different intensities. The play we are watching is about total surrender. The drama is cosmic and encompasses all life.

The play has no director, no script, no final outcome. It only has non-protagonists.

The non-protagonists change as the play continues.

Our non-protagonist body has become a multiplicity, and his polyphonic shouts can be heard echoing through the cosmic space.

Meanwhile on stage, the machines and the creatures have started to move to Stravinsky's *Sacre du Printemps*. Like ballet dancers, they sway across the stage, sprinkling white powder from ground-up bones, used as fertilizer, on stage. There are many ritual gestures to which we have no key. Their movements coordinate with the underlying dynamics of the cosmic order and nature. The mechanical dancers become vessels of latent powers. Hallucination and fear. A Dionysian dance of animated hieroglyphs. The sound becomes unbearable. Moaning and crying and laughter breaking through language in order to touch life—this is what they call reality.

Slowly with great effort we can make out some words, the creatures are whispering to the audience:

*Find your body without organs. Find out how to make it. It's a question of life and death, youth and old age, sadness and joy. It is where everything is played out.*<sup>6</sup>

When all is done, a group of human beings in white protection suits enter and clear the stage. Only four people applaud.

*The human face  
is an empty power,  
a field of death...  
...after countless thousands of years that the human  
face has spoken  
and breathed,  
one still has the impression  
that it hasn't even begun to  
say what it is and what it knows...*<sup>7</sup>

(re: notes below)

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**Notes**

- 1 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The will to power* (1967)
  - 2 William S. Burroughs, *Naked Lunch* (1992).
  - 3 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (2009)
  - 4 Antonin Artaud, *To have done with the judgment of God* (1975)
  - 5 Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* (1993)
  - 6 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (2009)
  - 7 Antonin Artaud, (written for a presentation of his Portraits and Drawings at the Galerie Pierre, July 4-20, 1947)
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The director **Susanne Kennedy** reacts to the new balance of power between bodies, technical objects and machines with an aesthetic beyond man. Alienated by masks, play-back dialogues, doubles and multimedia, the actors confront the audience with a posthumanistic subjectivity.

Born in 1977 in Friedrichshafen, Susanne Kennedy studied directing at the Hogeschool voor de Kunsten in Amsterdam. In 2017, with *Women in Trouble*, she will be releasing her first world premiere at the Volksbühne Berlin - a hyper-realistic reproduction cabinet that investigates the new balance of power between nature, living beings, culture and technology. 2019 follows *Coming Society*, an installative performance, conceived and realized together with Markus Selg, in which the audience becomes the actor of an evolution game around the question of the future form of community.

**Translated with** [www.DeepL.com/Translator](http://www.DeepL.com/Translator)



*Coming Society* by Susanne Kennedy and Markus Selg, Volksbühne, Berlin, 2019, Photo: Julian Röder, 2019





*Coming Society* by Susanne Kennedy and Markus Selg, Volksbühne, Berlin, 2019, Photo: Julian Röder, 2019



*Coming Society* by Susanne Kennedy and Markus Selg, Volksbühne, Berlin, 2019, Photo: Julian Röder, 2019





*Coming Society* by Susanne Kennedy and Markus Selg, Volksbühne, Berlin, 2019, Photo: Dorothee Richter, 2019

# “We have created a parody of these austere rituals which didn’t exist in the past”: Revisiting Music Education<sup>1</sup>

## Brandon Farnsworth

The project *Revisiting Black Mountain* at the Zurich University of the Arts brought together projects addressing the historic art college from all departments of the school. I conceived and curated the four projects from the music department that would be presented over the course of the school-wide initiative. The following text will present my curatorial approach to managing these projects, and use it as a way to speculate on a possible new direction for music education more generally.

Higher education in music today continues to put a strong emphasis on the value of technique, and with it refinement, perfection, and quality. Musicians spend hours per day honing the current interpretation of canonic repertoire, and composers pore meticulously over their scores, note by note, often in isolation. The best results of these working processes are performances that present highly dense, considered, and well-thought works, a result of established lines of communication and production. The worst results are when these ways of working prove to be unable to produce performances that are relevant to today’s audiences—which in my opinion make up a majority. Let me explain.

The foundations of what we today think of as classical music can be traced back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Philosopher Lydia Goehr argues that this era saw the emergence of the concept of *Werktreue*, and the ossification of musical performance into commodifiable “works,” manifested as scores.<sup>2</sup> This same period also saw the formalization of music pedagogy, which became centered on the exact reproduction of canonical works. In the new “German-style” conservatories, musical education became less of a holistic practice of music-making, and was instead broken up into separate courses on music theory, music history, ear training, and instrumental or compositional tutoring sessions with one’s professor.

This structure formed the basis for musical education as it still exists today in many conservatories. Examining, for instance, the Zurich Conservatory’s curriculum at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century shows that by then this division of music education had not only already occurred, but also that this educational programme has remained basically the same in the intervening 117 years (!).<sup>3</sup>

The effect of this process of formalization continues to have an understated effect on the current state of classical music-making today. As historical musicologist Joshua Navon argues, the result of this formalized educational model has been the production by conservatories of students skilled in the high-fidelity reproduction of canonical scores, to the detriment of other possible qualities of music making, such as experimentation, risk-taking, or engaging critically with the site of performance (more than just adapting to its acoustics).<sup>4</sup>

This work-centered, modernist/rationalist approach to music education is ideologically far from the model of the historical BMC, which was an example of a school where the dividers between forms of practice (artistic or not) were meant to be as porous as living itself. Students did not learn art, but rather artistic *practice*, meaning that the school's focus was on the forming of experience, and on an open-ended model, rather than one based on discrete works and inculcation of a canon.

Many of BMC's early teachers were exiled from the Bauhaus, providing an important link between the American and European avant-garde movements. Important for these Bauhaus artists was the concept of experimentation understood as a process of constant searching that creates a knowledge unique to art. The emphasis of the BMC lay on realizing the individual autonomy of students, as well as their ability to collaborate with their peers — a kind of processual knowing-how rather than work-centered knowing-what.<sup>5</sup>

Within the Zurich University of the Arts, revisiting the working methods of this now-historical college arose out of an interest in examining what being an arts school today means. This self-reflexivity came as the result of the school's 2014 move into a new facility housing all its different departments under one roof. Sharing spaces unleashed a flurry of reflection on the direction and values of the school as a whole. In a hope to give some perspective to these debates, BMC, often the subject of contemporary debates around arts education, logically became the subject of one of the school's first collective projects. However, it soon became clear internally that the reality of being part of an increasingly transdisciplinary arts university presented a particular challenge for the music department and its operation within a conservatory-model that arguably predates even the historical BMC, at least in its focus on a work-based aesthetic.



Therefore, the intention of my curatorial work for revisiting was to develop projects with students that challenged them to experiment and think creatively, but at the same time it did not totally reject the rigorous technical training most of them possessed on their respective instruments, or as composers. The aim was thus to understand the specialized musical training of the students not as a bulwark of conservatism to be dismantled and rebuilt, but rather as a tradition that is explicitly chosen and maintained by its proponents. I wanted to work *with* the tradition, not reject its qualities outright.

This work happened on two levels. The first was that I developed projects together with students whom I approached because I felt that their existing ways of working could be molded and amplified to fit into the concept of *revisiting*. Together with them and their four projects on different topics, a second level was that these projects were opened for all music students to participate in and were finally presented to an audience. The point was to experiment with the internal organization of these projects, as well as to present to audiences a different way that the music department could sound.

An example of this was the working process with a student music theatre group, Kollektiv Totem. The group usually presents a mix of self-developed compositions and idiosyncratic interpretations of existing music (theatre) repertoire by composers like Aphergis or Shlomowitz, often mixed together into concert-length collages of their own devising (akin to a kind of *Regiethatre* for music). It was decided that Totem's project would be a performative museum tour of the *Revisiting Black Mountain* exhibition in the Zurich Museum für Gestaltung. The intention was to use their music theatre approach to re-read the exhibition of mostly historical photographs and documents. In early conversations with the student group, though, it became clear that their curriculum did not cover BMC, its historical significance, or even much of the work of John Cage, who would be the most prominent link between BMC and Totem's present-day musical practice.

The first step in working with the group was that I organized a series of dinners where—like a book club—we could discuss texts about BMC in an informal setting. We also looked at the work of Andrea Fraser, and her *Museum Highlights* (1989), in order for them to know about a similar exercise in the visual arts. These helped the students discuss and think through the topics they would be dealing with, which had previously been totally foreign to them. The intention of the informal setting was to help get over the hurdles to understanding academic writing, mainly by allowing them to also express their frustration with the task as a legitimate part of the discussion.

They then wrote a script, and began the rehearsal process, blocking and coordinating their movements and that of the tour group through the building, while also relating it back to the ideas they had learned about. Rather than rehearsing a canonic score, it was e.g. rehearsing how best to adapt Cage's *Water Walk* (1959) to a handicapped bathroom stall, or composing the most suitable music for eliciting a certain mood in a tour group walking up the stairs (they decided to make it into a kind of aerobics class).

The performance itself showed a kind of humorous irreverence for the exhibition that Totem was purportedly giving a tour of: rather than being escorted through the museum, participants were taken instead on a tour of the school's campus *in medias res*, interrupting a rehearsal, or being lectured on Cage's *4'33"*, before finally ending up in the *Revisiting Black Mountain* exhibition. Their idea was to project the experimental spirit of the historical BMC onto the current-day Zurich University of the Arts and to

see how well the comparison held up, addressing also the hard reality of their precarious careers after graduation. The performances were then advertised alongside the “regular” tours of the *Revisiting Black Mountain* exhibition from the museum, and so could be easily visited by the public.

Taking the Totem example as a point of departure, the question then becomes how to describe this approach to music-making that exists between experimentation and technical know-how. I think the best way to describe this way of working is to look at some recent arguments on the shifting concept of musical practice.

One promising term, “The New Discipline,” was coined by the Irish composer Jennifer Walshe in a text of the same name. She argues for a form of composition, which she herself also practices, that reimagines the relationship between composing and performing. Rather than an emphasis on the completeness of the score as a kind of standalone, a total world, composers use any and all tools at their disposal in order to realize a performance that they are usually also part of, shifting the weight from the score as the locus of meaning towards the moment of performance. What is “new” in the New Discipline is this opening to a diversity of references from other arts, internet culture, or working methods borrowed from theatre, dance, or installation. What remains of musical practice for Walshe is a “discipline,” or as she describes it, “the rigour of finding, learning and developing new compositional and performative tools.”<sup>6</sup> The New Discipline puts a strong emphasis on the event of performance, and on heterogeneous references from across the spectrum of contemporary life, while at the same time reaffirming the emphasis on meticulous preparation for the performance that has become a characteristic of conservatory training. In this way, it maintains its relationship to the conservatory training that still defines the majority of music practitioners but applies its meticulousness not to canonical works but to determining the nature of the forms of cooperation that a particular project requires.





Walshe's approach is similar to what Shannon Jackson calls "dedicated amateurism," which is "dedicated" because of the emphasis on practice and on concentration, and "amateur" because of its commitment to starting from zero with each new project, and every new constellation of people and places. Jackson argues that this concept, seen increasingly in the interdisciplinary performing arts, is the result of a combination of two different approaches to performativity. The first is from the visual arts, which since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have moved away from objects and towards events and concepts. The second is from theatre, dance, and music, where since the likes of Cage and works such as *4'33"* (1952), there has been a rejection of the virtuosity of the spectacle, seeking instead new forms of relating to reality.<sup>7</sup>

The approach described as the New Discipline, or as dedicated amateurism, fits well with our example of Totem's practice. The thorough, meticulous planning of the route the tour would take, the careful timing of its various sections, composing contrasting moods, while also taking a larger artistic positioning, all show that the group produced the performance in a similar way to how they would also prepare a traditional concert. The amateurism, or the newness, was not just in choosing the unconventional medium of exhibition tour. Rather, it lay in the decision that the tour was the format best suited to the project at hand, as well as in the group's ability to quickly adapt to this different way of working.

A conservatory training that takes this dedicated amateur approach seriously would do three things. It would firstly be able to maintain its core principal of discipline and rigor that has sustained it since the inception of this system, allowing for existing skills to be repurposed. Second, it would be able to reconnect with a history of music that puts emphasis on creating a uniquely interesting performance event, rather than a spectacle of virtuosity. This is a lineage that goes through Black Mountain College, performance art, and a kind of shadow-history of spatialized music in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup> Third, pursuing this approach allows for musical practice to get out of its self-made ghetto and participate in a vibrant and rich inter-arts field. It establishes a framework for understanding the musical production of European conservatories as only one tradition among many others in Europe and elsewhere.

Pursuing this approach would enable music to better interface with its neighbors in the arts school, many of whom are already in the process of grappling with similar questions. My position on music education does not advocate for throwing out the distinctiveness of music; it entails music departments finding their own way to what transdisciplinary collaboration could mean, on their own terms and in relation to their own history (also their history *as* conservatories), rather than from external forces or imported discourses acting upon it. This should not diminish the urgency with which such changes in musical education should take place: the conservatory model is desperately outdated, and its foundational belief in *Werktreue* no longer compatible with contemporary society. Music students are starving for the creative skills they will need to be successful in a shifting arts landscape, a responsibility that relatively few music educators currently take seriously.<sup>9</sup> My hope is that sketching my approach to this project at the Zurich University of the Arts will contribute to the growing discussion around building a roadmap for this change to occur.

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## Notes

- 1** The titular quote is taken from a yet-unpublished interview between the author and New Yorker music critic Alex Ross, September 2016.
- 2** Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 205ff.
- 3** Markus Müller, “Über Musikerziehung und Berufsausbildung am Konservatorium,” in *Das Neue/Alte Haus: Zur Einweihung des renovierten Konservatoriums-Gebäudes*, ed. Markus Müller (Zurich: Konservatorium und Musikhochschule Zürich, 1987), 35ff.
- 4** On the development of the German conservatory model, see Joshua Navon, “Music Conservatories and Nineteenth-Century Music Historiography: Pedagogy, Transformation, Reproduction” (conference paper, Fifth Sibelius Academy Symposium on Music History, Helsinki, Finland, June 6 – 8, 2018).
- 5** Anette Jael Lehmann, *Reenactment Impossible?* Lecture at the Zurich University of the Arts, March 8, 2018.
- 6** Jennifer Walshe, *The New Discipline*, Borealis Festival, accessed August 22, 2018. <http://www.borealisfestival.no/2016/the-new-discipline-4/>
- 7** Shannon Jackson. “Just-in-Time: Performance and the Aesthetics of Precarity” in *The Drama Review* 56 no. 4 (Winter 2012) p. 17.
- 8** See Christa Brüstle, *Konzert-Szenen: Bewegung, Performance, Medien. Musik zwischen performativer Expansion und medialer Integration 1950-2000* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013).
- 9** Interesting exceptions include the research project at the Norwegian Academy of Music, *The performing musician in the 21st century* (2015 – 2019), and the Musician 3.0 Bachelors program at the University of the Arts Utrecht. The Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen (AEC) is also currently running a research project entitled *Renew: Reflective Entrepreneurial Music Education Worldclass* [sic]. Their understanding of “entrepreneurship” is similar to what I refer to here as “creative skills,” though the former has been avoided in this context because of its too-strong economic overtones. See <https://www.aec-music.eu/projects/current-projects/renew>
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# Terra Vague: Against the Ghosts of Land

## Johanna Bruckner

The research hypothesis for this text revolves around a discussion of the Brazilian architect Sérgio Ferro's critical analysis, which emphasises the socio-economic transformation of built space as the politics of the material and of social class. His ideas are read against the background of the finance-driven deregulation of buildings in Hamburg's HafenCity and the subsequent reorganization of production and labour conditions, based on new technological and infrastructural development. Concepts such as the scaffold, which refers both to physical labor on the construction site as well as to the algorithmic scaffold or framework as both method and object in algorithmic infrastructure and logistics, constitute the tools alongside which social and cooperative performances of living and working are emerging. Research is discussed with the participating performers in temporary social settings on site, on the basis of which dance scores are developed which, in turn, feed back into these notes. The performers' responses are articulated in bodily, physical gestures, and their transmission aims to propose new social infrastructures for the present.

### 1.

In this text, which is based on my works *Terra Vague: Against the Ghosts of Land* and *Total Algorithms of Partiality*, I would like to discuss some of the Brazilian architect Sérgio Ferro's key ideas, and to consider his propositions as a critical response to the politics of urban renewal in Hamburg's HafenCity. Sérgio Ferro was born in 1938 in Curitiba, Paraná. He is a graduate of the University of São Paulo, where he also taught. His work focuses in particular on questions of labor and production conditions in the construction industry; his involvement in the planning of the new capital city Brasília during the 1960s played an important role in the development of his theories. Together with Flávio Império and Rodrigo Lefèvre, he formed the radical architecture group *Arquitetura Nova*, which critically examined the Brazilian ideology of modernist building practices, regarding them as a form of social exclusion.<sup>1</sup> João Batista Vilanova Artigas, a fellow militant, established the Institute of Brazilian Architects (IAB) in São Paulo, as well as FAUUSP, the Architecture and Urbanism College at the University of São Paulo. Within this framework, the group conceived its formative architectural discourse of freedom and democracy, contrasting its ideas for the construction of Brasília with a reality characterized by appalling and unsafe working conditions, in which badly paid, ill-fed labourers were exploited. In looking for a response to these unacceptable conditions for architectural production, the group gravitated towards the communist faction, which at that time provided an ideological home for a significant portion of the leftist intelligentsia. *Arquitetura Nova* played an active role in various demonstrations and strikes, calling for democratic access to architecture, design, and construction, and envisioning a highly politicized approach to living space.<sup>2</sup>

Drawing on these experiences, Ferro wrote of architecture as the production of commodity, its modern practices fostering a division of labor in order to generate value. For Ferro, this principle was embodied in the jargon involved in architectural drawing, which alienated and was indeed largely incomprehensible to the builders. In Ferro's

conceptualization of architecture, the design process cannot be separated from construction. His aim is to abandon this transformation of production in favor of design solutions. He searched for architectural answers that could immediately be put into practice by the general public, who by and large built their own houses without employing architects. The result of these undertakings was unconventional architecture with a deep aesthetic feeling, based on on-site experiences and civic demands.<sup>3</sup>

Between 1961 and 1962, two emblematic experiments substantiated the group's architectural praxes. The first was the Casa Boris Fausto<sup>4</sup> (Boris Fausto House) in São Paulo, which consisted of a large canopy of reinforced concrete supported by four pillars tied by one-meter high beams that formed a balance of six meters. Although it was a one-off attempt, the Boris Fausto House was nevertheless representative of the impasse between industrialization and the construction industry at that time.<sup>5</sup>



Figs.1-2: Johanna Bruckner, *Terra Vague*, performance, video still, 2018.

The second experiment, the Bernardo Issler House,<sup>6</sup> located in the city of Cotia in the state of São Paulo, was characterized by the decision to return to traditional construction methods in order to rationalize procedures and popular techniques, thus enabling significant collective savings without going through the industrialization process. The Bernardo Issler House, designed as a masonry brick vault, was an opportunity to put the group's hypotheses into practice and identify economically and technically realistic construction solutions. The house is based on masonry furniture, in order to overcome the division between the social and service sectors. Space for social and collective action is afforded top priority. Looking at the house's structure in greater detail, the living rooms are located in the northwest façade, thus receiving a large amount of sunshine and reinforcing social interactions within the building. The surplus that the sunlight produces here is regarded as having a collective value. Access to the house is from both ends, in linear form. The windows provide natural light and ventilation during the day, while in the evening artificial lighting takes the form of a trim between the floor and the roof. The house has a concave surface that protects its occupant and is the expression of the most primordial form of human habitat, its roof echoing the spatiality of caves and Brazilian indigenous huts.<sup>7</sup>

Arquitetura Nova's practices, beyond their aim of producing accessible and reproducible design and ergonomic solutions, reflected a new respect for the worker on the construction site, allowing for a collective working experience involving builders, architects, and residents. The organization of the internal space beneath the house's curved architecture was further explored in the group's later projects. In their 1965 house, Império and Rodrigo defined these models as the prototypes for new housing construction in Brazil.<sup>8</sup>

In 1970, the Brazilian dictatorship responded by exiling Ferro alongside his mentor, Vilanova Artigas. On leaving prison, Ferro decided to emigrate to France, where he became a professor at the School of Architecture in Grenoble. The legacy left by *Arquitetura Nova*, also referred to as New Architecture, was however more an opening up of new perspectives than an actual establishment and integration of its methods into society. Indeed, neither the historical situation at the time nor class barriers would have allowed this: just as the roles of the people were played by middle-class actors for an academic audience, the primary target audience, New Architecture was still, in the end, a bourgeois house built for intellectuals.<sup>9</sup>

Let me now read these considerations against urban renewal regimes in Hamburg.

## 2.

Passing large areas of wasteland occupied by sea birds, with the river beds smelling of marsh drying out in Hamburg's early July heat, the street ends abruptly in front of a block of pale green shelters. The refugees who live here are confronted with private corporations' aspirational new luxury enclaves in immediate proximity to their living space: the clime of urban redevelopment. Most of the land is being sold to private investors; new homes are rising up and will soon change the landscape entirely.

HafenCity Hamburg is characterized by the finance-driven deregulation of buildings and space. It is emerging as a form of governance in which liberal democratic structures are mimicked for use in the organization of residential urban areas. Since its beginnings at the turn of the century, HafenCity has been characterized by an expansionist policy of turning former warehouse lots into luxury apartments. Accordingly, city and civic life are dominated by data governance and smart homes: electronic money and virtual civic services in the form of life streams and invisible cables remodel the city into a



Fig.6: Johanna Bruckner, *Total Algorithms of Partiality*, performance, 2018.





Fig.16-22: Johanna Bruckner, *Total Algorithms of Partiality*, video stills, 2018.



dematerialized stream of desires. In responding to HafenCity's urban renewal and taking into account recent technological developments, one must understand the link between labor and housing that underwent a transformation as a result of urban and economic reorganization and neoliberal victories in the areas of labor and cognitive value production. Housing has always been a spatial instrument of governance, wielded for the purpose of making society calculable.<sup>10</sup>

The post-Fordist saturation of urban life merges with a Fordist approach: the speed with which property is physically built and the machine-led approach contradict the anthropomorphic agendas of algorithmic architectures.<sup>11</sup> What are the possible agencies inherent to these agonisms, which confront the ubiquitous processes of dematerialization, the digital fabrication of civic and urban life, and the deregulation of dwellings and built space with methods that aim to reveal materialization to be an organizational planning practice—also called a constituent support structure, as outlined above with regard to Sérgio Ferro's work—as well as to identify the processes involved? Which potential and productive articulations result from this agonistic confrontation? The bodies in the performances that make up my art work are the forces of materialization, proposing infrastructures of social encounters beyond class barriers and exclusive contexts and which will be referred to throughout the project.<sup>12</sup>

### 3.

The labor force on the construction site in Hamburg's HafenCity is mainly drawn from eastern and southeastern Europe on a temporary basis, the workers being recruited by firms before leaving their homes and then 'bought' by construction companies in Germany. Firms compete to offer the cheapest labor, often simultaneously charging their partner companies money, before then closing down their operations. New firms emerge but disappear equally rapidly, due to the corrupt nature of their enterprise. Construction companies in Germany are doing business with *ghost firms* in the east and southeast of Europe.<sup>13</sup> I am attempting to work with labor organizations in these geographical areas to enable a response to the European ghost trade scenario on a structural and political level, as well as to ensure that after arriving in Germany, workers will have the capacity to invest in establishing workers' solidarity networks, ideally on a global scale.

### 4.

Over the course of several months I have worked with a number of performers and labor unions in temporary social settings on former warehouse plots, wasteland, and areas earmarked for imminent construction, within which the group develops dance scores and language in order to transform the urgencies of construction labor and the paradoxes of housing policies and their associated ambivalent structures into potential collective agencies. Ground plans for future construction in HafenCity are redrawn to integrate aspects of Sérgio Ferro's conceptions of housing, creating forms of accommodation that better meet the needs of prospective populations, which will include construction site workers, refugees, and others who require affordable space. The new drawings are scores to be performed. In the practical work accompanying this text, the floor plans that are usually automatically and technologically generated for homes in HafenCity to integrate Sérgio Ferro's proposed housing values in their algorithms. These new algorithms put forward entirely new housing models, and may in the future be able to be printed in print stations distributed throughout the neighborhood. The repeated performance of these newly composed algorithms reinforces the validity of this idea within society, positioning the concerns of Ferro's popular house within the age of algorithmic infrastructures.

The bodies perform in relation to one other, creating a physical language that remains autonomous for the time being because the scores, in their emerging structure, are temporarily foreign to capitalist abstraction. The bodies' movements are beyond the range and scope of HafenCity's surveillance mechanisms, as they interrupt and disrupt the algorithmic streams of data and finance. These bodily constellations perform as self-determined, self-composed durational social endeavors, rehearsing relational accountabilities. Different experiences in the investigation of labor and housing are discussed and put forward. A collectively produced manifesto poses demands to HafenCity's authorities, conceding the social pluralism of society only under the condition that support structures sustain citizens' subjectivities on a stable and equal basis.

The organizational practice proposed in my work is simultaneously a general support structure and an archive and data resource available to those who need it. It collates information shared by workers in relation to conditions on site and is updated with information based on local and situational experiences, while making reference to practices such as those of Sérgio Ferro and the Arquitectura Nova Group. These practices are actualized by a changing group of performances on a global scale in response to situational immediacy. Technology has the potential to link agencies worldwide but it may involve politicizing coordination and envisaging a future in which education, labor and data critically have to be considered more closely interrelated. These practices, which we refer to as *Scaffolding Agency*, are to be elaborated upon.

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## Notes

**1** See <http://www.spatialagency.net/database/how/networking/sergio.ferro>, accessed on May 21, 2017.

**2** Felipe Contier, "An Introduction to Sergio Ferro", in *Industries of Architecture*, eds. Katie Lloyd Thomas, Tilo Amjoff, and Nick Beech (New York: Routledge: 2016), 87–93.

**3** Ibid., and <http://www.spatialagency.net/database/how/networking/sergio.ferro>, accessed on June 19, 2018.

**4** Figures 3-5.

**5** See, for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MzsXycPvHNU&t=103s> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISa87rCMxpA>, accessed on April 9, 2018.

**6** Figure 7.

**7** Ibid., accessed on June 10, 2018.

**8** Ibid., accessed on June 11, 2018.

**9** Ibid., accessed on April 9, 2018.

**10** Andreas Rumpfhuber, "Housing Labour," *E-flux Architecture*, <http://www.e-flux.com/architecture/artificial-labor/140678/housing-labor/>, accessed on December 4, 2017.

**11** Algorithmic architecture describes the cybernetic feedback of data into the computational design process of a building. Ned Rossiter (for example, in *Software, Infrastructure, Labour*, New York: Routledge, 2016) refers to algorithmic architectures in the sense that he approaches them as algorithmically managed forms of automation serving infrastructure, trade, and the building industry. He describes algorithms as complex machines operating under neoliberal forms of governance, labour, and the globalisation of manufacturing and service industries. In using the term "algorithmic infrastructure," I am referring to Keller Easterling's *Extrastatecraft. The Power of Infrastructure Space* (London: Verso, 2014) and her understanding of infrastructure. For Keller Easterling, infrastructure "typically conjures associations with physical networks for transportation, communication or utilities. Yet, today [...] infrastructure includes pools of microwaves beaming from satellites and populations of atomized electronic devices that we hold in our hands. The shared standards and ideas that control

everything from technical objects to management styles also constitute an infrastructure. [...] Infrastructure is now the overt point of contact and access between us all—the rules governing the space of everyday life.”

**12** A more detailed overview of the work with video links can be found on [www.johannabruckner.com](http://www.johannabruckner.com).

**13** This information is based on conversations with representatives from labour organisations in Hamburg, July 15, 2017.

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**Johanna Bruckner**, born in Vienna in 1984, is an artist whose work is shown internationally, most recently, at the Venice Biennale, 16th Architectural Exhibition (2018), Deichtorhallen Hamburg, Sammlung Falckenberg (2018); Galerie Reflector Contemporary, Bern (2018); the KW, Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2017); the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zürich (2017); the Villa Croce, Museum for Contemporary Art, Genoa (2017); the Kunsthaus in Hamburg (2016); the Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof (2016); the Cabaret Voltaire, Zurich (2016). She is now preparing an exhibition at Galerie Eigen + Art Lab, Berlin. She has lectured at various universities and institutions including the Bauhaus University of Weimar, the Lucerne School of Art and Design, Zurich University of the Arts and the BAC Center Contemporain in Geneva. Her work has been awarded numerous grants, she received the Hamburg Stipendium for Fine Arts (2016), was awarded a scholarship for the overseas artist studio program at the Banff Center for Visual Arts in Canada in (2015), is currently a fellow at the Sommerakademie Paul Klee (2017-19), and is now nominated for a College Fellow in Media Practice at Harvard University, Cambridge, US. Bruckner is interested in the conditions of labour that have been emerging in response to the technologies of communicative capitalism and the organisation of collective bodies. <http://johannabruckner.com>.

# New Alphabet School (Haus der Kulturen der Welt: 2019–2021) Olga von Schubert, Caroline Adler and Boris Buden

The New Alphabet School is a school for artistic, curatorial, archival, poetic, activist, critical, and affirmative research practices that take place outside of academic curricula. Conceived as a translational gathering, the school connects various forms of collectively produced knowledge, making it possible for the participants to detect and address its incommensurability within the established knowledge regimes.

Its mode of conduct is neither inter- nor trans-disciplinary but is genuinely *undisciplinary*. The school does not aim at productively connecting the existing disciplines of knowledge or creating a parallel. It is rather an attempt to break the areal logic of the disciplinary divisions, which has been imposed on knowledge production since the wake of colonial-imperial modernity. These divisions have not only separated the subject of knowledge from its object, both in terms of nature and society, they have also socially divided people into those who are seen as qualified to think and know and those who are not; into the professionals and the laypeople. Moreover, the logic of area has acquired a normative meaning that goes as far as to divide humanity by anthropological difference, separating the civilised from the uncivilised by geo-cultural area, regardless of their place in time. The disciplinary division of knowledge is at the very core of logocentrism, ethnocentrism, and phonocentrism, which have up until now haunted the geo-cultural area called “the West.” Yet, this normative identity block, the fortress of knowledge as we know it, is no longer stable. There are ever more cracks in its walls. It is in these cracks where the New Alphabet School searches for what is common in both knowledge and life. The New Alphabet School thereby focuses on the discrete elements that constitute both alphabetical and digital knowledge.

There is nothing natural or innocent in the alphabets. They were instituted as tools that turn language into a finite number of discrete objects, which can be combined, measured, calculated, deciphered, translated, and traded. As infrastructures of writing, alphabets have essentially influenced the today still dominant understanding of language based on the paradigm of communication. Here, language as a bearer of a message appears as a code and a written text. To read a text then means to deploy the code so as to transmit the linguistic information it contains. In this model, meaning finally appears as the identity of code and message, that is, as a result of successful communication.

It is in this conceptual context that the learning of alphabets has been institutionalised to provide, in terms of universal literacy, the common foundation of knowledge—with far reaching socio-political and technological consequences. Alphabets have both decisively contributed to the Romantic identification of language and national community under the paradigm of sovereignty and facilitated the transformation of language into a commodity and/or resource of contemporary capitalism.

Digitality makes it possible to trade this commodity and take the alphabetic logic of language as a computable calculus one step further. Should we unlearn alphabets? This is not what the New Alphabet School attempts. We don't want to simply delete the old alphabets from our minds as obsolete and useless in order to make space for the new ones. Rather, the school implies an encounter with their failed promise to perfectly encode the entire knowledge of the world, making it universally translatable into every particular idiom by rendering it as a combination of discernible components. It is about their missed claims to both the measurability and commensurability of languages, to the linguistic equivalences of which our alphabetically ordered vocabularies are composed.

The New Alphabet School was inaugurated with a space for gathering, discussion, and workshops set in a scenography created by **Raumlabor Berlin**, in the foyer of HKW from January 9–13, 2019. This **(Un-)Learning Place** was conceived by **Boris Buden**, **Olga von Schubert**, and **Caroline Adler** and sought out strategies to navigate through the inherent classification and ordering systems of archives, libraries, museums, institutional architectures, and digital networks and offered approaches to situating, negotiating, or (un-)learning research in artistic, site-specific, poetic, or bodily practices.

Together with **eight independent curatorial, activist, or artistic collectives**, the *(Un-)Learning Place* offered **eighty international participants** the opportunity to investigate new strategies for interdisciplinary research and potential crossdisciplinary collaborations in five tracks in the fields of **Translation, Archiving, Digitality, Spaces of Theory** as well as **Embodied Infrastructures** in order to challenge established perspectives and collectively develop ways of restructuring the order of things.

During the five-day-program, participants met in daily plena, held discussions with experts from the field as well as HKW curators and colleagues, and participated in group workshop sessions by **ASSET productions, diffrakt | centre for theoretical periphery, Each One Teach One (EOTO) e.V., Fehras Publishing Practices, knowbotiq & Claudia de Serpa Soares, Raumlabor Berlin, Telekommunisten, Tactical Technology Collective**, as well as guests such as **Felix Stalder, Karin Harrasser, Vincenzo Latronico, Mitchell Esajas, Jessica de Abreu**, and others.

The curator and theorist **Gigi Argyropoulou**, the curator **Gilly Karjevsky**, and the artist **Nicoline van Harskamp** acted as observers of the *(Un-)Learning Place* program through participatory interventions, collective observations, and documentation throughout the five days.

In the future, HKW's **New Alphabet School** will continue as a travelling school between the archipelago of Guinea-Bissau and between Dakar, Havana, Delhi, Rafah, and back to Berlin, investigating and probing practices, strategies, and approaches to navigating through the existing infrastructures of The New Alphabet.

The New Alphabet School is a participatory format, which invites artists, scholars and activists worldwide to attend the public programs as well as the corresponding workshops. Participants of any New Alphabet School workshop session become part of the School network and can propose and facilitate workshops in the upcoming editions.







**Upcoming New Alphabet School events:**

- #1 TRANSLATING** *June 17/18 2019* with Lydia H. Liu, Ranjit Hoskote and Sigrid Weigel at HKW Berlin, Germany
- #2 SITUATING** *November, 7/8 2019* with Karin Harrasser, Natalie Loveless, Liliana Angulo Cortés and Juan Rodrigo Machado at HKW Berlin, Germany
- #3 CODING** *January 16/18 2020* with Sarah Sharma, Felix Stalder and others at Goethe Institut and the Common Room Foundation, Delhi, India
- #4 TRANSMITTING** *April 8 2020* at HKW Berlin, Germany and Rafah, Gaza Strip in cooperation with 28 magazine
- #5 CARING** *June 11/12 2020* at HKW Berlin, and M.1 / Arthur Boskamp-Stiftung, Hohenlockstedt, Northern Germany
- #6 SURVIVANCE** *July 11/12 2020* with Filipa Cesar, Elizabeth Povinelli, Cadjigue Film Collective and Karabing Collective at IBAP – Institute for Biodiversity and Protected Areas, Bubaque Island, Guinea-Bissau
- #7 INSTITUTING** *September 17/19 2020* with Fred Moten and Stephano Harney at Eight Collective Athens in cooperation with Goethe Institut Athens, Greece
- #8 COMMUNITY-BUILDING** *December 3/5 2020* with Chantal Mouffe, Richard Sennett and Gerardo Mosquera at INSTAR—Instituto de Artivismo Hannah Arendt, founded by artist Tania Bruguera, Havana, Cuba
- #9 HEALING** *February 2021* with Chimurenga Collective and others at RAW Material Company, Dakar, Senegal
- #10 WEAVING** *May 6/7 2021* at Redes da Maré in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- #11 COMMONING** *September 16/17 2021* at HKW Berlin, Germany

**Alphabet School Editorial Committee:**

Mahmoud al-Shaer & Ibrahim Hannon, Gigi Argyropoulou, Rahul Gudipudi

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# "Everyone is just watching what's happening..."

A collaborative exercise by Sascia Bailer, Lucy Bayley, Simon Fleury, Gilly Karjevsky, and Asli Uludag to reflect upon our shared experiences at *Un-Learning Place* at Haus der Kulturen der Welt

This text results from a collaborative experiment undertaken by five people who met in the "Spaces of Theory" track at HKW's *(Un)learning Place* (January 2019). We were around twenty international practitioners in our track (there were five tracks with different foci). Our track involved the Director of HKW, Bernd Scherer, and artist Gigi Argyropoulou and comprised a two-day workshop with diffrakt | centre for theoretical periphery, a two-day workshop with Raumlabor, and a workshop by Soft Agency (Rosario Talevi, Gilly Karjevsky) with their guests Elke Krasny and Hannah Wallenfels.

On returning home we were looking for a way we could reflect on the conversations, gaps, conflicts, and potential for collaborations we encountered at this workshop. We felt the best method would be one where we write conversationally, mirroring our interactions at HKW. Five of us met on a shared Google doc, and for one hour we responded to a series of questions and to each other. At the start, we collectively eliminated individual authorship, so the voices and different experiences became blurred. These were the rules of the exercise:

– A text written by someone could only be deleted by the same person, but someone could add onto a text by another person. Adding on wasn't limited to adding to the end of the sentence but included adding words within the structure of the sentence. This way, the resulting piece of writing became an irregular weave (or perhaps a felt) of all participants' words.

– Similarly, moving portions of sentences elsewhere and copy-pasting became forms of co-writing/co-editing and were welcome. When moving parts of sentences, we paid attention to the portion that was being selected so we would not lose the use or meaning of the original

sentence. We also paid attention to what was left behind, as it might still convey meaning on its own.

– If a person felt strongly about an edit made to their piece of writing, it could be addressed and negotiated through comments, but it was preferred that these moments be negotiated through the writing exercise itself as much as possible.

– Throughout, we kept in mind that the purpose of this exercise was not to create a finished and polished piece of writing that portrayed a linear narrative. Instead, a spherical model (a thought bubble perhaps) was a way to question traditional ways of thinking, learning, and knowledge production. It might be better to call what we created there expanded writing. Perhaps it was not even meant to be read from beginning to the end. How this text performed after the hour allocated to the interaction of the participants, was it fully determined the exercise within that specific time and space?

## 9pm, Berlin time:

### **When you think back on your time at HKW, which moments come to the foreground?**

On several occasions, a child with his great-grandfather having breakfast together.

I spent a lot of time listening, which was a privilege; I'd like to listen more often. I was thinking on the time allocated in our work, paid time, real time, not stolen snippets, dedicated to reading and listening. There is an urgent need to unlearn creative work as practiced today.

Each morning, outside the cafe where I exchanged a little conversation with the great grandfather, a flock of sparrows made me smile.

The morning plenum with the images of museums of natural history from all over the place, and the questions people posed on the back of the images was a very strong moment of reflection. Formats of shared writing, shared silent production are the ones that stayed with me the most I guess, moments of movement rather than discourse... Even this moment now feels closer to the purpose and idea of "unlearning" than any spoken conversation we could have had—are we seeing the death of speech?

I'm finding the pace of this interesting; it feels as though now and then we each think, then come back into the conversation. There would be a formality and pressure in a typical meeting, on Skype for example—so performative.

I agree, it seems like everyone stopped typing now. Everyone is just watching what's happening. Weird but exciting and fun at the same time. It's making me laugh!

When I'm stuck, I search for you guys, scrolling up and down the page. Tactics, dimensions rather than strategies...

BOOM!

Ha-ha. this is my favorite part so far, I'm in a bar, people are wondering why I'm typing and laughing. I can hear a sewing machine in the room adjacent... My child fell asleep ten minutes before our session started, I poured myself a glass of red wine—and there is ABSOLUTE silence. No noise from outside, no noise from inside. Except for my fingers on the keyboard. BOOM!

### **Which conversations, encounters resonated most with you?**

A confrontation between host and participant got out of hand... a fellow participant intervened, opening just enough space for reflection (a gap), that diffused the tense and unnecessary encounter. This moment resonated through that track; I didn't see it but heard a lot about it. The woman who intervened talked about the emotional labor behind that act, how much it cost her, how much it took from others. It also brought people together. In the tight schedule we had, there were no slots for conflicts. The unlearning place was not

supposed to be agonistic, but it was very conflicted. It's even possible to say goodnight to my daughter, as the conversation slows!

I was very pleased to be allowed to see another track every day. I was lucky because the groups were so different and had such different processes. It was a fantastic polyphony as long as I need not reduce it to conclusions :) Perhaps even reductively what learning is—and what unlearning tries to fight. Fresh air really helps.

The exercise "silent conversation" was fascinating. It seemed to arrive at just the right moment. As a group, we started out sharing (in a formal and institutionalized way) our reasons for coming. We then kept on returning to this debate around how to conduct the discussion. Should it be structured, do we return to questions and outputs, or should we allow discussion to grow organically. I keep thinking about this challenge within the group—it seems to be fundamental—that some were resistant to the ideas of outputs and productivity, but that you need both. On the third and fourth days, and when "care" became a focus, there was an expansion that allowed for both kinds of approaches.

I really took a lot (learnt) from the body/movement practices (qi gong and fun movement exercises), learning and play, learning and playing with care. It reflected on the missing sensual components of "institutional" knowledge production, particularly when being hosted by an institution that is working according to categories and disciplines defined a long time ago, with different ideologies and conditions—having otherwise forms of knowing, sensing was important. I'm trying to say it was eventually central to the unlearning thing—maybe someone can help rephrase here?

Perhaps watching the skills people have for holding, caring for, and building conversations. I've never really encountered that patience, without an added element of competition. I watched it on the last day when we did our plenum; we spread out flip charts with questions, and people gravitated towards questions they wanted to respond to—both people in the workshop and people just wandering in. The confrontation mentioned above was held and discussed in a way that worked, because there was a kind of patience and generosity.

I felt I learnt more about the labor people undertake.

Creating spaces of "care" became a subject I keep coming back to. And perhaps we (almost?) failed at HKW because of the tension we keep mentioning here. There were people who felt taken advantage of in the larger group and the tension kept building until the last day. I guess I said "we" failed because we were all sharing that space even though HKW created it, so I do feel that there could have been a collective effort to resolve it.

**Which gaps did you discover, and did you consider them in another context outside of HKW as well? (as something you kept on coming back to)**

I've discovered these gaps since I've returned; coming back to work. There are constant gaps and invisibilities in what we do, but there are also purposeful gaps. There are gaps created in the way we talk about things, we often describe things in a way that ensures our meaning isn't clear, that it remains indeterminate. I feel like this is an example of how an institutional process can allow for a little wiggle room?

Yes, more space for playfulness...and not knowing.

I have been thinking a lot about gaps since HKW. Gaps in knowledge, gaps in understanding, gaps in policy. These are moments of interruption to something that might be considered "a whole." These are moments that can be used productively. Blurriness and gaps are what we need. Also holding things open, blurring can often lead to collapse, whereas tension—as we learnt in the qi gong exercises—is about creating space by opening... articulation...

These can be utilized in resistance. These are entry points into a space where one might not be allowed to enter. They are doorways in some sense. Someone wrote about the reader below and how rigid it was and that it allowed no access point for the participants of the *Unlearning Space*. This is exactly what I am talking about.

Several weeks after returning to work, I found one of Gilly's provocations positioned on a packing crate outside the museum's research department door. It stayed there for about a week and then was gone... it could have been folded and hidden, somewhere in the institution's fabric, but not the intended place of intervention! I learn that often our intentions are worth unlearning...

**Which questions remained unresolved?**

"I feel great discomfort regarding the translation of theories, common practices and forms of interaction between an urban and a rural setting, an academic and everyday setting. How do I metaphorically understand the environment to which I am foreign? How do I grasp the conditions of life in the site of intervention? How can I make my concepts and visions 'intelligible' without imposing them? How can we establish a common alphabet with which to construct a language of mutual understanding, support and care? How do we unlearn the place from which we are speaking to create a more respectful, socially fair platform of interaction?"

I drafted these questions in my application for the HKW *(Un-)Learning Place*, and I still consider them very relevant and somehow unresolved. I felt that we touched upon some of these aspects, but I missed an in-depth conversation on these issues. It turns out, though, that in retrospect I connected with many people from the workshops who had similar questions, and I hope we can continue to work on them together.

"Can we ever really dismantle the master's house (that we ourselves inhabit)?" Diffrakt asked us to respond to this question on our second day, do you remember? Did we answer it?

Coming back to work after being with all of you, I keep trying to pose it in meetings. I bought Audre Lorde's book *(The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House)* and propped it up on my shelf. I feel—for me—this is unanswered: *tactics, dimensions rather than strategies... revision is an on-going process of (un) doing, so tired of the artist/curator axis of institutional critique... perhaps we could discuss other approaches?*

I bought Audre Lorde's book. But as a gift to a friend of mine, who works on feminist activism, and I wanted to share this lovely conversation we had on the master's house. She didn't know her work. We sat on the couch, and I read a passage to her. But it didn't click with her the same way it had for us in the group. She said she needed more time to read it and possibly translate some passages. This again just speaks to the special atmosphere that was going on during that day. And I think the breakout groups were inspirational and will stay with me for a while.



**What did you learn about unlearning?  
Would you say you un-learned something?**

That un-learning is a process... we should undertake it with care, but not so much care it's smothered, that we have much to learn from listening to others, ourselves as others, included...

I keep coming back to wondering whether unlearning can be done by an institution like HKW.

I think the approach of the institution here is very important. I am very curious how HKW will make use of what we did there, for instance. Bringing other forms of knowledge into the space of the institution is one thing; internalizing that knowledge is another. I'm thinking about the dynamic between the institution and the participants of the workshop. Were we all invited there to create new conversations amongst ourselves? Will the institution use our conversations in the coming months? Or are we responsible for keeping this dialogue going? Did the institution only provide us with a space to start these conversations? I think this is where I'm having trouble understanding what happened during the workshop. Is the institution only a resource or does it itself produce something? Should it?

**What were your thoughts on the format itself?**

The format itself took getting used to. Our group, "Spaces of Theory," was lucky to have a space that wasn't HKW (we visited Diffraakt on the second day). I think the day we spent there was precious for us to bond as a group, outside the institution of HKW.

This makes me think about the role of the institution in creating spaces of knowledge production. Something Rosario mentioned comes to mind, that it is important to work both inside and outside.

I didn't feel the same anxiety about institutions as others did in the workshops, but I have to agree that leaving the open space of the lobby at HKW had something unique to it and fostered a much more intimate and productive conversation. I am not sure whether it is an institutional aspect or a matter of a spatial arrangement (more private space, less noise, warmer lighting, cozy atmosphere).

The atmosphere in the grand hall was intense... we went for a walk ( five of us, if I remember correctly), we talked,

looked at fungi, and realized how little we knew about them, but learnt a little more about each other. I think the intense atmosphere was in part because of the strip lighting.

I remember the walk; it was a moment of escape, mushroom roots, pointing at things and getting to know each other. It's funny, the conversations I had on the walk are clearer than other conversations over the week...

It was easier to ask people about their lives.

Walking alongside each other opens a very interesting space for exchange.

It was raining (lightly) and at one point we had a destination, but that goal fell away.

**Was there anything that upset you—and if so, how do you feel it connects to a collective process of unlearning?**

There were tensions within the different groups, angry chain emails sent, strong accusations were voiced during plenum sessions, e.g. when someone took the mic from somebody else and said the Berlin crowd was colonizing the microphone. Critical comments were made about the set-up. For me, it felt disrespectful—and also very naïve. Someone said in a conversation over breakfast: "The call for applications was so interesting—it was envisioning a kind of utopia. But these workshops are very much planned and not utopic at all." I have to say, at one point I left the conversation because there was no way we could agree. One cannot expect that an institution delivers your utopia on a silver plate. This is nonsensical. The expectations that were there were beyond workable. And I believe they stem from the collective frustration of a) not understanding what un-learning might mean, and b) not having succeeded in un-learning within those five days.

I would argue that at the core of the frustration lies the relevance of the issue at stake, the relevance of collectively investigating what unlearning might mean. Without projecting the whole workload onto an institution. But making our experience within the institution productive; using our critique as a starting point of unlearning....

I think it's important to realize that we as a group worked well together. Everyone was very respectful; there was a sense of a collective which is very difficult to achieve in such a short time. I'd like to comment on what we experienced in our group concerning facilitation. I think both our facilitators (Raumlabor and Diffraakt) did a great job in creating a space of blurry borders (within

the structure HKW created)—which is difficult to do. I did not feel that there was a hierarchy between our facilitators and us. They were trying to learn as much from us as we were from them. None of the presentations were in a "lecture" format. It was more about sharing experiences and directing conversations according to the needs of the group.

I agree with you—but I think a respectful language is necessary. It's counterproductive to speak of un-learning and collaborative exercises with a social justice focus when you can't even stay respectful on a basic level.

I agree with this. It also makes me think perhaps HKW didn't expect a conflict and was passive in reacting to what was going on. It seemed like they turned to us and expected us to resolve the situation amongst ourselves.

I've been thinking about how conflict can be useful, but how it can also be redundant. I feel as though it's about having the skills or generosity to enable a difference of opinion but with space for commonality. Perhaps, one thing about our track was the ability to find common ground—particularly through the interventions.

In the answer to the previous question of the walk, I truly believe that movement creates a space of negotiation. It creates a commonality of some sorts. Language can be very restricting and, because it is the way we communicate with each other, it has very strict borders hard to break. These borders have made a mark on our tongues. Movement can be more experimental. I guess I'm saying language is harder to unlearn when compared to movement.

### **I want to discuss the reader of the Unlearning Place.**

I remember how heavily it bore on a lot of the participants; they kept referring to it—it was such a finished product, such a statement of intention. In conversations with Olga and Boris, the curators, they thought of it as a starting point but for many people it acted as the whole framework and as an impenetrable object of thought or knowledge. In another conversation with a guest, a fellow curator, we discussed the difference between making programs, making books, curating research, and curating practice. And I felt that the "unlearning" part of the school did not benefit from the reader as much as the institution did—what are your thoughts on this point?

I share this idea of the reader being this weight of knowledge. I felt this before I arrived; I tried to read as much as I could manage and felt inadequate not already having this knowledge already in hand. It seemed counter-productive to be required to have this theoretical understanding in a space for unlearning. But since then, I've used it and referred to it regularly as a kind of archive. I've shared it with people who didn't attend. I wonder, is it something we could have shaped together in the tracks?

I agree that we could have produced something like the reader within our workshops, but then again it compresses the time we had—and puts the pressure of producing something ordinary, namely a book. And I think within the context of unlearning, it's more useful to provide a basis for common discussion than to ask for a joint publication as the result of a very open conversation...

I didn't have an issue with the reader. I felt it gave me a glimpse of the body of work, research, and conversations that went into producing this event. The readings were fragments; they included personal notes and sketches. For me, this was more of a playful introduction into the field, setting the ground for a very diverse audience from very different academic and cultural backgrounds. For me, the reader was not a pre-defined thing that limited my capacities within the program. It was more of a "service" to us as participants, to research, read, and get inspired.

### **Another question comes to my mind as we type: How does this creative, experimental exercise fit into a rigid logic of a curatorial magazine?**

Here again, we face structural limitations, in terms of space that we are allowed to take up, but also somehow the expectations to produce something "serious" and respectable, which can serve within a privileged art context. I think we are so caught up within structural frameworks—which we have internalized so completely that we constantly self-regulate ourselves, that we comply with the structures and do not dare to re-imagine other ways (for example, other ways of publishing within a curatorial context). That processes of unlearning still should look like all other processes of learning, e.g. like objective, peer-reviewed scientific work. But isn't this collaborative work also peer-reviewed? It obscures authorship, and the content comes to the foreground.

The experience of writing this therefore becomes much more important than the reputation one might get from publishing within a respected journal. For it directly ties me to the questions of Un-Learning, which we encountered at HKW.

If what ends up going to the magazine is a page of Google doc tag BOOM BOOM I don't mind so much... to follow up on the above comment—it is up to us to redefine what we produce, not to wait for the framework to give us more freedom. I agree it is one of the biggest lessons of the HKW week—let us extitution<sup>1</sup> ourselves!

### Notes

**I** André Spicer, "Extitutions: The other side of institutions," in *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization*. (<http://www.ephemerajournal.org/contribution/extitutions-other-side-institutions>).

**Sascia Bailer** is an interdisciplinary researcher at the intersection of curating, critical urbanism, and social justice. She is Artistic Director (2019-2020) at the contemporary art space M.1 Arthur-Boskamp-Stiftung and a PhD candidate in the PhD in Practice in Curating at the Zurich University of the Arts and the University of Reading. Both in her PhD and her curatorial work, she focuses on issues around care-work, aiming to connect, support and provide visibility for the often unpaid and unrecognized care-work within our society (<https://www.m1-hohenlockstedt.de/en/>). She has worked internationally in different cultural institutions (MoMA PS1, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Kunststiftung Baden-Württemberg) while also developing her own curatorial projects ("URGENCIA TERRITORIAL" at the Sheila Johnson Design Center in NYC <https://shiftingurbanecologiesblog.wordpress.com>). She holds an MA in Theories of Urban Practice from Parsons School of Design and a BA from Zeppelin University in Germany; she is the recipient of several awards and grants, amongst them a fellowship by the German Academic Merit Foundation (2009-2017), a student fellowship for Art and Social Justice by the Vera List Center for Arts and Politics (2014-2016) and a doctoral studentship by the British Arts and Humanities Research Council (2018 onwards). She lives in Germany with her son.

**Lucy Bayley** is a writer, researcher, and lecturer. From 2007 to 2013, she was Curator of National Programmes at the Contemporary Art Society; prior to that she worked in London galleries: The Drawing Room, The Serpentine, Matt's Gallery, and Peer Gallery. She holds MRes from the London Consortium and was recently awarded her doctorate for the thesis *Mediating Histories: an exploration of audiences and technology in London's Institute of Contemporary Arts (1949-1986)*. Lucy is currently Post-Doctoral Researcher at Tate working on the Andrew W. Mellon-funded *Reshaping the Collectible: When Artworks Live in Museums* where she is engaged in research into artworks which challenge the structures of the museum. Lucy has lectured at Middlesex University, London Metropolitan University and is a Sessional Tutor at Sotheby's Institute.

**Simon Fleury** is a senior conservator at the V&A, currently responsible for the conservation and care of the Museum's photograph collections. This wide-ranging role is underpinned by a background in photography, which has included extensive commercial experience, postgraduate study at the Royal College of Art, and an ongoing research-led practice. Simon is also actively involved in promoting conservation-centered arts projects at the V&A. This has included organizing and chairing a recent roundtable discussion exploring the emerging field of "experimental preservation" (featured in the publication, *Experimental Preservation*, ed. Jorge Otero-Pailos, Lars Müller Press, 2016) and a project with the artist Marie Lund and several paper conservators. Fleury's research-led practice fabricates new museum(-objects) with which to explore and test the intimate entangling relations between artworks and their environments in the museum. This research is the basis of a PhD study at Birmingham School of Art and Design (M3C AHRC).

**Gilly Karjevsky** is a curator working at the intersection of art, architecture, and the politics of urban society. Gilly is founder of the City Artists Residency program, a platform for artistic intervention in local politics. She currently serves on the international artistic boards of Visible—the international prize for social practice from Fondazione Pistoletto, ArtCube—a municipal studios residency program in Jerusalem, and the residency program at the ZK/U - Centre for Art and Urbanism in Berlin. In 2016, she curated the newest edition of the

Parckdesign biennale in Brussels under the title *Jardin Essentiel*, and in 2013-15 she co-curated *Glocal Neighbours*—an ongoing program for inter-neighborhood knowledge exchange, in collaboration with the Israeli Center for Digital Art. Her newest project, *Playful Commons*, sets out to explore what kind of licenses administrators and users of public spaces can agree on when it comes to allowing a commons approach towards management of public space. Gilly holds an MA in Narrative Environments from Central Saint Martins college in London.

**Asli Uludag** creates interactive and performative installations based on research. She received her BFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2013 and is currently pursuing an MA in Research Architecture at Goldsmiths University, London. Her work has been exhibited at the Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art and the Pera Museum.

My process starts with research, through which I find images that relate to the political or social conflict, geography or culture that I am working with. Architectural concepts or components make up a large portion of my research since it is how we define space and land. Folktales, beliefs, processes of making, materials used, crops grown, in short anything that is specific to the culture I'm exploring is relevant to my research. By repeating, layering, or geometrically modifying these images, I create patterns that I cut, cast, stitch, etc., in materials that are also related to the concept. The pieces I create tell a narrative, each component symbolic and its own sentence; much like how cultures are identified and history is recorded, through stories and myths."

# Jeanne van Heeswijk

## Interview by Ronny Koren

**Ronny Koren:** In 2014, you initiated Philadelphia Assembled, a show that brought urban settings together with museum spaces. Over a few years of work, you helped create new communities and came to be involved with existing ones. Can you tell me about what happened there?

**Jeanne van Heeswijk:** I am now working on developing a curriculum of community learning, and I look back at the work I did at “Philadelphia Assembled.”<sup>1</sup> What I’ve noticed in Philadelphia Assembled is that while working so intensively around some of the notions of figuring out ways and modes of methodologies of how can we learn from each other, and what are the ways in which we can create exercises of collective care, I talked a lot about this idea of imagination, as a collective exercise of care. How do we build an imagination of how we wish to live together? Not in a pedagogical, school-like way but in terms of specific training. Philadelphia Assembled was a way of starting to think of the “Training for the Not Yet.”<sup>2</sup> I’m thinking of the Not Yet training today—is there a way as a community we can learn from each other and can help ourselves be prepared for the future?

One of the principle things I started doing was what is called “Deep and Radical Listening.” The subjects we listened to varied. For instance, we listen in to a place. How do you do that? How to listen to the acts of life, acts of resistance, and acts of resilience that reside in a place. What is the process of Deep Listening, for instance? What are the questions that need to be asked?

One of the other things that happened is that we brought these working groups together in Philadelphia Assembled.<sup>3</sup> On what premises can these working groups start figuring out a form of common ground, a sort of commonality? How can processes of solidarity be built, even in small groups? What do we need for that to happen? You can say that training for the Not Yet, is also a deeper questioning of these processes of community resistance. It’s almost like backtracking, thinking in a non-linear way about what happened, what we learned and what we didn’t.

**RK:** How do you use it in a transferable way? You mentioned that you are focusing on gathering lessons. But every community is different.





The screenshot shows the Philadelphia Assembled (PHLA) website. At the top left is the PHLA logo with the tagline 'Philadelphia Assembled'. Navigation links include 'futures', 'reconstructions', 'sovereignty', 'sanctuary', 'movement', 'blog', 'network', 'map', 'index', and 'events'. A search bar and 'resources' link are on the right. Below the header, there are several sections: 'publications & resources' featuring a graphic with the text 'rise claim root care move'; 'PHLA City Panorama' which includes a map of Philadelphia with various icons and a 'Blog about events' link; and 'social media' featuring two posts from 'PHL Assembled' with dates and times.

**JVH:** What I use as an example is the Sanctuary working group, which was very interesting, at Philadelphia Assembled.<sup>4</sup> They were a group of people in the space who figured out very quickly that they did not have the same understanding of Sanctuary, even though they reside in the same city and there is an idea of what a safe space might be, they all have different modes of operation within that, and they very quickly decided to change the name of the working group into “Towards Sanctuary,” investigating what is need to be done towards that. This group created a Sanctuary Stewardship. They went to each other’s work space and organizations, looking into groups and their dynamics of finding a safe space, before thinking about how to find things in common, or share solidarity. In that group, it became very clear that not everybody can be in solidarity with each other. There are fundamental differences. It might be a call to postpone the idea of looking for solidarity, or what people have in common, but first train towards it, ask each community—how do you do it? It’s about what we learn: what are the acts of resistance and acts of life, how do people create space in which they can imagine forms of inhabiting a collective future? Training for the Not Yet, for me, is really about how do we, as a society, train ourselves for a collective future, when we do not know the collective yet? How can we talk about a future without knowing first who we are?

**RK:** Why does a person have to change and put up a new attitude in order to fit a certain community? What is wrong with what we currently have?

**JVH:** I don’t think a person needs to change. This fundamental understanding, based on Maria Garces’ text on letting go of your subject position—to understand that, in my opinion, you are in a world in which there are many subject positions at this moment.<sup>5</sup> And there is also a lot of systematic oppression. So, in order to imagine a possibility of being together otherwise, we need to be able to let go of our own understanding of what it is that creates relationality.

**RK:** It’s very interesting, something I would like to train for. However, it sounds very difficult.

**JVH:** It is very hard, and sometimes very joyous, too. It is hard to explain it as well. It requires me to be in a different mode of operating. What I know, I know through practice.

Thinking back on what happened in Philadelphia, is looking back at ways in which communities in the making, or groups that come together also check in with each other. The Sanctuary group realized that there is a fundamental understanding of what providing a safe space really meant. However, people might have been more aligned politically, but there were underlying differences. The group talked a lot about intersections of safe space, but what does it really mean? How do you hold that in a group that is not homogenous, or in a territory that is fractionated?

This idea of letting go of one's own subjectivity is also thinking in line with Hannah Arendt, when she talks of the battlefields of publicness, in which we as persona also have to place ourselves in this public space, in relation to each other, and in that relationship create that in-between space in which we can operate civic resistance or civic imaginaries.<sup>6</sup> If you think about it like that, then the concern is not only on how do we in one way become a public persona, but also how do we put our subject position at risk in public in order to create new forms of togetherness? This is a fundamental question. At the same time, it's a question of who can afford that. If we then think on a larger scale, there are bodies that cannot afford that risk, that their subject position has been denied forever. How can we create spaces where people can slowly figure that out?

**RK:** In your text, you mentioned a new meaning: "collective as an activity." All of a sudden, you are attributing action to this formed idea, transferring it into the realms of a verb, describing an action. Coming from the Middle East myself, values disrupt, draw extremists to act. It can be an explosive subject, loaded with military references. And I am wondering, what are the limits of such activity?

**JVH:** It is not for nothing that I talk about training. Honestly, I think one of the things is to not control it. To let it get out of hand. This is exactly one of the difficult things in thinking about the Not Yet. How do we train to be together, otherwise, without shared value sets?

**RK:** How do we do that?

**JVH:** I don't know, but that's what I think we need to start training for. Start processes of learning from each other's slight bits of tactics. It's almost like training a muscle we don't know we have. It makes us think differently about our subject position, relationality, territory. That, I feel, is very important, creating emergence but establishing a new root system at the same time.

Some of the methodologies created at Philadelphia Assembled echoed in a lot of places in the world. How do you create a land equity, food sovereignty, safe spaces? These are questions that are being asked everywhere. But I'm a believer, I think that small groups that are being netted well can have power at large scales. I wonder, how do we re-root ourselves differently, in our small ways of creating new ways of life?

And this is something I still don't know—I am a fellow at BAK for Non-Fascist Living.<sup>7</sup> Fascism at the moment has a metanarrative; the left is known to be too fractured. Is the answer only another metanarrative, or is there actually a different way for us to move our understanding forward? I don't know. This is what I feel like I still need to figure out.

**RK:** Is that in a way a political act?

**JVH:** It's a question that a lot of people ask, if I am still an artist or am I in politics now.





**RK:** How do you answer that?

**JVH:** I think that the possibility of imagining an option of collectively being together in a different way is very important. It's beside the political, economic, social. It is the cultural and the imaginative that are at stake. With somebody like Walidah Imarisha, who says that the decolonization of the imagination is the most dangerous and subversive decolonization process of all.<sup>8</sup> She says that when the imagination is unshackled, liberation is limitless. So, this idea that the possibility of imagining in the place where you are, and to be able to do that by building new forms of collectivity, are in great danger at the moment. And we must do that. I think that working on the imagination and forming it into bodily experiences, which could lead to a collective exercise of care, of imagining a being-together otherwise, and I think it's extremely important. Working through the imagination is a very political act. It's more than telling different stories; it's about relating civic imaginaries that we can collectively inhabit.

**RK:** This is such a beautiful notion. We need it, in our society.

**JVH:** What I learned in Philadelphia Assembled, the way I set it up, was already an attempt to look through

my practice. To check what kind of methodologies, what kind of simple things we need to unpack.

**RK:** Like what?

**JVH:** For instance, the politics of relation. What is the idea of belonging? What are the simple exercises in looking at that—for instance, a group like the Alumni Ex-Offenders Association (AEA), who had deep check-ins with each other.<sup>9</sup> Bi-weekly, in a group, they ask themselves questions regarding being in a community. What is it like, how does it feel, how to reconcile with that. Do you ever ask yourself that? I learned that it's an interesting question to ask a group of people.

In the Sanctuary curriculum, there were questions about timelines, movements of literacy, about self-help questions, which is a very '70s term. All formed important and complex questions regarding one's subject position of potential privileges.

**RK:** It reminds me of a quote from Joseph Albers, the first head of teaching at Black Mountain College: "We do not always create 'works of art,' but rather experiments; it is not our intention to fill museums: we are gathering experience."<sup>10</sup> How do you feel about that, regarding your own work?



**JVH:** I think that it's not all about works of art, but something that works as art. To see the artwork in itself also as a verb. Less as an experience, but more of something that could actually activate the register of art, of the imaginary, of the relation of aesthetics.

And this is where I think of Black Mountain College—so much experimentation with forms of art and forms of imagining possible situations, practicing other inhabitations of soundscapes. These are all ways of practicing being together, otherwise, practicing and forming what a school like that would look like. When I think about Black Mountain College, which experienced a lot with systems of scores, then I think to myself, what can be the scores of future survival?

I am currently focusing on transforming existing artworks into learning objects, and that is exactly that. I am looking into the results of what was created during my projects, like Philadelphia Assembled, not as art objects but as something that works as art. And if anything could be activated or reactivated within different things. I am investigating if there are objects, tools, or methodologies that within that framework could re-practiced.

**RK:** What do you mean by that? Is it like the essence of craft making?

**JVH:** For example, in Philadelphia Assembled, this dome-space was created. It's not really an artwork, nor an artifact. But it is an object that was created in which a lot of the things learned around the Sanctuary Curriculum manifested itself. What I am trying to figure out is whether this space, which by now carries specific meaning and lessons, can be reactivated, or is it just a tent structure? I do not know, but I am asking myself these questions—if the object can be addressed again and receive a different meaning. Whether the object can be re-used, re-interpreted, re-contextualized.

**RK:** So, there's a difference between a work of art, and something that works as art.

**JVH:** Yes. It's a question I am looking into, I still don't know. I'm thinking, if there's an option also to un-art a work, these are the mind games I am playing with at the moment. There are a few objects in my work that are in collections, so can I un-object them, and make of them something again that works as art? I don't know.

**RK:** There are interesting similarities between your work and BMC. BMC was very much established upon the thinking of John Dewey, and the sense of teaching and democracy, and how we can combine them. You are attributing so many things to art that collide with essence of democracy as well.

You also work from an institution. Why do you work from there? What does art give your practice that other places won't?

**JVH:** I'm not always working within art institutions. There are other things, like the Afrikaanderwijk Cooperative, or other self-initiated projects.<sup>11</sup> But I do think that it is important to think about the fact that these art spaces, although they sometimes have a very colonial legacy, are also still spaces in which some of this discussion can be held. I still see them as part of civic spaces, of public spaces, if you want.

**RK:** But why is it part of the art imaginary?

**JVH:** I make a very big distinction between participation and co-creation. When I think about the Training for the Not Yet, I think of how we could create a co-creation of the future, otherwise, rather than just participating in certain things. So, co-creation is fundamentally thinking about the structure of participation. It's not just participating in a certain framework as a democracy, but how do we fundamentally think about it otherwise.

**RK:** Black Mountain College's foremost objection was being educated without hierarchies, in a tense hermetic environment solely concentrating on artistic practice surrounded by beautiful mountains while focusing on creation. Do you also have a materialistic goal?

**JVH:** I think that my focus is to create that space for creativity, very much like they did in Black Mountain College. To create a space, like the sanctuary for different forms of thought, and for other ways of creating collectivity and being together that is extended outside, so it's not the privilege of a few. I am very interested in the way BMC thought of creativity. The way they fostered it in a way that it can thrive. We have to extend that into society. We have to find spaces in which we can all imagine our future otherwise. Because I am believer—it's of utmost importance to our survival to do so.

**RK:** The college closed down after twenty-five years of freedom. It could not hold on any longer, and was never re-constructed mainly due to the financial crisis. What happens after you finish a project—how do you leave behind your work in communities?

**JVH:** I think that what is important with these things is that they get a light of their own. They become what they are. I stay sometimes involved in the distance, more of a member of the community rather than an active participant, an ally, a stranger visiting. If you think about Homebaked in Liverpool, the project that became its own entity—the bakery became an interesting and well running cooperative business. These ideas of cooperative business and cooperative economies are always a thread through my work.<sup>12</sup> How can we find ways to sustain things financially, and not be dependent on grants and stuff like that. The bakery bakes bread and sells it, and this is also how they survive.

Now, they are also building houses. There is money from the housing ministry for building the houses. That is not because of the art, but because of the houses, so there is a mix of funding that is not only art-related, because not all outcomes are artworks. So, the bread works as art, but it is not an art object. It is the vehicle that sparked the imagination, and it temporarily embodied designers of that community to take matters into their own hands. It became the transferral of that. The bakery started a new civic imaginary of that place, in itself. I am still on the board; I am interested in the housing struggle. And lately I was back since they started building houses, and I was back at the bakery, and Angela, who was very involved from the very beginning as a member of the community, showed me that inside the bakery, she created in a corner of their toilet a wall of fame for the area of Anfield and Breckfield in Liverpool. Among the paraphernalia and black-and-white images of the Liverpool football club, there was a photo of me from the very early days of the bakery. There I am, apparently, a part of the historical paraphernalia of the area, not only of the bakery. Then I am, apparently, a person that has been very much a part of the formation of thinking in the area, but I am not an active member, I am a ghost on the wall. It's interesting. First, it made me cry, but it was also interesting to think about it.

Yes, I am still involved. This is why when I talk about the local, I don't actually talk about a specific territory. The local to me is also a place in which we see ourselves and our relationship with the world. You can be local in many ways, because you live there, work there, share

certain trajectories or maybe you share futures. So, it's also about understanding the non-linearity of the local. Because it's always a question I get: "Are you from there?" And I do not know what it means. In many ways, I am from there, I am part of their struggle. And this is also part of the notion of territories that are fractured. How do we think of what we share in common, and how do we move forward? Why is the bakery such a good connection then? I think we still don't do enough in closely reading communities' resistance or acts of life.

**RK:** Some of the things that happened at BMC were not expected in the free atmosphere of the school. New forms of art emerged, such as the Happening, the collaboration between Cage and Rauschenberg in '52.<sup>13</sup> How do you manage the unexpected?

**JVH:** I do think we need to work towards it. I think that working towards being together, training for that, can create new forms. What happened at BMC, the formation of a new style, is exactly that. Letting new forms emerge. I think we are in a time that a lot of these important shifts are also happening, in how to understand ways of life.

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## Notes

**1** In 2014, van Heeswijk initiated a show at the Philadelphia Art Museum, together with a collaborative team of artists, makers, storytellers, gardeners, healers, activists, museum staff, and community members. Philadelphia Assembled explores social issues that resonate in "The City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection." Within this project, these urgent concerns are organized around five principles, or what van Heeswijk terms "atmospheres": Reconstructions, Sovereignty, Futures, Sanctuary, and Movement. The subject of each atmosphere was derived from the artist's preliminary conversations with people throughout Philadelphia about the city and its character. See [http://jeannetworks.net/projects/philadelphia\\_Assembled/](http://jeannetworks.net/projects/philadelphia_Assembled/)

**2** "Training for the Not Yet" is van Heeswijk's idea regarding the importance of initiating new ways of thinking together, as a community, through specific training. Her text is available at the following link: [http://jeannetworks.net/files/esy/i\\_0025/JW\\_2016\\_SlowReader\\_PreparingForTheNonYet.pdf](http://jeannetworks.net/files/esy/i_0025/JW_2016_SlowReader_PreparingForTheNonYet.pdf)

**3** Artists, makers, storytellers, gardeners, healers, activists, museum staff, and community members.

**4** As part of Philadelphia Assembled, van Heeswijk initiated the formation of a group called Sanctuary. The



sanctuary activities in the city of Philadelphia in 2017 sought to embody a dynamic understanding of sanctuary that expressed various models of self-care, asylum, and refuge. See <http://phlAssembled.net/sanctuary/all/>.

**5** Marina Garcés, “Honesty with the Real,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 4:1 (2012), DOI: 10.3402/jac.v4i0.18820.

**6** Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition: Second Edition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

**7** Over the next four years, basis voor actuele kunst’s current long-term program *Propositions for Non-Fascist Living* (2017–2020) is prompted by the dramatic resurfacing and normalization of historical and contemporary fascisms in our present, and advocates art as imagining and enacting ways of “being together otherwise.” Beside its public programs, BAK hosts a fellowship program and the online publication platform *Basics*. See <https://www.bakonline.org/long-term-project/propositions-for-non-fascist-living/>.

**8** Walida Imarisha, “Rewriting the Future: Using Science Fiction To Re-Envision Justice,” February 11, 2015, accessed April 2, 2019, <http://www.walidah.com/blog/2015/2/11/rewriting-the-future-using-science-fiction-to-re-envision-justice>.

**9** Re-entering group participating at Philadelphia Assembled. Individuals participated in the co-production of a new justice paradigm, free from the chains of the “prison industrial complex.” See [http://phlassembled.net/reconstructions/index/freedom\\_in\\_a\\_carceral\\_state/](http://phlassembled.net/reconstructions/index/freedom_in_a_carceral_state/)

**10** <https://hammer.ucla.edu/exhibitions/2016/leap-before-you-look-black-mountain-college-1933-1957/>

**11** The Afrikaanderwijk Cooperative has been (Co) operative since 2013 and strengthens the power and qualities of Rotterdam South by investing in active inhabitants and local businesses. See [http://jeanne-networks.net/projects/afrikaanderwijk\\_cooperative/](http://jeanne-networks.net/projects/afrikaanderwijk_cooperative/).

**12** Since 2010, van Heeswijk, commissioned by the Liverpool Biennial, has been working with people from Anfield and Breckfield to rethink the future of their neighborhood. Among their architectural projects the group have set up is Homebaked Community Land Trust—a cooperative organization, in order to enable the collective community to have ownership of the properties, and a cooperative business to reopen the bakery as a social enterprise.

**13** Mary Emma Harris, “John Cage at Black Mountain: by Mary Emma Harris A Preliminary Thinking,” *Journal of Black Mountain College Studies* 4, accessed Apr. 2, 2019, <http://www.blackmountainstudiesjournal.org/volume-iv-9-16/mary-emma-harris-john-cage-at-black-mountain-a-preliminary-thinking/>.

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**Jeanne van Heeswijk** is an artist who facilitates the creation of dynamic and diversified public spaces in order to “radicalize the local.” Her long-scale community-embedded projects question art’s autonomy by combining performative actions, discussions, and other forms of organizing and pedagogy in order to assist communities intaking control of their own futures. Her work has been featured in publications worldwide, as well as internationally renowned biennials including those in Liverpool, Shanghai, and Venice.

**Ronny Koren** is a MAS Curating student at ZHdK, based in Zurich. Her background consists of projects in the art world and in the tech landscape, where she worked for Google for 4 years. Her current research focuses on the fluctuations of the term ‘contemporary art’ in philosophy of art discourse. She holds a BA in East Asian studies and Art History from Tel Aviv University.

# Dreams of Equal Division of Toxicity

## Raqs Media Collective

The investigation of time, language, and history is central to the artistic activities of the Raqs Media Collective. Founded in 1992 by Jeebesh Bagchi (b. 1966), Monica Narula (b. 1969) and Shuddhabrata Sengupta (b. 1968), Raqs practices at the intersection of contemporary art, historical enquiry, philosophical speculation, and theory, while taking into account social and political conditions in a global context.

The point of departure for the exhibition at K21 Ständehaus, Düsseldorf (2019) is Raqs's continual fascination with time, a topic that has preoccupied the members of the group intensively ever since they began working together. In works such as "Escapement" (2009) and "Re-Run" (2013), they pose such questions as: What is time? What does it mean to measure time? And: How does time relate to space and history? Visitors will find themselves confronted with a range of time-related phenomena – from a heartbeat or pause for breath to the timing of historical episodes, all the way to eternity. Viewers are encouraged to interrogate conventional notions of the measure of time and its disciplinary function in everyday life, and to question its foundational role in the capitalist organization of labor.

The artists make language their material and medium of play. This may take the form of puns or neologisms which they integrate into the titles of their works or weave into texts. In illuminated installations such as "Lost in Search of Time" (2015) or "Revoltage" (2010), it features in the form of brightly illuminated letters arrayed in regular rhythmic patterns. Such linguistic play allows them to elicit a variety of readings, to break with fixed terms and concepts, and to subvert linear narratives. Even the collective's name is based on wordplay: "Raqs" can be traced back to a term in Islamic mysticism that refers to an ecstatic state attained by Sufi dervishes while whirling. It describes a highly concentrated and at the same time continuously active mode, which Raqs describe as "kinetic contemplation." At the same time, Raqs can stand for "Rarely Asked Questions."

With their exhibition at K21, Raqs open up a new space of possibilities, one that invites visitors to heighten their awareness of the fundamental ambivalence of this world while re-examining habitual methods, narratives, and patterns of thought.

### **Dreams of equal division of toxicity**

Our civilizational failure in dealing with toxicity, along with the radical need to develop resources of care, must be included in every conversation.

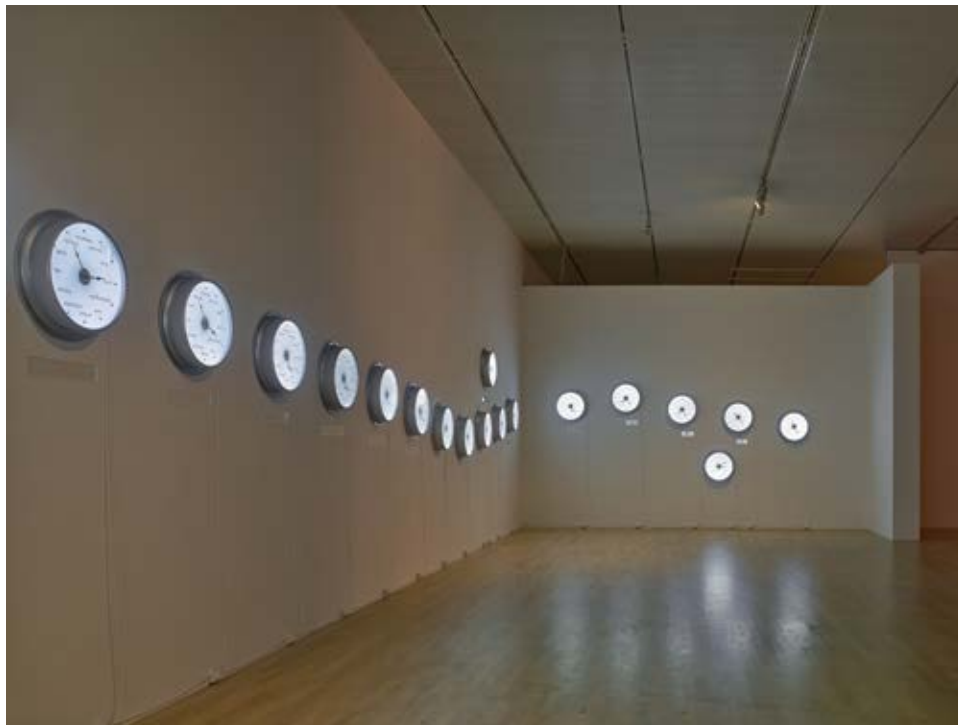
We have a friend. Bhagwati Prasad is an artist who deals in reveries and revelry. For some months now, he has been working with a sharp bamboo stylus on translucent hide, scoring some new, some invented, some premonitional, and some remembered lines. They all lead to Begumpura: a land without sorrow.

It was Ravidas, the 16th century artisan-mystic, who named and imagined this city of bliss and equality, predating most utopian visions.

The regal realm with the sorrowless name:



All images: Exhibition Raqs Media Collective Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, K21, 2018.  
Photo: Achim Kukulies.



All images: Exhibition Raqs Media Collective Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, K21, 2018.  
Photo: Achim Kukulies.

they call it Begumpura, a place with no sorrow,  
 No taxes or cares, no one owns property there,  
 No wrongdoing, worry, terror, or torture.  
 Oh my brother, I've come to take it as my own,  
 my distant home where everything is right.

The saying “the first draft of history” refers to the relevance of journalism. It reflects the motto of “today’s news is tomorrow’s history”. Raqs Media Collective refuses to see history as static and set in stone. “We regard it as a palimpsest that is permanently in flux due to overwriting, overlaying, and reinterpreting,” they say. Made in 2014, the work uses newspaper, blackboard paint, chalk.

He had declared that now, he, Ravidas, a “khalas chamar”—an untouchable leatherman who has freed himself from the shackles of hierarchy—invites all into a milieu where there are none who are second, third, or fourth in hierarchy. All are equal, each has primacy, and all roam through the palatial halls of bliss—which everyone inhabits as companions, of each other and the planet.

For Prasad, the diameter of Begumpura is vast, and its circumference porous. It encompasses oceans, forests, cities, waste, animals, tools, homo sapiens, machines. His maps are complex navigational diagrams that chart paths and currents between an expanding archipelago of many selves, many kinds of selves, the cosmos, and consciousness.

The audacity of this image comes from a paradigm of care.

In the past, Polynesians sensed the presence of islands through the flight of birds—a 9-mile island would thus have a 200-mile flight diameter. The land did not end when the water started. This sounds charming—but the moment we acknowledge expanded terrains by bringing in toxicity, fear starts to rage in the mind. Fukushima, Chernobyl, Bhopal. These are all diameters that have expanded vastly from their source. In the images of India’s south-east coast transmitted by the satellite Aura, rusty blobs of thick sulphur-dioxide-laden air show up consistently. Further down the coast, if remote-sensing thermal imagery studies were done of the groundwater, aquifers, fauna and soil, they would no doubt show carcinogenic concentrations of arsenic, iron and cadmium. Epidemiological investigations of villages downstream from a copper smelter in this region across several years show unusually high frequencies of cancer. “Copper for You, Cancer for Us,” says a poster in one of the settlements.

Gas plumes rose from the copper smelter in Thoothukudi on 23 March 2013. Five years and two months later, after another gas leak, workers, fishermen, housewives, farmers and residents from in and around the city marched to the copper factory in protest. Thirteen people were killed in police firing that day.

The predicament of being human involves the production of waste on a monumental scale. This is generally called civilization; sometimes it is simply a copper smelter. This is not a matter that can be resolved metabolically, or bio-chemically. It doesn’t just all get sublimated, recycled, or used up in some arithmetically sorted way that leaves the debit and credit sides of production, consumption, waste, want and excess all neatly squared up. Each hillock of refuse on the outskirts of a city represents a demand made by the present on the future, with no promise of recompense, until the archaeologists come calling.



Our Indic civilizational response—one could even call it profound non-thinking on the matter—has been to forever offload toxins on to designated “others”—they are meant to carry out the difficult task of keeping the biosphere clean of stench, and of the poison that arises from faecal or dead matter. In order to keep the trace of toxins away, dominant wisdom kept out of the walls of the polis all those who staked and risked their lives for cleanliness.

Hierarchies are invented and maintained so that not only the accumulation of toxic waste, but also its consequences, can be shunned and offloaded. This is not just for one generation, but for the future; through time, in perpetuity if possible. Death, disease, human and animal waste, and the residues of production—these are all things much rather not handled by those riding higher on the karmic roller coaster. This thinking is a scandal; it comes from a paradigm of fear.

We have another friend. Shveta has to visit the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Delhi, regularly for her condition of multiple myeloma, a cancer of the blood. Others who visit have various degrees of toxicity from the containment of the cancer cells in their bodies. She describes courage, love, affection, laughter, demoralization, pain, bewilderment, hope. Her oncologist always smiles, and speaks of life that has to be led with joy.

She reminds us that this is a world very close to what we all live, daily, but with much more expressed courage and application. This is not the world conjured up by the abhorrent image arrayed on every packet of cigarettes. “If the pathologies portrayed on the packet are the monstrosities that they are portrayed to be, then the people who bear them must be monsters who must in turn be shunned.”

This dive into the abhorrent image is a failure of the imagination of a culture that cannot conjure care when it wants to caution.

Why is it that fear of the toxic has become the means to police those who exercise immense compassion and courage that enables them to handle its raw danger? Why reprimand that which needs to be understood and thought with?

Kahe Raidas Khalaas Chamara,  
 Joh Hum-Sehri Su Mitu Humara  
 (Says Ravidas, the tanner now free,  
 (In this city without sorrow)  
 All are co-dwellers, friends.)

It is not a surprise that the profound song of equality for all was sung by Ravidas, a tanner-mystic. He saw equality as the deepest connection.

The care of life and the care of self are not possible without care with toxicity. The splitting of care and the toxic is detrimental to thinking about the future of life on this planet. To live with toxicity is a condition of life. We have to think about our sickness and our offal and our residues of constant industrial production and consumption. More and more, pharmacology is a balance of toxicity within the human body. The life of millions is extended by this balancing of pharmacological toxicity in their bodies. As our life expectancy increases, so will various chronic conditions. Health will no longer be conceived without toxicity.

The care of life. The care of those we love. The care of neighbourhoods. The care of others. The sustained circulation of abhorrent images to terrify us is a continuation of the civilizational blind spot that can only think of maintaining the life of some by the banishment of others.

We have to begin to think of life with toxicity, and without banishment. We can do this by openly discussing, as a global conversation, and with the self-knowledge of a civilization that this banishment is a cruelty and a folly.

This text was published at [livemint.com](http://livemint.com), August 29, 2018.

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### Notes

**I** Raqs Media Collective at K21 Ständehaus, Düsseldorf, 21 April – 12 August, 2018, Text see introduction, website <http://www.kunstsammlung.de/en/discover/exhibitions/raqs-media-collective.html>

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**Raqs Media Collective** is a contemporary art practice based in Delhi. They co-initiated the Sarai programme at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. *Untimely Calendar*, a survey of their work, was shown at the National Gallery of Modern Art (2014-15). In 2016, they curated the Shanghai Biennale. A retrospective of their work was shown at the K21, Dusseldorf. Raqs Media Collective is named Artistic Director of 2020 Yokohama Triennale, Japan.

Imprint  
**Issue 43**

*Publisher*  
 OnCurating.org

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ISSN 2673-2904 (Online)  
 ISSN 2673-2955 (Print)

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