KEYWORDS

Repurposed

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> *During a recent discussion about progress and failures in public schools, I was challenged to define the purpose of education. My companion proposed that the goal of education is to teach human beings about their own fundamental freedoms—I suggested another definition: perhaps the teacher's role is to educate the student about their place in history, about the spirit they have inherited from those who have come before them and their responsibility to nourish it and carry it forward.*
>
> **—Eve L. Ewing,** "Educating '68: Lessons to Learn and Un-learn"

Recollect

> *We cannot move on from 1968 no matter how much we might think that it needs to be left behind or that today does not relate to then. Our lives, families, organizations and cultures are intertwined with what happened then and what has been said, what has been celebrated and what has been hidden. It is our task to make sense of this history and the politics we have chosen, learned and inherited.*
>
> **—Daniel Tucker,** "Inheriting the Grid"

To me, having grown up in a Northern California suburb, 1968 hails memories of a domestic life centered on home, quiet streets, and shopping malls. As university students a decade older than me were questioning their future in a system built upon social inequity and class privilege, I was insulated within its promise. A beneficiary of the rising middle class, educated from preschool

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through university in an affordable state public school system, I embody the values and failures of an establishment so ardently challenged by those conscientious activist-intellectuals of '68.

An emphasis on universal truths and individualism characterized my public schooling. This became the basis of a standardized social consciousness first experienced while a university art student in the 1980s, and later, as an academic in the 1990s and subsequent years. No version of 1968—neither its documented texts nor graphic projects—ever surfaced among the lectures or critiques in my college art classes. Words and images seeped informally (perhaps subversively) through print, public exhibits, or song lyrics circulating those knowledge systems outside the academy. The absence of 1968 in my own formal training remains for me its most striking legacy. It is a testimony to the incomplete project of public education and its divergent geographies and economies of history.

My participation in and witness to California's fifty-year experiment in public education have become the means by which I have developed a critical perspective of the institution as the cornerstone of training for membership in advanced civil society. This has also led to a deep concern over how these knowledge systems will fail or remain embedded within the formation of our individual and collective unconscious.

Further, the parcels missing from my own training, which contain the revolutionary year of 1968, have given me cause to join forces with those student activists of past and present who continue to pursue the project of '68. We work to recuperate what are and could be the radical practices of the creative scholar—within and despite the limits of the institution.

Repeat

> *I also want to take the chance, the results of which are still not completely in, of suggesting to professors that a way to inspire their pedagogical practice is for them to begin to think of themselves as artists when they are teaching, and to think of the production of knowledge in their classrooms as a collaboration rather than as a passive consumption of knowledge as is so often and so prevalently the case in American and European classrooms.*
>
> —**Jeffrey C. Stewart,** "The New Black Studies: Students' Global Vision and Its Opponents"

With each year of courses taught and admission portfolios reviewed, I have had to reckon with my regulating role as a teacher and gatekeeper at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), an institution through which more than a thousand of my students have passed. I have become aware that in our efforts to mentor, we often prepare students to become versions of us. Indeed, the methods that we impart to them are not so far different from those of our own

training. Further, through my administrative roles, I understand how most institutions are not structurally set up to respond to rapid changes, either internal or external. While the world around us shifts, the ways in which we approach our academic lives and their systems of value have not. As my university dean, David Marshall, so aptly pointed out, the ossified bureaucratic structures lingering from the nineteenth century govern our twentieth-century curricula and educate our twenty-first-century students.[1] Faculty and administration spend a good deal of time balancing these demands against their divided responsibilities as researchers, teachers, and public servants, thus reinscribing the embedded patterns of the institution.

As I write this article, the crisis of our state has begun to penetrate even the havens of higher education. Research-as-usual within the University of California is currently taking a crash course in budget reduction and crisis management, as every sector of the academy has been impacted by mounting state deficit and waning public support.[2] The guiding principle of UC's 1960 master plan, adopted under then-president Clark Kerr, was to provide an exceptional quality of higher public education accessible to anyone as a civic right.[3] Now, in the increasing failure to fulfill its mission and in the absence of a certain future, that purpose is under full negotiation. Should the system be repaired, reimagined, or abandoned? Should we as its stewards resign, redesign, fight, or protest? In all cases, no one is altogether sure who among our high-level administration is managing the current educational bankruptcy and to what end.

In the absence of clear leadership and given the lag in our institution's capacity to mobilize itself into action, it has become the task of individuals and collectives across the system to do what they can to take the future of the university into their own hands—and to do so in uncharacteristically modest and alternative ways.

ReImagine

If artists have proven themselves adept at recognizing opportunity within limits and doing more with less, this particular trait would prove most useful right now, as we take account of the impact of a post-boom economy and the fiscal downscaling in all sectors of the state's public programming. While scarcity has triggered predictable belt-tightening measures by the institution, the unprecedented gap in structural certainty has, in turn, drawn artists and other cultural workers to fill it in with more imaginative, radical proposals for how things could be. Comfortable with uncertainty and fueled by a flexible value system based on human and social capital, collectivity, and exchange, the artist draws upon his or her "anticipatory" strategies in the face of economic instability (a way of life for most), reimagining unknown possible futures that reside outside the status-quo imaginary. For most others, it is a challenge to consider

alternatives, especially amid crisis, without tangible models to help map new possibilities for the way we do things.

What if we were to imagine that the classrooms, administrative bureaucracies, and surrounding community of a university were occupied by artists and were the potential subjects, materials, and spaces for the demonstration of cost-cutting practices? What would the institution look like then? Could higher education be reconceived of *as* the radical project? Félix Guattari provokes this possibility by asking, "How do you make a class operate like a work of art?"[4]

If I were to consider the components of my own scholarly profile—research, teaching, and service—as integrated forms of my practice as an artist, how might I approach these situations differently? How might the arts curricula I teach respond to external shifts with immediacy and fluidity? What does this demand of me, of my students, and of my university administration? Would my classroom look and feel different than it did twenty years ago? Moreover, would it even be a classroom? How could this space function both within and outside the limits of a university?

The uncertainty of these considerations triggers a renewed level of self-reflection and creative inquiry that might be addressed in a writing project or studio practice, and yet we, as instructors, often hesitate to assume these imaginative structures within our practice or our pedagogy.

Repurpose

To further explore the relationship between knowledge production and creative practice, my recent work attempts to respond to these questions. Through action-based experiments, my students and I have begun to pilot new formations of academic work that invest aesthetic production within the circumstances of a larger public sphere, addressing its value as both civic and socially engaged practice. As a result, my own scholarly identity has become more complex and expansive, as "the research" is more difficult to name and categorize. Authorship has become diffused (and often confused) within the collectivity of collaboration that takes place between myself as researcher, professor, administrative facilitator, and community servant and the numerous student and community partners with whom I have worked. These uncharacteristic scholarly formations present new challenges for existing conceptions of ownership over, and access to, the knowledge we create.

Ten years ago, I began the project of the Friday Academy at UCSB. What was initially a weekly upper-division art course would become a year-round, alternative space within the university designed to engage in new experiments in teaching and learning.[5] Creating an "academy" within the space of the campus momentarily suspends students' expectations pertaining to a university art

course and leaves them open, albeit sometimes skeptical, to new conceptions of classroom practice as "the work" itself. Such projects emerge in a timely manner from, and in alignment with, contemporary topics and events. In turn, these global conditions generate the course content, requiring constant revision of the curriculum from one quarter or year to the next.

Further, Friday Academy's public mission extends to the immediate community in proximity to the university. This gives value to both the public and the local, while transforming the neighborhood into an open laboratory for university research *as* community development (and community *as* research). Friday Academy's "public or perish" mission to remain within (the institution) without becoming (the institution), encourages continual reinvention of pedagogy, promoting a sense of enterprise in the way art is taught and generated within the institutional frame.

Straying from traditional studio arts training, Friday Academy encourages participatory and collaborative models that draw individuals from outside the degree major. Thus it maintains an interdisciplinary assortment of academic refugees and community scholars who work in collaboration as creative problem solvers. Those at the margins of their disciplines join other community members with local expertise to form new research clusters. This expanded public research laboratory hosts an array of academic–public partnerships based on shared commitment rather than prescriptive requirements.

Within this alternative knowledge economy, the role of the faculty member shifts from content provider to facilitator/coordinator. Leveling the faculty–student hierarchy presents challenges for many students who prefer authority and direction over freedom and responsibility to take charge of their own learning experience. However, as knowledge is pooled amongst those in the class, the students often possess skill sets more suited to solving the real-world problems at hand than those of the faculty are.

Through Friday Academy, more than two hundred students have worked on projects that I am describing here, which form a significant part of my own research. The students, mostly undergraduates, remain at the core of the work's success. Some of these collaborations have been monumental in scale and unruly in scope; they often required multiple terms for completion, though other initiatives were realized within the timeframe of one quarter. As co-director of the multicampus UC Institute for Research in the Arts over the decade that it has been hosted on my campus,[6] I have played a central role in the development of this current research, providing programmatic infrastructure and both academic and public networks for this work to be produced and recognized. Facilitating relationships and alignments between different social and spatial contexts allows Friday Academy students to become involved with a host of new publics while tackling problems varying in scale from hyper-local to global.

SHORT

Projects of Friday Academy

Our key projects focused on the 2005 housing crisis. At the time, in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the global trade deficit disrupted the export of shipping containers from the United States to Asia. As fully loaded, Walmart-bound container ships flowed steadily from China to keep pace with insatiable US consumption, stacks of empty cargo boxes were accumulating at shipping ports across the United States. These modular industry innovations that revolutionized the world economy in just fifty years now had no US-manufactured product to fill them and make their transoceanic journey back to China a profitable one. In 2005, these 8' x 8' x 20' boxes were valued at less than the steel and plywood materials they were made from.

As the central coast region of California sustained the highest median home prices in the nation, the housing inventory in our area would become out of reach for most UCSB employees, including faculty, placing pressure on the campus's ability to draw and retain high-level researchers. Isla Vista, the community adjacent to UCSB, would continue to draw the highest-density occupancy west of the Mississippi because of its exploitive rental market. Since each room in an apartment costs more than $1,000, four—and sometimes even six—students often inhabit each room in an attempt to make living and going to school affordable.

In response to the urgency of the moment, Friday Academy invested in several housing-centered projects that would creatively address the need as well as propose new possibilities beyond crisis. The 2005 *Villa Cesar Chavez* project was a student-driven public art design plan for a large, affordable housing development for seasonal farm workers in Oxnard, California. To that end, students worked in partnership with a nonprofit developer, Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation (CEDC).[7] The second project, *Open Container,* was initiated over the next year as a large-scale redesign and repurposing of shipping containers into new prototypes for affordable studio housing.

Open Container was the most ambitious work of Friday Academy's efforts to date. It was initiated through an unexpected partnership with a local shipping company, which donated several used containers for exploratory use by students. Given the inordinately large scale, the classroom moved to an outdoor work yard with real time and space conditions to explore the series of material transformations of the containers from conceptual sculpture to habitable dwelling units. The project fully challenged the conventions of arts practice, as well as the classroom teaching space itself.

The faculty–student team of artists had little or no previous architectural design or construction experience, nor did a professional school of architecture exist on campus for consultation. Through this exploratory work, students assumed responsibility for their own hands-on learning of fabrication technologies to solve an array of problems. The conceptual and schematic design process

Figure 1. *Open Container* project. Photographs courtesy of Kim Yasuda.

was a collaborative learning effort among some fifty students, while the construction phase brought in a host of outside consultants including architects, planners, and contractors, who donated their time to solve the pragmatics of roofing, insulation, weatherization, and electrical installation. The effort presented opportunities for students to learn through doing as well as have exposure to community professionals who offered their input on the project.

The student-collective participants repeatedly asked themselves, "What can artists contribute to the evolving discourse surrounding community sustainability, affordable housing, and material reuse?" Given the abundance of global efforts toward this end in other fields such as architecture, the group held itself accountable to the artist's particular capacity to influence the built environment in ways distinct from those of other disciplines. As a result, *Open Container* embodied innovative aesthetic reuse strategies in terms of both the design and the materials for the project. Beginning with the used shipping containers, all materials followed suit in their reuse/recycling capacity, thus ensuring that the housing unit would be able to maintain its mobility and adaptability to new environments.

Since studio artists are often self-focused in their process, the collaborative nature of this project presented a challenge to perceptions of artistic identity and authorship. Within this venture, a central goal was aesthetic coherence that

also provided the opportunity for a composite of different design influences. Each student-artist took on a different aspect of the design and treatment of the unit as a solo project. Space planning and layout, graphic design, material insulation, wall treatments, innovative furniture design, lighting, and decorative components offered students a degree of individual authorship within the collaborative effort.

The 320', aesthetically repurposed two-unit container itself has maintained a life well beyond the timeframe of the class. It has served as a demonstration for campus and community sustainability groups and has housed student artists as a day studio and exhibition space. Although initiated as a curricular experiment in extending the limits of student innovation, *Open Container* has been featured in both academic and professional conferences and exhibitions across the country. In 2009, the classroom project was acquired by a family foundation in Southern California as both a fully functional studio space and as a work of art.[8]

Outcomes and Assessments

These partnerships and projects have allowed me to recognize new intersections for research that fosters alternative methods, testing my role as an artist in communities within and outside the academy. It has facilitated both our conception of a civic identity and our understanding of the complex ecology of community—one that is discovered and fostered through relationships rather than prescribed or scheduled by committee.

Since these modes of research no longer resemble traditional academic output, they raise important questions that challenge our existing standards of evaluation within the academy. How do we assess the public value of our scholarly work? What constitutes the criteria for review? How do we evaluate the merit of a project if it does not result in familiar products such as the monograph, solo exhibition, or permanent public artwork? Why do we separate processes of creation and reception from the material outcome? How could such forms of work be documented and valued differently within standard university evaluation, which is traditionally based in a culture of evidence? Such questions come with this new territory, challenging the conventions of relevant practice for both the individual and the institution.

Assessment is a crucial part of developing a new practice and constitutes the terms by which it is established as a viable body of research. Given the absence of criteria currently in place within the academy, I have had to develop my own system of assessment in order to determine the level of my students' success. It is based on the following set of guiding principles:

New knowledges/scholarly formations: How does this research serve to enact and demonstrate the possibility for new knowledge produc-

tion within and outside the discipline? How does the project create or participate in these new formations?

Translation/demonstration: Does the research effectively visualize, represent, or translate itself into the world? In what ways does it animate/demonstrate both its theoretical and social frames?

Relational aesthetics/ethics: Borrowing Nicolas Bourriaud's words, how does this research value "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space"?[9]

Social and public embeddedness: In what ways does the research acknowledge and "open up" to new and existing situations and publics? How is the work resituated within contexts that offer opportunities for instruction and experimentation throughout the process and for all participants?

Catalytic capacity: Does the research serve as a catalyst for new ideas and circumstances for creation and reception within existing conditions?

Geographical embeddedness: In what ways does the project situate and invest itself within and between multiple human spheres and spatial scales (local/regional/global)?

Relevance: Is the research—as well as its attendant outcome—responsive to the contemporary moment? How is it current/timely/resonant?

Coherence: Can the research and its various parts/phases be conceived of within a larger continuum?

Sustainability: Did the project extend/expand beyond its initial scope of work? How does it continue to live beyond the initial period of investment?

Transformation: How did the project present opportunities for significant changes—in viewpoint, perception, and/or relations—to take place among stakeholders and their circumstances? How is a particular situation different as a result of this work?

Experimentation: Did the project open up the opportunity for alternative/innovative thinking and experimentation that extend their respective fields of research (in this case, pedagogy, art, and community practices)?

Mobility/flexibility: Does the research possess a nimble capacity to relocate itself effectively in new and different situations as well as to expand and apply itself to conditions beyond its initial formation?

Affiliations/partnerships: How does the research reinvest the knowledge produced within the broader public sector? How does it function to change both perception and actual circumstances through

the harnessing of institutional resources toward a larger social agenda?

Collectivity: Did the project facilitate existing or new collaborative and community formations through relationships among individuals and/or groups? Did the exchange have both quality and sustainability?

New economies (environmental, material, and social): Do the project and its process approach materials, methods, and land use with a regard for their social and environmental conditions/implications?

Reciprocity: Does the project expand and harness new networks and resources in mutually beneficial terms?

Openness as source: Does the research present itself as a case study or tool for free and open use by others?

While no one project fulfills all of these categories for evaluation, the list suggests the analytic process by which I can begin to frame this work and establish a context for it to exist both on its own terms and as part of the larger discourse.

As external forces exert pressure upon the public university to articulate its relevance within a broader social agenda, this model of engagement emerges as one of the most hopeful and critical responses to the contemporary moment. As more faculty make the choice to "de-situate" and mobilize themselves and their students outside conventional campus-based environments, they embed themselves more deeply within a cultural dynamic that tests ideas and their currency to expand knowledge creation beyond the field or discipline, as well as outside the closed academic circle.

Deploying such experimental models, we address salient issues that emerge from a collective discourse rather than from a disciplinary frame within the university classroom. We harness the resources and energy of a shared moment, as well as its relevance and sense of urgency. Connecting our students and ourselves as teachers to the world at large, we become what Henry Giroux calls "border crossers and public intellectuals," those who function in the "border space between 'high' and popular culture; between the institution and the street; between the public and the private."[10] We negotiate and rearticulate the fluctuating role of a discipline such as art and its relevance within a broader cultural context. Through opening up the teaching space for experiments in creative praxis, I have found greater coherence between my sensibility and practice as an artist and my role as a professor—more than when I worked diligently to compartmentalize my scholarly profile into separate obligations of teaching, research, and service.

These action-research projects bring a level of coherence to students as well. This allows them to think and act beyond class-driven, instructor-led assignments and toward sustained engagement in a process that challenges their ini-

tiative and fosters relationship formation and a sense of stewardship toward their community.

Over the past ten years, the process has caused deep reflection and has raised a host of new questions. I have learned in earnest that collaboration does not come easily to the formative young person, with only four years to find his or her voice in an overscheduled college life. My students were well aware that they would eventually be in competition with the multitude of BFA- and MFA-trained artists coming out of university art programs across the nation, most of whom will join the workforce of postgraduate artists employed outside the profession for which they trained. Giving up exercises in personal vision for the collective consensus fervently engaged a few of our students and lost the interest of many others. For those who chose to commit, a different breed of art student emerged; these individuals thought of themselves as part of an expanded community invested in an enterprise larger than the effort of one.

In retrospect, it is clear that Friday Academy and similar projects are not for everyone. Nevertheless, they provide an alternative way of thinking about art—both its production and presentation and its educative role in social transformation. Rather than conceiving of their practice as part of, or fitting work into, preestablished institutions (i.e., the museum/gallery), students can become creators and entrepreneurs of their own alternative spaces, generating opportunities for their work to be both conceived and received by their version of a community.

There were a few more things we all learned from these experiments. Foremost, the most effective teacher/student relationship is not hierarchical; rather, it is a lateral and flexible dynamic of mutual engagement. Also, teaching at a research university is not always conducive to the best and most relevant learning experience for our students. As faculty, we must continue to reinvent the system while remaining within it. As creative intellectuals, we have an ethical responsibility to improvise, take risks, and transform the spaces that we and our young students inhabit.

The cumulative effects of forty or more years of neoliberal public education have reached advanced stages. This last decade of "no child left behind" strategies and standardized testing continues to have a profound effect on students entering US universities today, presenting the modern educator with significant challenges to the development of recuperation projects. Although students today seem vastly different from those of '68, their sense of capacity resurfaces amid opportunities for learning when knowledge is not handed out wholesale, but provided in the form of situations that reclaim the innate sense that they are the agents of change and in charge of the future.

As the formula for success as we know it crumbles in the wake of our failing economies, the opportunity of uncertainty has presented itself as one of the most compelling hopes of the twenty-first century. The revolution is yet to come.

NOTES

1. David Marshall, "The Places of the Humanities: Thinking Through Bureaucracy," Liberal Education 93, no. 2 (2007): 34.

2. Currently at the University of California, formerly secure programs of access, affordability, tenure, employment, and retirement have now become vulnerable. Downsizing, reductions, faculty furloughs, staff layoffs, student fee hikes, and expanded class sizes have introduced a high degree of uncertainty and distraction for scholarly pursuits. UC Office of the President administrators have attempted to tackle the current problem in true academic form—by creating a committee, UC Commission on the Future, charged with the task of "developing a new vision for the University within the context of the University's mission and budget, while reaffirming our commitment to quality, access and affordability" (Letter from Regents Chairman Gould outlining working group charges, August 4, 2009, Communications, UC Commission on the Future, Oakland, California). At the same time, a 40% mandatory student fee hike took effect the following academic year.

3. See Clark Kerr, The Uses of the University, 5th ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).

4. Félix Guattari, Chaosmosis: The EthicoAesthetic Paradigm (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 133.

5. Friday Academy's mission is to provide a temporary instructional environment within the university that maintains its own academic calendar to conduct year-round, project-based curricula in an itinerant classroom setting. Straying from studio-arts training models, the Friday Academy encourages a high turnover of art majors while drawing from an interdisciplinary assortment of academic refugees and community scholars who work in collaboration with one another.

6. As this article goes to press, the UC Office of the President has just announced that the UC Institute for Research in the Arts will no longer fund the arts as part of the UC portfolio of multicampus research initiatives. After its thirty-year history as the only system-wide unit across the ten UC campuses, UCIRA will cease to provide the valuable opportunities for our artists to commission and showcase their innovation as a vital contribution to the cultural profile of our state.

7. The CEDC founder and CEO board members were among those labor and housing advocates who joined César Chávez on the front line of the farmworker labor movement in 1960. These individuals would translate their activist strategies of community organizing toward building and investing in the economic and infrastructural development of the farm labor force here in California. CEDC is a remarkable testimony to private, corporate, and nonprofit alliance building.

8. For more information about Open Container and related projects at UCSB, please visit my faculty webpage at www.arts.ucsb.edu/faculty/yasuda/.

9. Nicolas Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics (Dijon, FR: Les Presses du Réel, 2002), 113.

10. Henry Giroux, Stealing Innocence: Youth, Corporate Power, and the Politics of Culture (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 140.