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WAYWARD

EDUCATION

EXCHANGE



ISSUE 1

LESSONS OF THE UNDERCURRENT
ADRIENNE ECONOMOS-MILLER & JUNE T SANDERS

TRANSMUTATION
SWAN FERRARO

INSTITUTIONAL(IZED) CRITIQUE +
PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTIONS AT THE
ACADEMY: A MAYBE MANIFESTO PART 1
PETER CHRISTENSON

TEACHING AS PROTEST & THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN ACTIVIST ART AND LEARNING
NOUSHIN MOUSAVI

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INTRO



"Everything we learn is only
real to the degree that it
contributes to what we are."*

As a teacher, it has never been my responsibility to possess knowledge on any particular subject, but to create a space in which knowledge might be found by others. Not to know, but to model and understand how knowing might start. How to care for a question. I am writing to you today from that vantage point. This publication offers to you what its contributors and myself might know, question, and consider relevant in hopes that we might collectively offer new questions, insights, and transformations in the way we consider education, spaces of learning, and our lives. I don't find the act of study to be a movement towards expertise or greatness — rather just a movement towards change. Wherever and whoever you are, there is always potential for meaning, radicality, and care through study.

I consider *wayward* as a school of thought, a strategy for alternatives, and a concept of unpredictable, anti-assimilationist behavior — and combined with pedagogical practices of love, intimacy, and responsive care — as something that might reject acceptable notions of scholarship & didactic expectations of the classroom and find new ground with each other.

Wayward Education Exchange seeks to aid in the search for understanding, change, and new ground through teaching and learning — by way of alternative pedagogies, institutional critique, way-out class(rooms), relational learning, art, design, poetry, craft, childcare, neighbor visits, building projects, sidewalk chats, singing circles, long hugs, longer walks, kitchen haircuts, driving lessons, cooking together, braiding hair, etc, etc, etc. We pay homage to *Big Rock Candy Mountain* and other publications that have started this work many years ago – and continue to teach us that everything is education, everything is learning, and nothing needs to be what it was or how it is.

Quietly,
JUNE T SANDERS

**Big Rock Candy Mountain*, 1970.
"A Learning to Learn Catalog."

LESSONS OF THE UNDERCURRENT

Adrienne Economos-Miller & June T Sanders

This interview was recorded on ‘The Minnow’ - an abandoned yacht washed up on the shores of Lake Michigan in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. At the time of the interview, the Minnow has 105 five-star reviews and was designated as a religious site on google maps.

J: We ended our conversation on Friday about behavioral modeling in schools in relation to architecture... you were saying something really nice...

A: Thank you. I think I was saying that there’s this insidious symmetry between architectural labor and traditional models of teaching. Where — and the students expect this — where we’re supposed to tell them what to do... That’s just the typical office model that our studios mimic. There’s me who’s supposed to be teaching them how I do architecture and they’re expected to embody that. But I think it’s the same as architecture in a more holistic way too — Architecture where there’s a drawing set that exists prior to the building. That drawing set tells somebody else how to move their body in such a way to produce a building. A drawing of a building is a document of bodily movements that define labor. But you don’t draw the labor you draw the building. The teaching is the same, the aesthetics cover the encouraged embodiment.

J: The students are trained to expect there to always be a boss. And then when they don’t get the boss, they don’t always see it as freedom as much as this expectation of — I’m supposed to be given information. And if you’re not giving me information then you’re not teaching me. It’s really disappointing to me.

I think I start to feel bad when students express their disappointment to me — when I don’t tell them what to do. It produces a feeling for me... where maybe I should tell them what to do because that honors their desire. It’s a matter of should I honor their current desire or should I help them towards a new desire?

A: What do you do?

J: Right now, I tell them I’ll do what they want me to. But they have to tell me what they want. But then I feel like that takes us back to the root of the problem.

A: Which is that they don’t know what they want. Or we think that they want something bad. Which is for you to tell them what they want.

I think a lot of my reaction to that desire depends on how I’m feeling. I’ve definitely noticed times where I’m impatient that day and just tell them what to do. Then other times I’m feeling a little bit more... I suppose stubborn... and it’s like no, you have to figure this out.

J: Like when you’re impatient or you don’t have all of yourself, you’ll employ that model.

A: Yeah, I fall back into it sometimes. I get tired of the questions.

J: Right, because it’s infinitely more work. To not give them everything.

A: Yeah, I think so. At least in a way that matters. It takes more of an actual part of you than just the work part of you.

J: Yeah, I was thinking about this the other day because I’ve been thinking about my colleagues and how easy it is for them to plan out these lectures, plan out these projects and readings, even though it feels like so much labor for me. But how hard it is for them to relinquish control. Even though that feels like, maybe on the surface, like so much less labor. But yeah...the length they’re willing to go to set up all these things for the classroom. Yet they won’t make the effort to be open.

A: I feel that 100%. I’m pretty committed to a light touch model. I feel like the best project I ever wrote for a studio — and also some of the best results — was just one sentence. It was, design a house for seven people that they can build themselves on a 75 foot by 150 foot lot. That was it. I gave two short lectures that semester and we did five weeks of pretty broad reading.

I think if it works it works... I’m really resistant physically to over-planning a course. And I’ve always just kind of blamed myself for that.

J: Resistant physically?

A: When I’m sitting down and writing an assignment sheet and it comes time to fill out the schedule or a syllabus — I don’t want to do it. I don’t know what I’m going to be doing two weeks from now. You know? I also don’t want to tell myself what to do as a teacher. Like if I write in the syllabus — two weeks from now we’re going to have a lecture, then I have to do that lecture. Not in a lazy way but... the class has to be in a position by the time we get to that lecture where that content makes sense. So, then I have so much more to do in forcing my will — forcing the class into a particular shape to handle that lecture. Or whatever the scheduled content is, right?

J: Right.

A: As an example this semester — The studio schedule just listed the two guests that were coming this semester and that was it. Every other day just said “class”.

J: Was there any response to that?

A: In the past, I’ve taught classes where the students were horrified about it — and that always bothered me.

J: Do you think they’re upset about the potential of not knowing how to pass the class or get the grade or do you think they’re just horrified at the void?

A: Probably both. I think the way it always comes back to me is “you don’t know what you’re doing” because I’m not giving them structured content.

J: I wonder if that’s them internalizing a singular way of knowing?

A: I think it is. I think most of it is probably just the inability to square the idea that knowledge might exist in other forms than just through dictation.

J: I think that’s the thing that I grapple with — and I felt that a bit when we were in your class with the almost even number of students and teachers — that the teachers knew that and had a varied way of thinking about knowledge, but it didn’t reach across the table. And I think that’s the thing that was stressing me from Friday — we were having that conversation, but we weren’t all having it..

A: I think a lot of it is inertia. On Friday we were talking about architecture specifically, but I don’t think that’s the full picture. When I’m teaching students it feels like I’m fighting against 12 years of primary school too. If they only have me for one semester, it’s



really hard to be like “if they don’t fully understand this at the end, I failed or whatever.” This is 15 weeks out of 20 years of education. What can I do in that time frame to get them to where I want them to be? You can only really do that if they’re already pretty close. At the very least you can plant something different in their head.

J: Do you think they remember that.. somatically?

A: I don’t know. Do you have classes like that? I feel like I’ve had teachers like that where it’s five years later and I think.. “Oh, that’s what they were doing.”

J: I think I had this experience that my students have now where I don’t remember any of the content or anything that was said. I only remember the vagueness of how I felt — and students have given me that same feedback where they said “I loved your class. It was a really pivotal moment for me” — and I say “oh, well, tell me a little bit more about that. What was it that we talked about what was the content?” — and they usually say “I don’t remember any of that. I only remember how I felt.”

And that’s why I always think about things like somatics, even though those things can be really overstated, because they won’t remember what we talked about or what happened they’ll just remember the movement. For themselves.

A: I’m trying to think about myself and think about my own time as a student to figure out my response to that.

I feel like the classes where I really got somewhere were much more about the environment than they were about the content. I always think back to my second year of grad school — where I was really going through it personally and my design studio professor just gave me a lot of space to figure that out in a way that a lot of others might not have and I feel like that room to experience those feelings was really important.

J: You were going through it and the class allowed you to go through it. How did that look?

A: I always call that semester an exorcism. I was just getting it out on the page or in the model. Which is really funny, to describe architecture like that. It’s so typically unemotional. But, I still feel that way about it and I still feel like that’s what’s important about it. I don’t show that project as work, but it still stands out to me as one of the most important things I did in grad school.

I don’t know, I don’t...I haven’t had many experiences with students after teaching them to know if I am giving them the same space. Which is a shame.

J: Really?

A: Just a few students who were already into it when I had them. They were who I meant when I said — well, they’re already almost there, you know?

J: I did want to talk about emotions. Because we talked about emotions in the classroom and emotions in architecture...

A: It’s tough for me because I recognize that architecture has played a role in my life as a place where I can do self-analysis or self-expression. But I also realize that the reason for that is because it is divorced from its professional reality enough that it can become more personal. The way we talked about architecture as something expressive of a single author requires that design be divorced from construction. Because the design has to occur within a particular arrangement so that one person gets to design it or a small group of like-minded people get to design it.

A painting is a more obvious form of self-expression because you know it’s usually one person on the other end of it. Architecture can play that role if you only talk about design and the building labor happens separately. But once you start thinking about it as a whole industry or in other potential arrangements in which labor isn’t excluded from the conception of architecture, it becomes more difficult to identify any one person as being able to express emotion in the medium.

J: Yeah, when you say that my brain goes to something I struggle with where students internalize the individuality of learning and education and that it is competitive. In more competitive schools it’s just actually competitive. But even at other types of schools it’s competitive in the way that it it’s revolving around the meritocracy. The people that study the hardest, or work the hardest or have the most energy or the most ability do the best in school — and it’s up to you to make that happen. It’s not up to your peers or your teachers. Maybe that’s not a connection to architecture. But, there’s all that invisible labor.

A: In architecture the structures of school that produce individuality also produce this funny feeling about the design of space because students are taught for the most part over their six years of architecture school that they are the individual author of space. I think a big reason for that is just grades.

It’s easiest to judge a student when they do individual work, so then you make them do individual work, and then they think architecture is individual work. We talk about that all the time. It’s like, well if all



they do is group projects throughout school then how can we measure one student’s skills? We think we have to make them individual, but then that subjectivizes them in a particular way.

It teaches them that architecture is individual. Or gives them the idea that one person must possess a particular set of broad skills to be an architect. It doesn’t really happen like that. It’s not how the world functions, even architecturally.

J: Yeah, it’s usually a collection of people.

A: Even if you’re not inclusive of construction labor. Even if you only consider the architecture firm. It’s still not usually one person.

J: Is that divide that, when they’re out of school, It’s assumed that they have all the skills and that when they’re in a group it’s who’s choosing to employ what skills?

A: Yeah. How do we judge that? Because we have to judge them in a university that provides grades. Or, at least, the university expects grades to represent a particular judgment.

J: I had this interesting thing in my class the other day because I had my students all huddled together and asked if we wanted to change anything or remove an assignment — and I think I was just trying to respond to the world, respond to how people were feeling. Seeing if there was something I could address and relieve stress. And I just remember the first response a student had was “This class is already so easy”. And I was really taken back by that because I wanted to say “It’s not about if the class is easy. I’m just asking you what you need.” But we couldn’t talk to each other. I don’t know what the meat in there is but...

A: I’ve always wondered about that...

J: I think I’ve been dealing with this rustic inquiry right now because I’ll just react to something and then I’ll ask why I’m reacting. Because students keep going to my class not having read the readings and then I’ll be upset. But then I’ll ask: why am I upset? Why am I upset that they’re not reading this thing that I asked them to? And so that rustic inquiry has been helping me get to some bone.

A: What’s the bone?

J: I don’t know what the bone is. But maybe I take it too far and I say, well, why are we reading? Why is that valued? Why do we have to do that? Because it’s the same thing where they think — We’re in university. We need to read to learn — and I say yes we’re in university. We need to read to learn. And

then they don’t do it. And both of us are sort of believing at the same time that maybe it’s false.

A: Or feeling that it’s false. Do you think the students feel that it’s false or do you think the students just don’t care? I guess that probably reveals that they feel its false..

J: I think there’s this phenomenon where people believe that if you can’t express something in a particular way that it’s not real or it’s not valued or it’s just not there. So we think students don’t care because they can’t articulate caring or not caring in a particular theme. Does that make sense?

A: Yeah, but they articulate it in other ways by not doing the reading. They articulate the feeling of falseness around the necessity of reading by just not doing it.

J: And if I said “Well, fuck the reading then.” Then they might react to that because if their way of protest is by not doing what’s required of them and if I stopped requiring it then I’m taking away their act of protest. Which sounds...batty. But that’s where my inquiry is.

A: Yeah, or the other day when you said: should I just be a real hardass?

J: Yes. As a pedagogical experiment. Just be unreasonable so that they will respond.

A: I’ve never tried the opposite. When I teach intro design students, it’s their first ever design class, so I am more forward in my asks of them. And that’s really one of the times where I’m teaching where it feels like I’m doing a job. I go and make sure they’re hitting their checklist, we talk about it, I give them advice — And I don’t know if I have to do that, it just feels like they need to have some certain set skills before they get to the next... Maybe I should interrogate that... I guess what I’m getting to is that it never feels like teaching, just implementing.

J: That doesn’t feel like teaching but that feels like a job.

A: Yeah, teaching software, teaching very basic kinds of drawing. But then when I go into a higher level studio it feels like the moment where it’s like okay let’s figure it out now. This has to be collaborative otherwise there’s no point to it. But I guess what I’m getting to is that I wouldn’t describe myself as being unreasonable to generate rebellion.. But I have been more typical in certain design courses, more traditional in terms of pedagogical model. But I don’t think it does anything either, as far as I can tell.

But the open conversational model might. Or the almost deadbeat parent model of teaching that I

often employ, where a student will come up and be like “what do I do?” and I say “who are you? I don’t know you,” and let them figure it out.

I very much feel what the students on Friday said: “it often it feels like my professors want me to guess what they want.”

J: Oh, yeah, that’s the heart of it.

A: 100% real.

J: I have that too where students ask me “what do you want me to do?” and I say “What do I want you to do?” And then they look at me because they know what we just said.

But that’s it. It’s the guessing culture.

A: I think they’ve been taught in the past that there is sometimes a right answer if you can guess it. And then when we tell them there’s no right answer ... It even takes that game away from them. There are some students who value that guessing model. Because once you get it right, you’re teacher’s pet, you know? It’s like “thank god, I figured it out.”

J: Yeah, I... Can I tell you a kind of funny model I employ? Because I do deal with that all the time. I feel like I’m this specific identity in the classroom and I feel like I walk into the classroom and certain students know immediately that they might be able to get along with me and certain students know they might be in trouble. Or they think they might be in trouble, right? I know they won’t, but they think they will be because they know there’s this split between us. And what I try to do to disrupt that is to talk about their world with them. And I remember this one student — he wrote it in my review — about how we talked about cars together and how that was so surprising to him. And he said that I taught him not to hate design. And it was because I bridged the gap, personally. And then we went into the content. And if I was this other person that was trying to teach design, he might still hate it. And it takes so much effort and it maybe arguably takes more effort than the teacher that does the lectures and is meticulous about their schedule. I just try to find a through line with every student so that there is no guessing of how to please me.

But I don’t know if that’s pedagogical or if that’s just... provincial, right?

A: I think it’s pedagogical... sometimes I feel like the students have this funny feeling where they kind of approach me as if I’m not a person. And I don’t mean that in an othering way. I mean that the disconnect between what marks a student and a professor or professional is big enough that they — whether it’s inferiority or just a kind of general

alienation from what they think I am — enter into that relationship afraid or submissive or concerned that they’re going to get found out that they’re not the same type of thing as me.

If you can just dissolve that barrier... It doesn’t have to be an entirely structural thing as much as it is just putting in the work. Just be a person in the classroom — be somebody who is real, exists, does things. I think it’s really important and I think I express that a lot through not wanting to hold these kind of personal boundaries away from the classroom. I’m happy to share with the students what I like, what I listen to, what I do — I feel like that’s really important because it’s not universal. I just think it humanizes you. It makes them feel like you’re the same thing as they are — it just kind of dispels the fear. Or it helps to.

J: I think that’s something I was thinking about on Friday as I was talking and thinking about radical content or curriculum versus just relational moments or structures. Because that’s what it is. A student taught me recently the idea of establishing common ignorance — when you model not knowing, they can model not knowing. And that’s a quick way to break it down. When I can say I don’t understand what a word means then they feel like they have that permission.

A: I will say, I feel that between us in our relationship. It’s just not something that I experience often in academia, and it was immediately disarming and we just got comfortable. It’s a lot of pressure to think that there’s somebody sitting next to you who knows everything that you’re supposed to know that you don’t know. It’s hard to think about jumping that gap if you can’t see the steps between you and the other side. And so when the other person says “I’m incomplete” — you know, whatever that means — it makes it apparent that it’s a process of becoming.

I guess that’s what I mean when I say that they just think you’re something else. They think you’re a finished product, that they will become or have to become you.

J: Even when they think you’re a monster.

A: You mean that in a personal sense?

J: Just when students express disdain for a teacher because they’re torturous or they’re unfair or they have all these expectations — if they still find that person to be a finished person.

Because they’re finished with their knowledge even if they are relationally uncooked. Unactualized.

A: Do you think the students feel that the monstrous

professors are not actualized? I don't know if I do. J: Well, I was saying I think they still think the monstrous ones are actualized because they're intellectually actualized. And that's what we value. And I think this was going into this thing I was thinking about earlier... and I don't want to invoke gender... but I feel sometimes this gendered labor where knowledge, even if it's inside of a monster, is more valued than somebody that just cares for other people's knowledge. That's really hard for me to grapple with because I increasingly am just caring for other people's knowledge.

A: Which is a form of knowledge other than the desired one. It is gendered.

J: In the same way that the person that keeps you alive is valued in a different way than the person that is helping you succeed in a more linear way or with a straighter through line. And that goes into ideas of the vernacular and one of your arenas of architecture, that the grandiose is valued but the simple projects that are human centered are devalued or valued in an undercurrent.

A: Yeah, I guess I would frame it through language. Architectural academia values projects that say something in a declarative statement and devalues projects that ask something.

J: Because saying something is more valued than asking something.

A: My friend has this funny way of describing studio projects that he calls "no more problems buildings," where somebody designs a project that is supposed to solve a problem or solve many problems all at once... Whether or not the things they are trying to solve or the methods in which they are trying to solve it are good or politically positive, the project is declarative or linear in a way where it presumes a direct connection between the things that we make and the effects that those things have in the world. It's predictive. And I feel like I always want to frame my projects and I want my students to frame their projects as questions about something that exists in the world that couldn't possibly be solved... How do you produce a scene or how do you think about creating an environment in which things might happen? As opposed to asking "how do you produce an environment that says things will happen?"

J: We talked about that in your class — about designing a building where the spray paint is sanctioned to a certain spot or designing a building where people could decide where to spray paint.

A: In my mind, if you know where you're going, there's not much point in making it. And I mean that pretty radically. I think that architecture is a tool that is utilized to ensure that construction

occurs on a particular path in order to produce a known object before it begins —and I don't even want us to do that. I want construction to be an open framework for whoever's involved to change it or think about it or engage with it, whatever it is.

It's common for us to think about design as a place where inquiry can happen. We can ask questions, we can do research, we can think, and we can make statements, but there's a hard edge, which is the construction site. Architecture eventually has to dictate, it has to say something — or it has to say something to somebody else so that they can work according to the plan — and I think that edge is really an issue.

J: It's hard for me to even imagine what that alternative would look like. But that's where things get interesting.

A: I always tend to give the example of the Gothic architecture... I always think that Gothic architecture is kind of a little hint at something else that might be not because it's totally alien but because it's fairly close. I tell students that the plan of a Gothic church was decided before anybody showed up on site: it's a cross, faces west, and it has to have these parts. The Catholic Church is telling anybody that wants to make a church that it has to meet this doctrinal criteria. Within that framework the stonemasons kind of carve whatever they want. Decisions about window design are made on the ground in chalk before they're tilted into place. So, the construction is actually where the meat of the design happens. Obviously, I don't want the Catholic Church to decide what a building should look like or any similar political framework, but I think that is one way of thinking about how construction might be a more open framework for life. I think if you were to pair that somehow with pre-construction as a similar open framework then maybe we're getting somewhere.

J: You were talking about how this exploration happens in the design but then once you go into construction it becomes more rigid — and I think about that with schooling too because I think it doesn't matter if you're going to public university or if you're going to a private liberal arts college — there's an exploration that happens and you're allowed to explore, experiment, but there's an expectation that you leave you will become a certain thing or become a certain way. I've been thinking about the professional managerial class in that way — that most of education is behavioral control or behavior modeling to create the model citizen even if that is sort of through an alternative liberal arts education. You still normalize. Maybe you normalize into this liberal, informed citizen but you still normalize.



That feels related to what you were saying about architecture.

A: Architecture preserves a bit of false radicality — even outside of the university — within the design process. There's this great orienting quote for me since I first read it in graduate school, from Deleuze and Guattari's chapter on "The War Machine," where they're talking about architecture as a division of labor and they say: "the State does not give power to the conceptual innovators. It makes them a strictly dependent organ whose job it is to divest those whose job it is simply to implement of all of their power." It argues that architecture is this kind of trap for the managerial class to have this false autonomy, false agency, a false playground of design in which the real job is labor control, control of the construction site and workers. Design is just construction management but it pretends to this artistic autonomy that is false.

And that I see as something that happens in school but it's also something that I see happening even when the content shifts to something more politically progressive. That's what's really important for me in thinking about architecture is that there's all of this desire for change that gets filtered into the same processes.

Sometimes the thing on the other side looks better than the thing that came before, but it's just hoping for a good king, right? The king is still there and eventually there's going to be a bad king. Relying on architects or anyone to always be "good" is just not a system or structure that produces something better.

TRANSMUTATION

Swan Ferraro

trans·mu·ta·tion: the process of changing into
another form through the use of alchemy

“What we need is a culture where the common
experience of trauma leads to a normalization of healing.
The expectation should be: I know we are all in need of
healing, so how are we doing our healing work?”

— adrienne maree brown

Transmutation by Swan Ferraro is an art installation consisting of sculpture, ritual, and film. The sculpture is a collection of broken branches that were found on the ground, snapped and fallen from their trees. They have been lifted back up and suspended in the air, swaying in the space. The physical nature is honored by turning the branches into objects for healing rituals. Candles are attached to the branches, and when lit, the sculpture becomes activated as a tool for somatic bodywork. Lighting candles is a symbol of the transmutation process: there is movement in the melting of the wax, dripping and solidifying into a new form. The candles drip onto those who put their bodies underneath the branches. Hot wax dripped onto skin can induce hyper-awareness of the body, helping to release dissociation, gender dysphoria, and other unpleasant experiences. The painful sensation allows one to connect with the body, acting as a sensorial portal. This portal serves as a reminder that bodies communicate and can be collaborated with to create new realities. Prior to being dripped on, there is an invitation to set an intention for the body, such as liberation or love. Setting intentions and envisioning them in the body acts as a form of divination. By ritualizing the body, trauma that lives in the nervous system can be transmuted. This involves intimate performances that are commonly unseen. To make this invisible process visible, the transmutation ritual has been filmed and projected inside the installation. It combines people patiently waiting for wax to drip on them with people who utilize chance movements. This movement involves the contact improvisation dance form, where continuous touch is explored by surrendering to the individual body and the bodies of others. Both stillness and movement involve intention and devotion to the transmutation of trauma. Through collectively and consensually stepping into hauntings, shadows can be utilized to find the lights. We can follow paths that are not seen to create what we wish to see. *Transmutation* is dedicated to trans people, survivors, and sex workers.

Acceptance has been an important word in my healing journey. The action of accepting imperfection requires disciplined introspection. It requires a continuous rewiring of thoughts, morphing grief into peace. This involves traveling to unknown places and futures in the body, mind, and spirit. You cannot time travel backwards and undo the trauma you’ve been dealt. You cannot travel to spaces where your trauma does not follow you. You cannot travel to places where trauma does not exist. There is no use

cursing the trauma that lives within and all around.
Cursing causes corrupted pain to expand, infiltrate,
and poison. Deadly energy in the self can seep into
others around you if left untreated, soaking into
your epigenetics, haunting your blood.
a small vial of your blood
sits waiting
to be boiled &
buried
in the dirt of the lake.

I have written multiple poems about abstract
cursings. As a witch, I never perform curses, but
reading these cursed poems aloud in front of others
is a performance of its own. I turn the deadly energy
into art, utilizing creation energy as a counterspell.
There is no real harm wished upon another, instead
it is about fully accepting all emotions in order for
them to be processed and released. To accept the
emotions requires a surrendering to them.

The trauma energy comes and goes: it gets processed,
disappears for awhile, and re-emerges, sometimes
out of nowhere. The unknown and unexpected
emergences throughout different timelines
is a continuum. It’s an improvised endurance
performance, simultaneously an individual ritual
and a collective ritual, existing in the space between
intimacy and darkness.

One of the most important lessons I’ve learned
from other survivors is that you must accept that
trauma is a part of who you are. You are not defined
by it, but healing it is a life long journey. There is
not a linear path or end point, and the sooner one
accepts this, the sooner one can cultivate deeper
feelings of peace and trust. Feeling like you don’t
exist doesn’t last forever. Invisibility fades away if
acceptance of it is cultivated. Experiencing trauma
forces you to grieve your prior identity and create
a new self. The in-between of having no self at
all—the abandonment of identity—opens up a
new way of existing and creating. I am interested
in this invisibility of the self. I call it anti-identity.
Feeling like a ghost, physically, psychologically,
and spiritually, for an extended amount of time,
is a unique feeling. It is a stage of being in an
ambiguous reality, and creating art in this place is
deeply haunting, yet healing. When one creates
in the process of not having identity, one begs the
question: who is doing the creating?

Artist Alexis Martinez says, “Dealing with trauma
often leads individuals to create parallel realities
as a coping mechanism, allowing them to navigate
their pain in a controlled environment. This
subconscious creation of controlled and alternate
experiences provides a way to explore feelings and
emotions that may be too raw or overwhelming
in the real world. These parallel realities play a
crucial role in processing trauma.” There is power in



accepting trauma, and there is power in the process
of transcending it.

The somatic practice of performing consensual acts
of pain in a controlled way is a healing modality.
This is called pain play, explored under the umbrella
of sadism and masochism (SM). The word *play* is
used broadly to describe any sort of SM or kink
activity. This vocabulary gives us context into why
people consider these activities so healing. To play
is to engage in activities for joy and recreation,
often associated with childhood. In adulthood, we
often become disconnected with our ability to play.
Reconnecting with our desire to play bridges us to
the feelings of ease and joy, acting as an alternative
timeline or portal.

Creating these timelines or portals of healing can
also be psychologically intense. Accepting our
desires can be difficult if they are alternative to
mainstream society, like pain play is. Many people
are shamed for having these desires, directly and
indirectly. Photographer Catherine Opie and her
friends were called perverts for being involved
with SM. In the photograph *Self-Portrait/Pervert*,
she shows herself wearing a black leather mask,
topless with the word “pervert” carved into her
chest. She speaks about the painful experience of
these photographs in a somatic way, “I’m not saying
it didn’t hurt; it hurt. But what you can do with
pain is very interesting. How you can have it move
through you.”

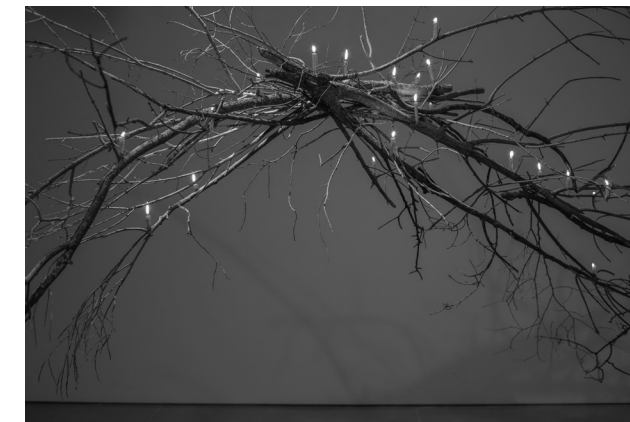
Releasing pain by utilizing pain is explored in my
artwork as a form of acceptance. When we seek
to accept and actualize our desires, we release the
shame that keeps the trauma trapped in the body.
Using kink in an intentional way can remap the
experiences that live in our bodies: situations that
were not pleasant or not consensual can be explored
in a consensual way to reclaim autonomy, power,
and desire. To relate to the body and other bodies
in these experimental ways takes courage and trust.
The risk that is associated with these practices creates



important dialogue around understanding safety, physically and emotionally. Clearly communicating levels of risk, and providing ways to move between these levels, such as offering less risky options, having safety plans, etc. is necessary while working in this realm.

By creating these powerful moments of intimacy, we embody rituals of sensation, emotion, and release. Author Gabriella Herstik explores embodiment rituals in her work, asking us to ask ourselves: “What aspect of myself do I reject? How can I embrace this aspect of myself (my shadow) with love and compassion? How can I use kink to help me do this? What part of my sexuality and erotic self do I reject? Why do I have trouble accepting this part of myself? What desires do I want to experience but don’t give myself permission to do so? What rituals do I already have in place to honor my erotic side? What are rituals I can create to come back to again and again?” This type of introspection is the backbone of my work: it’s the healing work that is not seen, but explored in the same invisible ether where I create art.

By creating spaces to share and surrender to our authentic desires, we allow them freedom to free our bodies. The somatic practices of *Transmutation* unlock timelines that prioritize body intelligence. Valuing this knowledge of the body creates pleasure that heals within intimate spaces and outside of them. Ingrid LaFleur states, “Pleasure generated through our own power should resonate as far into the future as possible.” To accept healing as a lifelong journey is to channel desirable realities into existence. Creating alternative futures allows us to accept our bodies and alchemize our timelines for individual and collective empowerment.



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INSTITUTIONAL(IZED) CRITIQUE + PEDAGOGICAL INTERVENTIONS AT THE ACADEMY: A MAYBE MANIFESTO PART 1

Peter Christenson



The end is the beginning.
The beginning is the end.
Same. Same.
My mother was the first artist
First
Teacher
I met.
I am
You.
You are
Me.

While attending an opening reception for one of my curated collaborative group exhibitions, a student recently asked me why I opted to install art on the floor in addition to on the walls. I was particularly grateful for this observation and for their question, as this act, like all artistic interventions, was purposeful.

Intent:
I recall asking
Her why
She
Often put art on
The floor.

For me, the reasoning and motivation to place artworks on the ground is more complex than just a straightforward aesthetic decision. This floor-up, Down-Top, (Which is the opposite of Top-Down) type of installation serves as a “visual and spatial



interruption” of sorts; it provides an occasion for “view point curiosity”: a divergent perspective / exchange and “access point of view” of the artwork, quite literally lowering the sightline for folx of different (all) heights, with varying vision(s), and/ or providing a clearer view for those of us, say, who might be in a wheelchair or might like to lay on the gallery floor. It’s also a symbolic and poetic gesture, a figurative manifestation of a paradigm shift/switch for maker and spectator, a disruption to the hierarchical ladder once-embedded/coded into Art, and as such, it becomes an institutional intervention, a critique of the “lofty and high-brow” institution of capital-A Art, the institution of white-walled, pure, transcendent gallery spaces that have historically been places only for the rich and elite to only champion the artistic genius and their “masterpieces”; therefore...

an occasion to reposition what is perceived as powerful or important in the artistic equation, an opportunity to critique and challenge these exclusive/exclusionary places where art can only be revered as if in church, looked up at,
Touched
Only when in white
Gloves, worshipped like blessed,
Sacred, perfect artifacts.
So...
Art is not religion or dogma,
Just art. Just
Work. Just
Play. Just story.

Same. Same.

By placing the most holy, worshipped and respected objects of value (Art) on a dirty, pedestrian quotidian floor, we curate inquiry into these generally accepted roles, views, and associated traditions; we call them into question. We allow and invite a breaking of rules + roles together; we break a norm/belief system; we let it topple and fall. We ask spectators to mix a new formula, a personal and unique relationship with the art and space; a new portal to enter the dialogue.

We are
Artists. Maybe
Teachers, maybe
Students.

Maybe a break
from what one might be accustomed to seeing in a gallery or museum, or book, or maybe a break from how someone might be taught to write or read
an essay, or article, or
maybe a break from how one might customarily navigate the gallery space, or classroom, maybe a break constitutes a break from tradition, a break from expectation, a break from a prescribed role.
Say good bye
To the cubicle, critique the 925, and
Join me,
Artist
Student
Teacher
The objective to break



from convention or pattern when making and installing art can lead to powerful and lasting awakenings for the student or spectator or artist in attendance; it can shift how they see/interact with your art, with all art(s). This intentional and interventionist tactic, if we can call it that, can transcend the gallery space, transcend the page. It can become a daily practice. Wall to floor thinking. And “wall to floor” interventions and “wall to floor” critique and paradigm shifting can and should be adopted and incorporated into one’s teaching pedagogy and classroom dynamic.

So, when invited to contribute to this journal about non-conventional teaching approaches, I decided to expound upon the intentional methodology of interventionist approaches to artmaking, but more specifically, the interventionist approaches of teaching art in and out of the classroom, and how this approach / modality can build more connected artists and artmaking, even within an institution or academy that we’re a part of and concurrently critiquing. It’s our responsibility as artist and educator to push against/with the academy (we are the academy) and make it/us better. And we should invite our students to do the same in and out of our classrooms. To push Against And With.

Critique the teacher, the institution, critique art, our indoctrinated viewpoints, break a prescribed norm of obedience or tradition. As a teacher of art, You may find me breaking norms rather intentionally, sitting on the classroom floor literally or figuratively, critiquing the place of teacher, changing sightline, Inviting viewpoint curiosity, inviting students to break Norms. Critiquing and intervening. Together. in the classroom. Voice an opinion. Ask another question. You might find this all With/by making Art What was once an occasional pattern interruption in curation or artmaking, has now become a daily practice of creative and intentional intervention in routine and expectation. Placing art on the floor, picking up a piece of litter, walking on the grass as opposed to the sidewalk, waving to a random person, small gestures of improvisation, of change, of sightline deviations. My teaching too has adopted this practice of intentional breaks from antiquated routine. Go for a wander with students, meet at a secondhand store, start/end class with a poem, no computer day, invite your student to make a new rule/role to practice, start class 3 minutes

early, ask more questions, have fewer answers.

As an artist and social worker, I believe that artmaking can be like therapy, we can use the same tools and instruments for exposure, intervention in self, community, culture building; we can pattern interrupt towards change. Good art and good social work share from each other and share similar objectives: to sculpt and shift matter, to engender dialogue, facilitate transformation, growth, awakenings, to connect And disconnect at times. Maybe. But always to intervene. Somehow. Somewhere. Like she said Make A new habit. Break a habit. Break the role/rule. Build a different rule/role. Use your opposite Hand. Sometimes as a teacher it best serves our students to break the expected routine, to do something unexpected as opposed to the basic lecture, slideshow survey of masters, or office-hour chats, rattle the habit for everyone in the classroom, for yourself as teacher. As student. Use the opposite hand. Teaching is not religion. Art is not religion.

Break the creed, standard, doctrine, viewpoint, formula, manifesto. Same.Same. This is art Work. This (maybe) manifesto is a reminder to never bow, never revere, to break customs and ladders, and never become institutionalized. Never genuflect, never kneel in obedience to tradition or antiquated expectations. Act, intervene, make art, push back on the institution(alization), break the prescribed role. Be the opposite student hand. Invite the student to push back with us. Invite your student to Write The next Line Break. The next stanza. Poem. Demystify and ground with art and teaching; listen as opposed to lecture, whisper as opposed to shout. Art is not above us but of us, we are not below it; it is not sacred or special; art and teaching are a dialogue, not a lecture. If you create access, intervene in unexpected ways, flip the script, flip the roles and rules, down-top as opposed to top-down, rock the boat, break the



mean, alter the line of sight, break the habit(s), nix the lecture, buck an antiquated trend, open the paradigm and discussion. If you teach from the ground, not from the altar or lectern or pulpit on high. You are Down-Top Intervention. You are critique Of tradition, of self, of discipline/practice, of All Institutions. Always and forever. My mother said place it on floor. Art is for everyone. It’s Art 101. It’s teaching 101. Social Work(ing). Same. Same. And try the opposite Hand now. Artist is client And Practitioner Student and teacher Mother. Son. You. Me. Maybe.



TEACHING AS PROTEST & THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACTIVIST ART AND LEARNING

Noushin Mousavi

Teaching is not simply about transferring knowledge from one person to another; it can also serve as a powerful act of protest. It challenges the status quo by questioning established norms, breaking through traditional barriers, and encouraging students to think critically and independently. When educators incorporate activism into their teaching, they do more than just impart facts, they encourage their students to question societal structures, to engage with critical ideas, and to develop a consciousness about issues that affect and shape the world around them.

In this way, teaching itself can be a protest. A teacher who encourages students to critically examine issues like inequality, environmental destruction, or human rights isn't just educating them; they are actively challenging systems of power that perpetuate these issues. By fostering dialogue, questioning authority, and encouraging independent thought, educators can act as agents of social change. Just like activists use protests to challenge oppressive systems, teachers can use their classrooms as spaces to question and dismantle those same systems, teaching students to view the world differently and act accordingly.

The relationship between art and teaching shares a similar role in protest and activism. Just as art can challenge norms, provoke thought, and shift perceptions, teaching can use similar methods to reshape ideas. Whether through visual representations or powerful lessons, both art and teaching can prompt reflection and critical thinking. Art as activism shows us how creativity can be used to express resistance, while teaching can become a platform for enacting change by addressing larger societal issues.

An example of this is my recent walking sculpture. I use my body as a form of protest against the social norms imposed on women in public spaces. In my home country, Iran, chewing gum in public is considered impolite/rude for women. In contrast, in the U.S. and many other societies, it's not considered lewd or uncouth. In my walking sculpture as I walk through the streets, passing pedestrian lines and street signs while chewing gum, I symbolize freedom and resistance to societal norms. This act of public protest crosses physical boundaries, but it also challenges the underlying social structures that limit women's freedom.

Through my work, I aim to teach by protesting, showing others how they can challenge the boundaries imposed on them. By using my body as a tool of activism, I invite reflection on the norms that shape how we live and how we view one another. This act of protest, whether through art or teaching, encourages us to think critically, act boldly, and challenge the systems that constrain us.

In my conversations with Professor Peter Christenson regarding evaluation methods and grading criteria, he encouraged me to design a teaching rubric or "teaching instrument to assess progress" that could adapt to different students and serve as a fair and meaningful assessment tool for all.

While developing a fair and inclusive rubric, I gradually came to understand that the creative process, regardless of artistic discipline, unfolds and gains meaning between two essential points: the beginning and the end. The idea marks the point of departure, while documentation defines the work's closure and contextualization. An idea may arise from rigorous research or emerge from something as simple and poetic as a childhood dream. What matters is that it sparks the act of creation. Documentation, in turn, becomes the framework through which we understand and assign value to the work.

Other criteria can flow between these two points; Visually, such as form, aesthetic, tools, technology, etc and conceptually, such as content, concept, all of which contribute to how the work takes shape and how it communicates.

The instructor can insert conversations into these creative sections to promote critical thinking. This way of teaching can be a form of activism. Art and teaching share this activist potential. Like art, which can provoke reflection and challenge dominant narratives, teaching can reshape understanding and

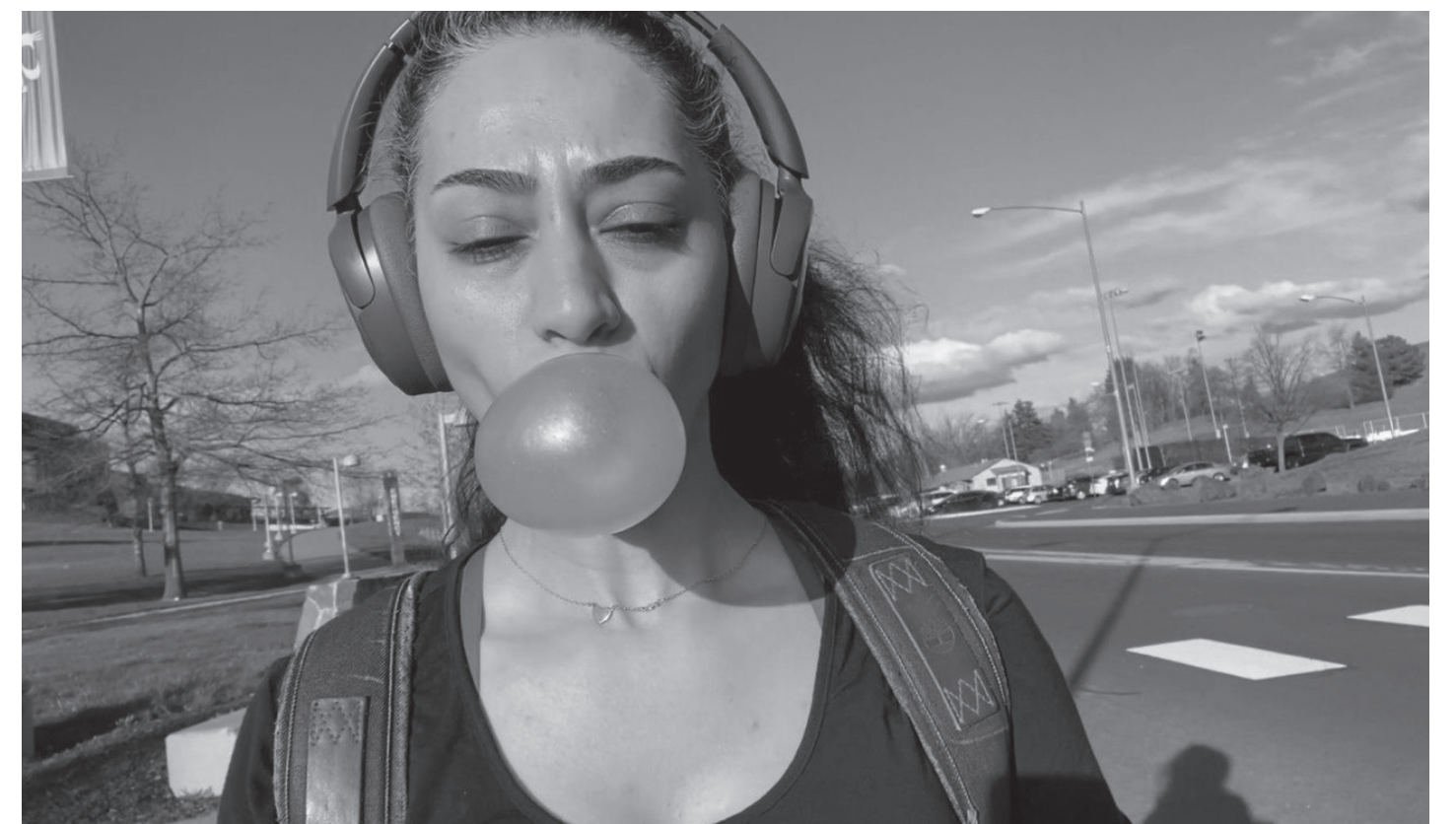
promote social awareness. Both serve as platforms for critical engagement and social change.

This idea emerged from a previously discussed question about pedagogy with Peter. The following section includes questions I responded to, offering insight into my experiences and perspectives on teaching, learning and artistic activism:

[Questions regarding Institutional (ized) Critique: Pedagogical Interventions at the Academy offered by Peter Christenson, Professor of Art at Washington State University to Noushin Mousavi, current Graduate Teaching Assistant at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

1- Can you speak to a recent time when as a student, a teacher's pedagogy or modality may have influenced your practice of creative activism? How did this unfold?

I recently worked on a street performance that I was very afraid to do. But my professor's encouragement and enthusiasm gave me the confidence to finally go through with it after a lot of self-doubt. Professor Christenson generously shared his knowledge of sculptural forms with all relevant sources and also expressed his enthusiasm; I felt inspired to keep working on the piece and develop it further, even after it had already been graded. This approach might not work for everyone, but it worked well for me. Peter also shared helpful resources that were closely related to my project, which helped me understand my own work better. Before that, I had been introduced to many artists, but I had to search





★ hard to find any real connection between their work and mine. After the performance, the professors gave me valuable feedback, which helped me reflect more deeply on my choices and think more clearly about the impact of my work.

★ My teacher's knowledge and deep understanding of the subject helped me transform my internal knowledge and process into a refined artistic expression. Another piece was "The Lost Piece" which was a performance. My tutorial professor and advisor for this project was Dr. Michael Holloman who helped and taught me to see my identity and even my fears as sources of strength. These insights of professors deeply motivated me through my art-academic journey.

2- Do you consider yourself a protest artist? In your opinion, is all art political? I began creating art based on my personal challenges and experiences as an immigrant. At first, my work focused on emotional moments and the meaning of home and adaptation—without intentionally aiming to be political. However, because my content revolves around the immigrant experience, political meanings naturally became part of it. Over time, I started capturing situations that carry political weight, such as distance, land, borders, the burden of limitations, and symbolic items of travel/movement like suitcases. I think we are always part of politics in this world as long as we are alive and engaged with our society and the law exists.

3- You're a currently enrolled graduate student at Washington State University where I'm a faculty adviser to you and member of your thesis committee. Do you think that as a student artist, you have the bandwidth or leverage to also critique the university/academy as an institution? In your opinion, does the American university allow for (or support) this type of practice? Should it? Why / how?

I believe that U.S. universities, especially within a capitalist system, can be a relatively safe space for art students like me to speak out through our work. In my experience, art programs often support individuality and creative freedom, which gives us the opportunity to explore difficult or political topics, even ones that critique the institution itself. I recognize that there are limits. While universities may support activism in theory, there's sometimes hesitation when that activism directly challenges their own structures of power. But I think one of the strengths of art is its ability to raise important questions and critiques in symbolic or subtle ways, through visual language, performance, or metaphor without necessarily confronting authority in a direct or confrontational way.

So yes, I do think I have some space to question the university through my art, and I believe that this kind of critical engagement should be supported. It's an important part of learning and growth, not just for students but for the institutions themselves.



4- Can you discuss a time when as an instructor you discussed activism and protest as a form of art with your students? Which texts and precedents did you highlight in lecture? Which artists or movements did you highlight?

During my time teaching graphic design in 2015 at the School of Art and Architecture in Iran, I didn't directly address activism and protest as forms of art in a formal way. However, the concept of resistance became increasingly important to me, especially as I prepared to immigrate to the U.S. As someone from a family displaced by the Iran-Iraq war, from one of the cities that share a common boundary between Iran and Iraq to another city, I have always carried a sense of migration and disconnection, which deeply informed my teaching. I encouraged students to think critically about their surroundings and reflect on social issues in their work. This way of thinking can become a foundation for activism in art. While I didn't assign specific texts at that time, I began incorporating conversations around artists like Ganzeer, known for his politically charged street art during the Egyptian revolution, and Barbara Kruger, whose bold typographic work critiques power, gender, and consumer culture. These examples helped students see how design and visual language can challenge authority and spark change. These experiences later shaped my own practice as an artist working at the intersection of identity, memory, and resistance.

5- What are your plans for your next creative

intervention, your next creative activist project?

Professor Christenson, a highly influential member of my thesis committee, has been extremely impactful in shaping my understanding of my work. He taught me the concept of walking as a form of protest, walking as a form of resistance, and the artist-walker as an activist. This perspective helped clarify the meaning of works that were previously unclear to me. As someone whose practice centers on immigrant experiences, I began to see how walking—often tied to displacement, transition, and border-crossing—could become a powerful method to express the emotional and political weight of migration. I am now working to extract these layered meanings in a more formal and comprehensible way, allowing viewers to intervene in the work and become an essential part of it.



Contributors

NOUSHIN MOUSAVI is an immigrant multidisciplinary artist and Graduate Teaching Assistant at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her work reflects on the passage of time and life’s transitions, engaging with the challenges and transformations of migration.”

SWAN FERRARO is an interdisciplinary artist working in installation, somatics and photo/video. Individual and collective healing are emphasized in the work through the use of ritual. Their current research is titled Creative Improvisation as a Form of Divination in the Trans Body.

PETER CHRISTENSON is a social worker, educator, and multiform conceptualist who works across media, platforms, and environments. He is a Professor of Art at Washington State University, where you’ll most likely find him dancing or crying in his office.

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WAYWARD
EDUCATION
EXCHANGE

