

ANNA CRAYCROFT +

OLIVIA PLENDER + FIA BACKSTRÖM + AURÉLIEN FROMENT + HARRELL FLETCHER + ADELITA HUSNI BEY =

*Building Blocks as Tall as Buildings:
Artists working with Early Child Pedagogy*

PREFACE

The works of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Friedrich Fröbel, Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner, and Reggio Emilia all translate complex concepts into graspable forms. Their interests cover dense fields like mathematics, medicine, politics, science, engineering, history, and philosophy. Their innovations employ genres ranging from painting to sculpture, architecture to dance, music to horticulture, poetry to graphic design. Their bodies of work are conceived according to unique cosmologies. The individual pieces they have produced are easily recognizable by signature colors, mediums, and iconography.

Of course, I am not describing artworks. These are not artists. Almost all are framed exclusively within the schooling for which they are best known: the early childhood pedagogies of Yverdon (founded in 1805, in Switzerland, by Pestalozzi), Kindergarten (founded in 1837, in Germany, by Fröbel), Montessori (founded in 1907, in Italy, by Montessori), Waldorf (founded in 1919, in Germany, by Steiner), and Reggio Emilia (founded in 1950, in Italy, by Loris Malaguzzi). The legacies of these five pedagogues measure the two-hundred-year evolution of classroom teaching with toys and hands-on learning. Their philosophies of education continue to influence the schooling we have today. But the conceptual rigor and cultural innovation of their objects, images, and activities are not recognized outside of the logic of their respective curricula. However, when we consider these works from early childhood pedagogy alongside works from art history, the critical correspondences between them reveal a network of analogous interests.

INTRODUCTION

There are many ways that pedagogy—its theories, its curriculum, and its spaces—can provide templates for the field of art. It maps methods for making, for exhibition design, for social engagement, and for institutional structures. The likenesses between the two fields create potential equivalencies that have been explored by artists and pedagogues alike. In my own practice I have modeled some of what I make and how I work after the interdisciplinary innovations, esoteric idiosyncrasies, and civic awareness of the five pedagogies I listed above—those of Pestalozzi, Fröbel, Montessori, Steiner, and Reggio Emilia. I have focused specifically on these five because of how literally they materialized concepts into forms—creating new vocabularies to explore complicated questions through the toys and activities of their curricula.

What I find even more significant, however, is the fact that they are pedagogies for *early childhood*. It is not that I am specifically interested in children as a subject for my work. But I am interested in what our definition of childhood represents: how we distinguish the parameters of pre-adulthood according to a developmental vulnerability that is in fact inherent to being human, at any age. I am curious how this restrictive prescription shapes our definitions of selfhood and our understanding of the human condition. My research into early childhood pedagogy as part of my artistic practice is an inquiry into what happens when the impressionability that we assign to childhood is considered as integral and relevant to the grown-up discourse of art and art making.

For == I spoke with five other contemporary artists who have made work inspired by early childhood education—Fia Backström, Aurélien Froment, Adelita Husni-Bey, Harrell Fletcher, and Olivia Plender. Each of them has explored a different philosophy of radical pedagogy using their own distinct methodology and personal perspective. Before our conversations I knew a few of them well, while others were new acquaintances—but none of us had talked previously about this shared interest. I met with them individually to learn more about how their work with early child pedagogy has shaped their art practice. Our conversations spanned questions as lofty as the responsibility of the artist and as pragmatic as the function of a didactic. Needless to say, there is no way to fit the breadth of each exchange into a short text, but I aimed to maintain the informality of our dialogues in this selective edit. I am grateful to each of them for their candidness and generosity. —Anna Craycroft ▶

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REPEAT AND VARY: PESTALOZZI AND LEWITT

A series of lines—horizontals, verticals, diagonals, arcs—are combined across a grid in repetitions and variations. Up on the wall is a set of instructions, leading a group to follow directions: “Now you will draw a horizontal line.” And they repeat, “Now I am drawing a horizontal line,” and so on.



BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT: **Sol LeWitt**, *Wall Drawing #260: All Combinations of Arcs from Corners and Sides; Straight, Not Straight and Broken Lines* (installation view), 1976, © 2014 The LeWitt Estate / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. *ABC der Anschauung Switzerland*, c. 1803.



SYNTHETIC MOVEMENTS: STEINER AND HORWITZ

Sound and movement are codified with vivid colors to measure pattern in time. Their rhythmic sequences are choreographic scores. Musicians, dancers, and speakers interpret, embody, and perform these synthetic systems.

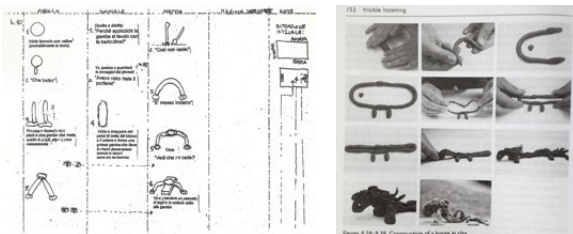


BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Eurythmy instruction at **Uhlandschule Waldorf School**, Stuttgart, ca. 1922 **Rudolf Steiner**—*Alchemy of the Everyday* © Vitra Design Museum and Authors, 2011. **Channa Horwitz**, *At the Tone the Time will be*, Performance, 1969. Courtesy of The Horwitz Estate and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles.



OBSERVATION NOTES: REGGIO AND CALLE

Photographs, sketches, and written notations document the process by which discoveries are made. There is no complete moment. Each is encountered according to its own logic. Their information and mystery is promptly recorded through fragments of images, textual murmurings, and allocated time-codes.



BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Documentation by teachers of student process at **Reggio Emilia**, ca. 1980. *Construction of Horse in Clay & Notes* by a teacher, scuola comunale dell'infanzia Diana, *Art and Creativity in Reggio Emilia: Exploring the role and potential of ateliers in early childhood education* Vecchi, Vea © 2010 Vea Vecchi. **Sophie Calle**, *The Hotel, room 43*, March 5, 1983, Ektachrome print, text and 7 silver gelatin prints, 41 x 56 in. each panel, © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris. Courtesy of Sophie Calle and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

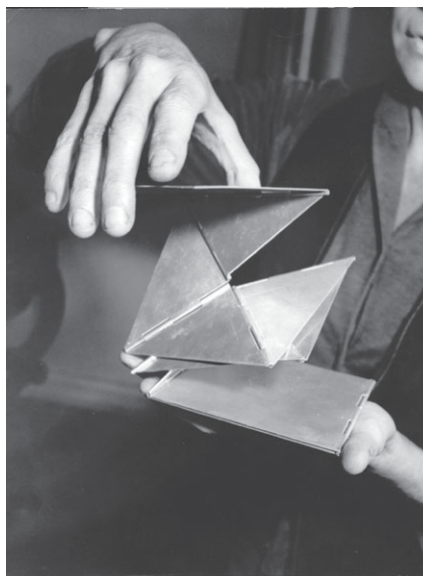


ANIMATING SPACE: FRÖBEL AND CLARK

A flat geometric plane is collapsed onto itself in measured divisions. This process of folding generates a series of rotations around a line. Like the crystallographic axis, this spine animates the inorganic.



ABOVE: American kindergarten teacher-trainees' paper folding albums, circa 1890, collection of Norman Brosterman.



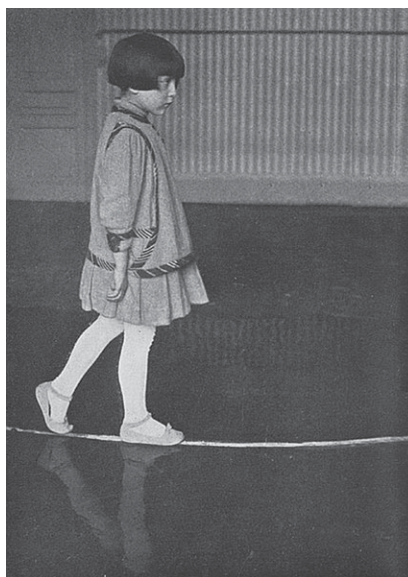
ABOVE: **Lygia Clarke Bicho**, (*Critter*), c. 1960-63, metal, variable dimensions. Courtesy "The World of Lygia Clark" Cultural Association.

EVERYDAY ACTS: MONTESSORI AND NAUMAN

A wide white line has been drawn on the floor to be walked upon slowly, meticulously, and with close attention to each step. In a laboratory for experimentation and discovery, the practice of a simple motor activity is carefully exaggerated. Gradually the nuances of this pedestrian gesture take on greater meanings.



ABOVE: **Bruce Nauman**, *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner Around the Perimeter of a Square*, 1967-68, 16mm film on video (black and white, silent), 10 minutes. Distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, Courtesy Sperone Westwater, New York, © 2014 Bruce Nauman | Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



ABOVE: Analyzing the beat of a measure while walking on a line. (A Montessori school in Italy) Montessori, Maria, *The Montessori Elementary Material* © 1917 Frederick A. Stokes Company.



Anna Craycroft, *C'mon Language!*, 2013, an exhibition incorporating some techniques from the pedagogies of Reggio Emilia and Rudolf Steiner. **Anna Craycroft**, *Subject of*

Learning / Object of Study, 2010, an exhibition incorporating some techniques from the pedagogies of Maria Montessori, Friedrich Froebel, and Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi.

OLIVIA: The faculty of the Art and Environment course at the Open University, UK, weren't particularly interested in producing professional artists. They had this whole idea of the "good enough artist," coming from [pediatrician and psychotherapist] D. W. Winnicott—the idea of the "good enough mother"—since very few of these students would become artists. That wasn't the point. It's *good enough* for people to be creative and to have access to their own creativity. So in a way, they wanted to turn on as many people as possible to this kind of potential—opening up the arts, basically. So that it's not just unique/special people who get to make art—anybody can make art.

Great Britain's Kibbo Kift youth movement of the 1920s, the Modern Spiritualist movement at the turn of the twentieth century, and the BBC's Art and Environment television course from the 1970s are a few of the historical movements that Olivia Plender mines in her dedication to the empowering potentials of open access and radical education.

OLIVIA: The Kibbo Kift and the Modern Spiritualist movement are groups that I have looked at a lot over the years. These two groups are essentially where I started with pedagogy. The Kibbo Kift were a youth movement from the 1920s. It started as a left-wing offshoot of the Boy Scouts. They split from the Boy Scouts just after the First World War because they were disillusioned with militarism. So it was a historical moment when younger people were utterly disillusioned with the older generation and the version of society that the older generation produced—because the society they have to live in has produced war and bloodshed and horror. It seems to have been a moment of ferment, when there was suddenly this feeling of "we are going to throw out everything and we can make everything anew." So in its early phase the Kibbo Kift was a bunch of left-wing Boy Scouts, plus a few people from the campaign for women's suffrage and also from the co-operative movement. And they came together to form this left-wing camping movement. And it was for adults and children. They definitely had a sense in the beginning that it was a breaking down of hierarchies. They wanted something that was gender equal. They wanted an equal relation between adults and children. And then there was a lot about creativity.

The word creativity defines Plender's approach to pedagogy. As an inherent part of human nature, creativity allows the potential for knowledge or skills to be acquired by anyone given an opportunity to do so—linking art to pedagogy as a form of liberation.

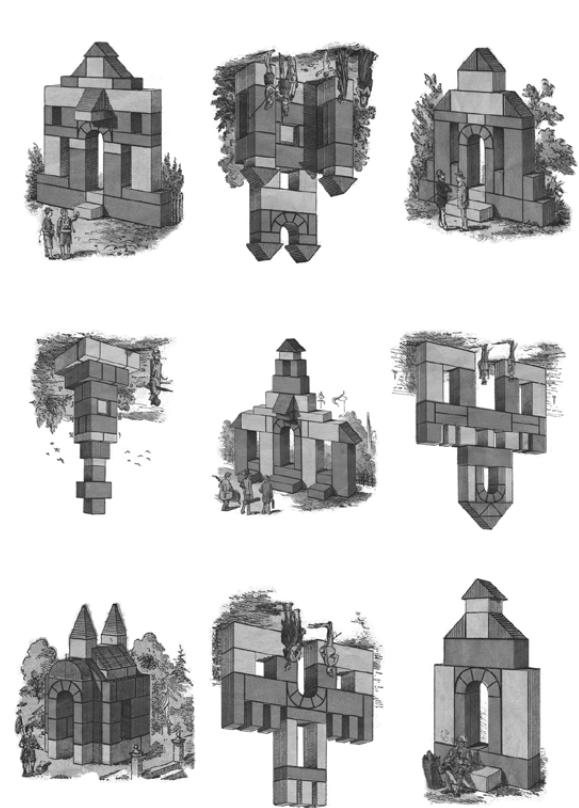
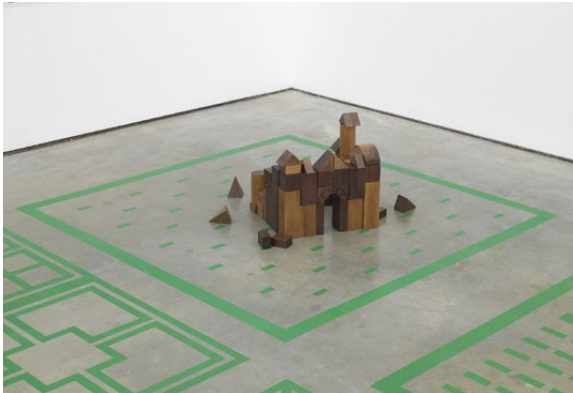
OLIVIA: When spiritualism came to the UK it really became popular in the north of England, in industrial towns among working-class communities, and it was not about charismatic leaders. It became a workers' method of mutual education. The Spiritualists styled their churches as lyceums. They saw

them as educational centers, where people could learn to read. Even today the Spiritualist churches—I've been to a lot of them, and I really like them, and the people—they have this ethos of, like, "You, too, could be on the platform, all you have to do is a bit of training." So there is this real belief in education. That everybody has this in them, this ability to—in that case, the ability to speak to the dead—but I think of that as quite similar to creativity and ideas around creativity. With creativity, it would be the difference between someone who believes that anyone is creative and you just have to access it, versus the idea of the genius—unique, special people who have talents that ordinary mortals don't have. The Spiritualists are in this arena where they believe that these special gifts that we have, everybody has them. You just have to train a bit.

Informed by her research into these varied histories and their archives, Plender handcrafts unique objects, images, and installations for her solo exhibitions. As she and I talked about the parameters of art making and the restrictiveness of symbolic languages, I wondered whether this presented an obstacle for her work with historical movements that focus on action and collaboration. I asked about how she negotiates the symbolic object in contrast with the social engagement and campaigns for political reform that are characteristic of radical pedagogy. Plender explained how her research into the Art and Environment course, for example, was providing a model for her own art practice. As part of the BBC's 1970s television broadcast of The Open University, the Art and Environment course instructed an unlikely demographic of art students in interdisciplinary lessons on everything from visual arts, theater, social sciences, and semiotics. As they fulfilled the requirements of their televised coursework within their homes and among their communities, the Art and Environment students were able to explore a contextual connection between making and meaning. For Plender, the design of the pedagogy anticipated this contextual impact, creating layers of self-awareness that she duplicates in her own objects, images, and installations—by exploiting the powerful messages that are embedded within the symbolic because of its limitations.

ANNA: In the examples you talk about—where the form of education is collaborative and emphasizes process—is the symbolic language of art being abandoned in some way?

OLIVIA: I don't think so, because they're still working with symbols. What they're *not* doing—which we are doing in this art world that we exist in—has to do with distribution and connecting with audiences. Because in the Art and Environment course in the seventies, they're not thinking about the audience so much. I mean, I'm sure they were a little bit, but more with a sense that there was no difference between the artist and audience, that there was no role for an audience because everyone is a participant. Most of the emphasis seemed to be on personal development in some way. It was consciousness raising. There was a real political project. Because of the nature of the context—the learners were working from home, and so there was a massive feminist component to the course in order to think about the politics of the home, like: Who's doing the



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Image from the **Kibbo Kift Foundation**, The British Library of Political and Economic Science, Special Collections department, London School of Economics.

Image from the archives of the **Open University's Art and Environment Course**. **Olivia Plender**, *Social Construction*, 2012, printed poster. **Olivia Plender**, *Machine Shall be the Slave*

of Man, but We Will Not Slave for the Machine, 2009, mixed media installation with video. **Olivia Plender**, *Social Construction*, 2012, installation shots from "Rise Early Be Industrious."

work in the home? Who's doing the labor? How are women represented in art and the media? So, it's a political education and it's really connected with a political project—that you should come out of the course much more aware of how symbols operate in the world around you ...

ANNA: Do you think that model could be transposed onto your own work?

OLIVIA: Yeah, I'd say it could. I think at least with my shows in galleries and museums it's like that. I'm always trying to historicize stuff. One of the big questions in my work is around history and historical narration and how you tell the story of history, and who is it that is telling the story of history. When you place something in its historical context, you denaturalize it. It doesn't seem common sense any more, or like it was always that way. Once it's in historical context, you're like, "Oh, that comes from a specific historical moment, that idea or that practice or that way of thinking about something. That's not *just* how people are." It takes it away from essentializing. You can't essentialize if you historicize something. Like in my exhibition *Rise Early, Be Industrious*—in one sense it's very didactic. But on the other hand, there are these moments of participation that the audience have. The whole show is trying to make the audience conscious of themselves, conscious of the institutional framing around the show, conscious of who *they* are looking at this work or participating in this work. To use this sort of 1970s terminology, it's consciousness raising. So that *is* kind of what I'm up to.

ANNA: If the goal is to be consciousness raising, how do you make the tools to do that?

OLIVIA: That's a *massive* question. [*Laughs*]

ANNA: Sure, but the reason why I'm thinking about early childhood pedagogy as a model for my own work is that ...

OLIVIA: It's full of tools.

ANNA: Right, it's full of tools.

OLIVIA: Yeah, I mean, that's why I'm attracted to stuff like the Art and Environment course. It's full of tools. They're really practically laid out. You can read the book and use the tools, apply them.

Among the tools that Plender applies from her research are comics, board games, group exercises, and toy blocks. She has worked with these forms within her exhibitions to engage audiences in complex questions about history and power. In her 2012 traveling exhibition "Rise Early, Be Industrious" (MK Gallery, Milton Keynes; Arnolfini, Bristol; Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow) Plender created a series of individual stage-set-like rooms that investigated histories of knowledge transmission, work, and leisure in a post industrial society. At the core of each installation was a form of game or lesson—with toys, costumes, figurines, etc.—presented as a provocation for play. Through the disarming

vocabulary of these games, Plender asks audiences to actively consider their own political positions.

OLIVIA: I'm very interested in games and have done a lot of work in the form of games—such as a board game, several performances involving game-like participation on the part of the audience, and blocks and other pieces with game-like qualities. There's a lot that interests me in that. Partly it's because you can engage the viewer in a different way. Viewers are not distant and contemplative when they are engaged in playing a game. They are inside a narrative and a set of structures. The blocks and the board game that I made both deal with societal structures. Within the games the audience can participate, but only to a limited extent as the structure of the game restricts what they can do, their room to maneuver. It opens up a conversation about participation within the arts, within the institutional frame of the gallery, as well as within a representative democracy and the institutions of our apparently democratic society. I want the audience to feel a sense of frustration at the limits of the structure that I have imposed on them through the game, rather than an unbridled sense of freedom. That is a kind of learning through doing, to feel the limitations of these institutional and societal structures through games, rather than having to be told about them in a didactic fashion. This hopefully then opens up to some questioning of these institutional structures. The games that I work with are not in any way as open as Fröbel's. Mine are deliberately closed forms, to ultimately frustrate the audience: fun enough that you play but not so fun that you miss the lesson. There are also games that I enjoy that are much more surrealist in a way. In terms of form, I like the irrationality, how related to fortune-telling it can seem, how the board game is all about chance, how the cards can be used for fortune telling, or how the narrative aspect of games are like dreams and the realm of the imagination.

FIA: The pedagogy of Reggio Emilia is very democratic, almost anarchistic in its approach. It is surely antiauthoritarian at heart, which allows for growth in an incredible way. Even though it's for very young children, I think it is applicable at all ages.

ANNA: And why do you think that this pedagogy would lead you to art—and not to activism or social-justice work? Why art?

FIA: I feel that the pedagogy of Reggio encourages children to understand the world through the eyes of an artist—the way artists approach the world, with that kind of curiosity where you actually embrace nonsense. Non-understanding is part of the process, not being afraid of it. It becomes a part of life.

Fia Backström first encountered the early childhood pedagogy of Reggio Emilia at Stockholm's Moderna Museet in 1981, during the exhibition "L'occhio se salta il muro." This was the first iteration of a traveling show that displays the methodologies and classwork of Reggio teachers and students. (The exhibition that Backström witnessed is still in circulation worldwide today, now called "The Hundred Languages of Children.") The pedagogy began in northern Italy during the 1960s, spearheaded by educator Loris Malaguzzi. Its philosophy and practices were further developed through collaborations among the citizens and municipalities of the city that is its namesake, Reggio Emilia.

FIA: When I was thirteen or fourteen years old, I was working at Moderna Museet in Stockholm. There was a Reggio Emilia exhibition there that took up almost the entire museum. The show contained both the children's work and the documentation from the Reggio classrooms. The museum's pedagogues were working with hordes of school classes. That was the first contact I had with the pedagogy, and it was amazing. It might be one of the reasons why I became an artist... I didn't revisit this experience for a while, but it was always there.

Backström has used methods from Reggio Emilia to structure two projects: Let's Decorate, and Let's Do It Professionally! (2008) and Studies in Leadership (2009–11). For both projects, Backström experimented with the role of a Reggio art teacher, or atelierista, and Reggio's student-directed curriculum.

FIA: When I decided that I was going to do a clay workshop with the curators at the Whitney Biennial as part of *Let's Decorate, and Let's Do It Professionally!* I knew I needed a pedagogical method and a character to relate to the curators. Reggio Emilia was instinctively where I looked, and it was a very useful tool in treating the curators like artists. I was going to be there as a Reggio *atelierista*, encouraging them to explore the material in a sensorial way, while keeping the outcome open.

Backström's description of developing Let's Decorate, and Let's Do It Professionally! sounded to me like a Reggio lesson using an "emergent curriculum" model. In this model, the classroom activity or lesson evolves from a continual exchange between the students and the teachers.

FIA: After many, many negotiations, the curators finally agreed to be part of a clay workshop and performance before the opening. But the workshop was *only for the curators*. It was one of a few ways this work inverted the content production expected of an artist. Instead, the curators started to produce while I (or the artist) became a director.

I started the workshop with a lecture-performance on language and stock images. I gave the curators key words harvested from Getty images when searching "happiness." I told the curators they were making words for the walls, but I didn't dictate which ones. I encouraged them to use the material, but not as an authority figure, who says, "Do this, do that." Rather, I approached it like Reggio—to make this an integral part of *their* experience. So they started to discuss it among themselves, and it became an inspirational exploration.

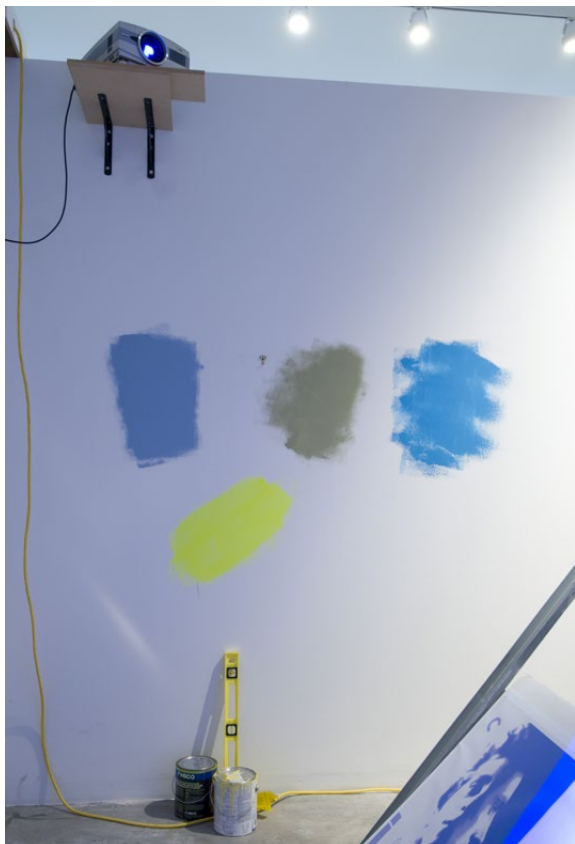
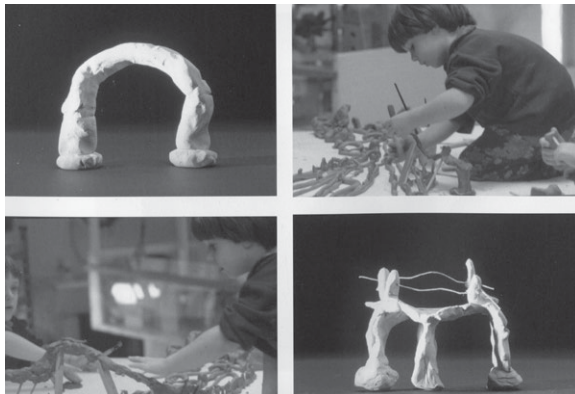
ANNA: It reminds me of an orchestration that I've been somewhat perplexed by in Reggio methodology. From a distance, their "emergent curriculum" can seem like it is the result of some mysterious process of marionetting, where the teachers invisibly guide the students to lead their own lessons.

FIA: There were a lot of negotiations from both sides. The curators worked very hard to make the project happen in a way they supported. It was like marionetting, but from *both* sides.

ANNA: Mutual marionetting! Like how in Reggio, through the negotiations of dialogue, students and teachers develop a common language.

FIA: Just that! Yeah, I agree. Of course, our agendas were different. But something else was super interesting. I think the curators felt really good that they had actually made something with their hands in the show. They seemed quite proud when they showed people the work and told them they had made it. One time when I visited the exhibition, I overheard one of the guides giving a tour. When she spoke about the clay objects the curators had made, she spoke about their aesthetic qualities—describing how the finger marks "made the letters more expressionistic." She didn't speak so much about the pedagogy. So there was this shift of authorship in a way from social objects into craft, or art objects.

The function of authorship continued to be an important question in Backström's Studies in Leadership that she began a year later. In each of the four iterations of this project—an exhibition at Contemporary Art Museum St Louis; a residency at Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; a workshop at Frieze art fair in London; and the syllabus and critical theory course at Columbia University—Backström invited installers, curators, critics, and students at each institution to manifest different roles of authority in the making of the works.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: "Construction of Bridges in Clay by Children 4 to 5/6 years old" and "The Crowd Projected and Dramatized," classroom activity at a school in **Reggio**

Emilia; images from *The Hundred Languages of Children: Projects by Children of the Municipal Infant-Toddler Centers and Preschools of Reggio Emilia* Exhibition Catalogue,

©1996. **Fia Backstrom**, *Let's Decorate, and Let's Do It Professionally!*, 2008. **Fia Backstrom**, *Studies in Leadership, A Family Affair*, 2009.

FIA: For *Studies In Leadership* — a family affair in St. Louis, the connection to Reggio was again with the character of the art teacher, who is constantly delegating and giving access to production. I likened this position to the soft corporate leadership in neoliberal corporate management, where openness and initiative is encouraged and it seems about free will, but it is very much controlled indirectly. I decided that I would delegate the making of this exhibition completely to the institution—as a performance piece. It was set up as a remake of William Greaves’s 1968 film *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm*. To prepare, I read up on different pedagogies and looked at case studies of primary school teachers in order to understand how to handle the institution and its different employees.

ANNA: What was the purpose of reading a variety of different pedagogies?

FIA: I see pedagogical models as proposals for how we come together and how we can actually work together in very practical ways, beyond utopic political ideas. The main interest in my work has to do with how we come together, the terms of collectivity, how we coexist, and what community means now. So pedagogy is a very natural material for me as well as a model for strategies within the work. Structures of pedagogy set up for the possibilities of community and therefore for the kind of society we get. With the community comes the question of the leader. The artist position is of course a form of leadership and so are the different managers in an art institution.

Another way that the Reggio Emilia pedagogy presented a model for Backström was its use of documentation. In both Studies in Leadership — a family affair and Let’s Decorate, and Let’s Do it Professionally! the documentation of the process was integral to each project. For Studies in Leadership — a family affair these records were included as part of the installation.

FIA: For the workshop of *Let’s Decorate, and Let’s Do it Professionally!* there were two videographers present. *Studies In Leadership* — a family affair was filmed by the people who worked at the institution. In addition I had a camera and I wrote a diary throughout the entire process. This was then published and inserted into the installation. Documentation is a very important part of the Reggio process for analyzing what has been done, both for teachers and for the parents. Of course we didn’t have any parents to deal with, but there were the institutions, audiences, and such. The inclusion of the documentation made it possible to communicate what had happened. It also added a meta-level that commented on the process. So the work also included the next step of how to talk about it, how to analyze it, and how to bring it to another place.

ANNA: This makes sense also in relation to Reggio’s idea of “the hundred languages”—that learning happens when we can understand things from multiple perspectives. Documentation halts a process and represents it from different stages or perspectives or “languages.”

FIA: Right. Because documentation is, of course, not true; there is no truth in documentation. It always involves a degree of staging that affects the process itself. It can be done at different turns of the process and it can be done in different ways and media.

In our conversation, Backström had mentioned “pedagogical strategies” to talk about how she wants her work—as artist and teacher—to invite participants and viewers to create their own understandings. I was curious about how she saw the relationship between a work of art and a strategy.

ANNA: I have a question for you about whether a pedagogical strategy or tool can also be a work of art. If it’s too much of a material thing, if it’s too autonomous—in other words too “arty”—then supposedly it can’t be a pedagogical thing. And if it’s too *useful*, then likewise it can’t have the autonomy of an art object, right?

FIA: I’m not sure that one can articulate it in that binary way. It’s too simplified. It’s not that clear of a line. Art can be useful and be fantastic. And with pedagogy, there can be a strange dissonance between what the teacher thinks was important in their class and what a student—maybe even years later—relays that was crucial for them. This proves that knowledge is created *in between* bodies and is not something anyone or anything possesses. I don’t believe in a pure top-down process, more of an interactive one.

ANNA: The distinction I made is also really problematic for me. I consider art and pedagogy to be much more interwoven than the binary I just laid out.

FIA: Okay, yeah. I *totally* agree with you on that. Also, there is this pejorative use of this word *didactic*, of art being didactic. I have heard those critiques of my work.

ANNA: And what do you think that means?

FIA: I guess it means using pedagogy in an overly explanatory or moralizing way. In a classroom, being didactic is actually part of the job, but art on the other hand often works intentionally with illegibility. It can be a way to treat information decoratively, to create nonsense through its material presence, but at the same time to point to its content through extreme explanations or diegesis. It’s another form of language, a trope, ultimately. I would like pedagogy to operate perversely, very perversely! To use didacticism in art is perverse! It has to do with humor, of being overly clear when something else is actually important. It’s a displacement maneuver: its proper function, “learning the facts,” has been deviated for other operations, like Freud’s description of perversion when the child is looking up under his mother’s skirt. But then looking away and seeing her shoe, he becomes a shoe fetishist. The function of the object is displaced onto something else. That’s the way!

AURÉLIEN: At the “Fröbel Fröbeled” exhibition in Nice, historian of education Baptiste Jacomino gave a talk in which he said that Fröbel actually created artworks. That even though Fröbel was teaching math, science, etc., he was also teaching art with his materials and that these materials were art. Fröbel created art objects to teach art instead of using reproductions of art to teach art. His “Forms of Beauty” were aesthetic objects for experiencing and teaching art directly. I thought that was a really interesting way to phrase the intuition that we have to see Fröbel as an artist: because Fröbel did consider his objects as art forms. Not only were they analytic and experiential tools, they were also aesthetic objects—“Forms of Beauty,” as he called them.

The lifework of nineteenth-century pedagogue Friedrich Fröbel has been a subject of investigation for Aurélien Froment through a number of his exhibitions. I met with Froment on the occasion of his traveling show “Fröbel Fröbeled” at Spike Island in Bristol, England.

AURÉLIEN: I wanted to explore the nature of the infrastructure—or the institution—in which the work is experienced. With Fröbel, there is this triangular relationship between the teacher, the child, and the object. So I thought that might be useful to look at the relationship between the artwork, myself (or the institution or any authority), and the viewer. In my work I often revisit other peoples’ works. Looking at Fröbel I slowly discovered the specific dynamics of the relationship between the inanimate object and the two people “at work.” I had an intuition that this could be a way to look at our relationship with art. What does art make, how does art work, and how do we experience it? Maybe those questions could be considered through an analogy with that relationship—between the pedagogue, the object, and the child—by moving that into the space of an exhibition.

Aurélien Froment’s attraction to Fröbel belies a dedication to mystery that is at the heart of all Froment’s work, regardless of the subject. Froment’s exhibitions set up the proposition for a viewer to place themselves at the center of an unfolding narrative.

AURÉLIEN: From the beginning I thought about the “Fröbel Fröbeled” show as an atlas of images “made of wooden blocks.” I was thinking of Fröbel as a space and a geography to explore. Often when I make a work I go somewhere that is located on a map. But with Fröbel, because it’s spread in time and space, what I wanted to describe was hypothetical. Also, since the various official narratives are based on the instructions Fröbel left—rather than on an external account of the daily work at the Kindergarten—the history reads more as a utopian space than as a real one. And even though the Kindergarten was not really documented, it still had numerous and tangible consequences. So I was interested in

revisiting that utopian space and to trying to map the resulting territory. The atlas I was imagining would be the result of visiting that territory, of being within that territory.

ANNA: So you set out to do so by following the instructions in the nineteenth-century textbooks on Fröbel’s toys?

AURÉLIEN: The instructions in the books are diagrams for representing things from the world with the blocks—and the extent of that is the image of an idealized world. The instructions show images of architecture—castles, churches, houses, bridges—but also monuments, furniture, tools, every scale of things that are part of the fabric of a social landscape. When you put all of them together, it actually draws the picture of a world—though an idealized one.

ANNA: Right, but all of the things in this world that are made with blocks can also be taken apart. So they are actions as much as they are things.

AURÉLIEN: Yes, they are instructions, they are models, they are things to be done and then, obviously, taken apart. Photographing them was like giving a new appearance to the same pictures as much as performing the instructions depicted in the textbooks.

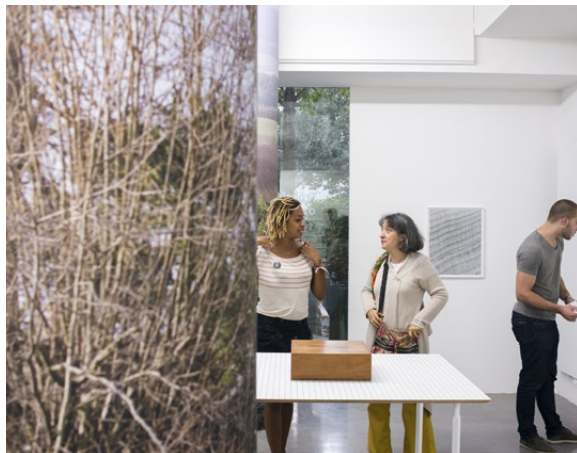
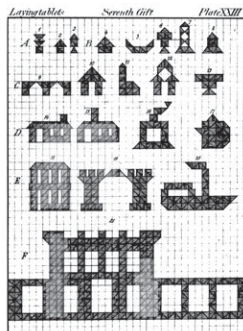
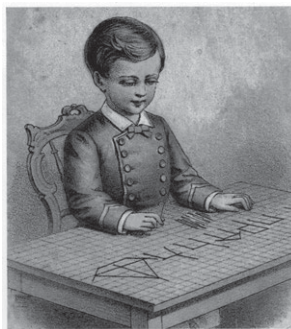
ANNA: So you also tested them in reality by physically remaking Fröbel’s tools.

AURÉLIEN: Totally. It’s a continuation. Remaking the toys was one of the ways I found to teach myself about them.

In order to reconstruct the comprehensive logic of Fröbel’s pedagogy, Froment remade the Kindergarten gifts—sets of wooden blocks used by students in Fröbelian classrooms. In a series of crisp black-and-white photographs, Froment staged the Fröbel toys in use—as stacked into patterns and architectural structures, or spun around and tossed into the air. The photographs are all close-cropped displays of individual gifts, but subtle differences shift the scale and story of each scene. At the “Fröbel Fröbeled” exhibition they hung in relation to a set of tables, designed by Martino Gamper, that displayed Froment’s blocks. Interspersed in each room were additional photographs of a trip Froment took to the countryside near Jena, Germany, where Fröbel had studied.

ANNA: Why have you staged the Fröbel toys through photographs?

AURÉLIEN: I wanted to show the objects with their images to open a space, a space that would be in between instruction and documentation, and I wanted to create a nondidactic situation. The photographs and the way they are arranged as part of the installation don’t explain, but they do construct a space of signs and relationships to be read and interpreted. It opens up something, but it doesn’t explain it. It’s actually what Fröbel did with the objects. Instead of telling the children what he knows himself with the authority of the teacher, he is giving them objects—tangible things that obey natural law—and hence, they learn from their own ▶



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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: **Fröbel's Kindergarten Occupations for the Family**, a kindergarten teaching set for home use. E. Steiger and Company, New York 1877, Courtesy Norman

Brosterman, *Inventing Kindergarten. Paradise of Childhood: A Practical Guide to Kindergartners*, **Edward Wiebe and Milton Bradley**, 1896. **Aurélien Froment, Fröbel Fröbeled**, 2014, (photo: Scott Massey).

Aurélien Froment, Fröbel Fröbeled, 2014 (photo: Jean Brasille). **Aurélien Froment, Fröbel Fröbeled**, 2014, (photo: Martin Argyroglo).

experience of it. Of course, with photography there are not really natural laws, there is another complex history of representation, conventions, and techniques. I thought about those photographs as a critical way to exhibit the gifts.

The laws that govern the structure of Fröbelian pedagogy offer a rich framework for Froment's representations.

AURÉLIEN: Underlying everything in Fröbel is a desire to contain and explain the world in one universal law, which he called the “spherical law.” With the sphere there is a center, and things expand from that center in every direction. This happens at the cosmic scale, at the individual scale, at the pedagogical scale, at the natural scale. The spherical law allows him to contain within one single thing its polar opposite. It’s something that Fröbel built on top of [eighteenth-century pedagogue Johann Heinrich] Pestalozzi. In a way, Pestalozzi was anticipating the postmodern chaos. Fröbel’s critique of Pestalozzi was the lack of unity in his pedagogy. For example, Pestalozzi was teaching children to follow and repeat a series of instructions with his lines and squares, but also letting the children do whatever they wanted. Fröbel thought this was contradicting itself and found in the sphere something that could unite those contradictions.

I have been wondering if there was a relationship between the spherical law and the grid on top of which all the gifts are derived. The gifts’ connections between each other follow a series of divisions—they are all united by the same ratio—which creates an underlying grid system. In some of Fröbel’s drawings you see a grid. He used a grid to show the movement of objects and how something would be used. But the grid has been in use for eleven thousand years. Fröbel’s work is inheriting and is part of that history. The grid implies consequences both good and bad. This is very clear when you follow the growth and expansion of his wooden blocks. For example, the small cubes of the Third Gift required a box. When they were introduced to the US, about thirty years after Fröbel’s death, they were manufactured by a guy called Milton Bradley. He was inspired by Fröbel’s ideas and built a toy empire from those small cubes. To be used with the box, the gifts required a table, the table required benches or chairs, and then teachers needed blackboards, and clothes, and all the material needed to fit the needs of the new spaces of the Kindergarten movement in America. Everything was patented. The gifts became Milton Bradley’s Kindergarten and Primary Materials. So from that original small cube and the grid that holds it, Milton Bradley’s company became an industrial empire. That was for good and for bad. The grid is self-destructive! The more Fröbel’s Kindergarten grew from it, the less consistent the system became.

Fröbel created twenty Kindergarten gifts in total. Their design grows sequentially, increasingly more complex in order to be developmentally specific for the growing children who use them. The lessons they teach follow three “forms” of learning: of beauty, nature and knowledge. Echoing the logic of the Fröbelian classification system, Froment groups his own photographs and

refabrications of the gifts into sets and categories. Froment even added two more “forms” to underscore the meaning of the works as manufactured art objects: cultural and material forms. Collectively, Froment’s works record an existing archive while simultaneously generating a new one.

AURÉLIEN: There is actually very little archival material in the Fröbel exhibition, or in any of my exhibitions. I’m building the archival material. I am producing a future archive, which is quite different. I use photographs as a display device. I use photographs to show the image of an object instead of showing the real thing in a display case or on a plinth. As for the objects in the “Fröbel Fröbeled” show—the reproductions of the gifts presented on tables—each of them function as another image, a composition within a frame; it’s like a photograph before it has been taken.

Froment’s interest in the representation of a real thing runs throughout the “Fröbel Fröbeled” exhibition. There is a playful sleight of hand in all of his “display devices” that undermines the search for individual authorship—ie., whether the works on view are Froment’s or Fröbel’s. Froment interrupts the impulse to understand the exhibition in this way by enabling multiple perspectives. In the video Second Gift, three experts on Fröbel’s Kindergarten—historian Norman Brosterman, toy manufacturer Scott Bultman, and educator Tiffeni Goesel—take turns providing narration about the object that is displayed in the film.

AURÉLIEN: It’s about voicing, I suppose. I was interested to present those three different voices, of Norman, Scott, and Tiffeni—they all have a different grain—and to orchestrate those things together. Before “Fröbel Fröbeled” I showed the box of gifts on a table in a large empty room [*Une exposition comme les autres*, Le Crédac, Ivry-sur-Seine, 2012]. There were a couple of chairs, and the gallery attendants we renamed ouvreaux and ouvreauxes for the occasion [ushers and usherettes], who had informed themselves about Fröbel and about my work in anticipation of the show. They were giving visitors a “walk-through” of the box and its contents. [For “Fröbel Fröbeled”], now that the box is not narrated anymore, but presented in conjunction with photographs, there are more ways to navigate through the work. Although I have made all the works on display, it’s not that apparent; what I have done is not that obvious. If you try to decipher whether the work is by Froment or by Fröbel, it’s great—it means in some ways you made the show yours.

HARRELL: Something that has always been confusing to people is why my sources were always about kids' education specifically. The people who I look at, like A. S. Neill and John Holt, were talking about children's education, so of course I was thinking about that relationship to children. But I was also trying to figure out how this applies to adults. At the time that I was beginning to read their writing, I hadn't run across Paulo Freire yet. Neill and Holt were my sources, so I was trying to figure out how to adapt this to adult education and also to my own education. And to ask: "What impact does this have on my art practice?"

Harrell Fletcher first started reading the pedagogical theories of A. S. Neill and John Holt in the late 1980s, when Fletcher was an undergraduate art student at Humboldt State University. At the time there were few models in the art world for the kind of interdisciplinary art practice that Fletcher was pursuing. Reading Neill and Holt outlined a methodology that Fletcher began to follow.

ANNA: So you first started reading A. S. Neill and John Holt when you were in art school at age nineteen. How did you think about their writings applying to your art practice then?

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HARRELL: That's a good question, because it was so long ago that I can't quite remember what exactly my thinking was. I didn't come up with some unified theory. I was trying to sort out my own impulse to not focus on any particular single kind of medium or practice, and I was taking classes in collaboration and performance and doing projects that were more ephemeral—kind of using art as the means to create experiential education. In the case of A. S. Neill, what he indicated was that with kids—and I think you could apply this to adults—there shouldn't be any forced learning. So that when you have a desire to learn something, you should have the means to be able to do that, but you shouldn't be made to do that.

A. S. Neill and John Holt were leaders in mid-twentieth-century movements for antiauthoritarian education alternatives and children's equal rights. In Neill's Summerhill school (founded in England in 1921), students were given complete freedom to guide their own studies. John Holt's numerous books (written between 1964 and 1989) offer guidelines for unschooling to liberate children, parents, and teachers from the restrictive and oppressive curricula found in educational institutions. The self-directed learning of these pedagogies is at the core of Fletcher's work. During his undergraduate studies, Fletcher studied with deep ecology sociologist Bill Devall. In this course, Devall practiced a form of experiential education that echoed many of the ideas Fletcher had found in the writings of Neill and Holt.

HARRELL: For me, probably the most basic part of learning—and being engaged in experiential educational learning situations—was the ability to ask questions. It was about

asking the questions that weren't on the test. The ability to go beyond whatever the basics were and to get at something a little off to the side that I actually was interested in. So allowing that to move to the front, I realized I can make my way in life and within my art practice largely through asking questions and using myself as a facilitator to focus on other people and other knowledge that I have been able to experience.

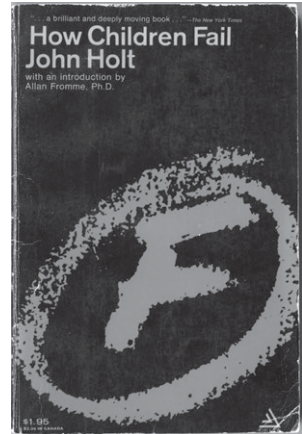
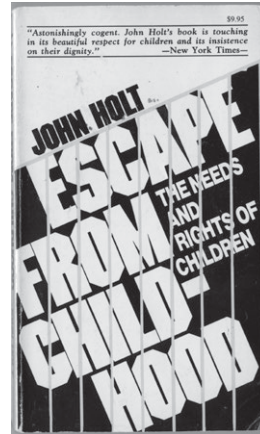
As a leader in the genre of social practice, Fletcher's works happen when people get involved. He collaborates with people he finds interesting at the sites in which each project takes place—garden, school, museum, farm, etc. Often his choices for collaborators might seem unorthodox—like Corentine, the eight-year-old who designed the public sculpture for Corentine's Turtle (2006) or the street musician Stanley Prosperi, whom Fletcher met busking in the underground and invited to take part in his work Where I'm Calling From at Tate Modern (2012). I wondered whether there was a connection between Fletcher's interest in early childhood pedagogy and his frequent collaborations with children specifically.

HARRELL: I'm trying to not make hierarchies in a whole bunch of different ways—like hierarchies on what institutions you work with or where you show your work—but also hierarchies on who you would work with. For example, I would work with an MIT-trained scientist happily, but I'd also work with a complete amateur gardener somewhere, and I'd work with a child. I'm not putting a value. I'm saying all of those people are potentially interesting or not interesting to me, and I'm not going to categorically rule any of them out or rule any of them in. It's going to be based on an individual situational experience. And so, kids are just a part of that. They are part of the humans, and since I'm often working with humans, they get to be included, and I'm not going to give them greater or lesser focus. In some ways it can seem that I give them greater focus, but it's only greater because they're given so little to begin with ... I'm just trying to create the world in which I want to live; and treating people in those ways is just what happens. That's part of it: that kids get included and people who are unexpected get included. It is true that I'm sort of biasing myself because I lean toward people who don't already have access to whatever it is that I have access to in a particular situation. I guess it's a form of affirmative action, which I also believe in. But it shouldn't be affirmative action without content. I'm not picking random eight-year-old kids—I'm picking specific ones who I feel actually deserve to be in this position, and then I'm not excluding them.

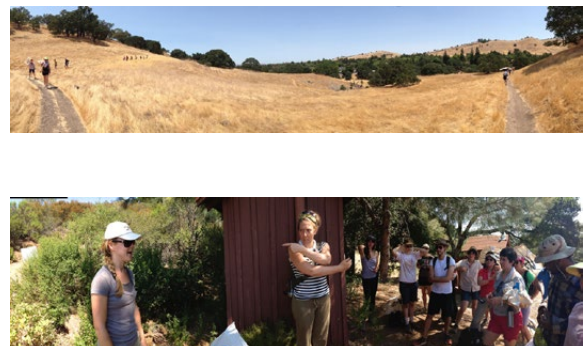
By including such an array of voices in his work, Fletcher plays with the process of unlearning that Neill and Holt write about—shedding the emphasis on an authorial voice and the necessity for a single leader.

ANNA: Would you say that the unlearning process that you went through was a process of shifting the meaning of learning by replacing the word *education* with the word *experience*?

HARRELL: That sounds about right. I mean, it's a combination of unlearning some things and learning other things. There were some things that when I was a kid or just a younger



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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Neill and Summerhill: A Man and His Work, a pictorial study by John Walmsley. **John Holt**, *Escape from Childhood*, book cover. **John Holt**, *How Children*

Fail, book cover. **Harrell Fletcher**, documentation from *Participatory Walk on the campus of the University of Hawaii*, 2011. **Harrell Fletcher**, *The Best Things In Museums are the*

Windows, 2013. **Harrell Fletcher**, *Where I'm Calling From*, 2012. **Harrell Fletcher**, documentation from *Participatory Walk on the campus of the University of Hawaii*, 2011.

person I was really resistant to. I had a hard time with math and science and things like that. As an adult, I have actually gotten into those subjects and even had projects that were related to those and a whole variety of other topics. I now feel like I have learned enough about them to have conversations with scientists, or mathematicians, or botanists. Whoever it is. Like with the *Public Doors and Windows* project that Molly Sherman, Nolan Calisch, and I are working on now at the University of California, Santa Cruz. I can be thrown in with anybody there—high-level professors coming from different fields and practices—and I can have a reasonably intelligent conversation with them because I have allowed myself to explore a lot of different things. I have at least enough knowledge to ask okay questions when I'm talking to somebody on topics ranging from women's studies to genetics to literature to arboretum issues to mountain lion tracking. Whatever it happens to be. So it's a combination of letting go of the things that are hindering you and getting into the areas that you are actually interested in.

For Fletcher, experiential learning becomes a way to change the shape of culture production, and the position of the artist.

ANNA: So is art the most amenable field to practice experiential learning?

HARRELL: Yes, because in other disciplines you couldn't get away with being as loose and dilettantish as I am within art. People often ask, "Why are you doing this as an artist?" and I say, "Well, because you can get away with this as an artist." They wouldn't let me do this if I was an actual sociologist or archeologist or anthropologist. It wouldn't be acceptable. And something I love about John Holt—he has this weird thing about how he won't reveal where he went to college, but I think he went to Harvard...

ANNA: I read online that it was Yale. Anyway, so it was an Ivy League...

HARRELL: Right, and he didn't want to talk about how he had this prestigious education because he didn't want it to seem like that's what made somebody an expert. So I like the fact that he was really educated, but chose to write in a super conversational, casual way. I remember, at the time, I loved that he would often times cite something within his writing, but he would say, "I think this person said this thing, I can't actually remember if it was them or not ..." And there was no footnote to support it. And it would be things that could have been looked up, but he just didn't. I remember at the time reading that and being like, "Oh, my God! That's amazing! This guy is totally breaking the rules here, getting away with it, and he is this important writer!" It was as exciting as seeing people break art-world rules. Like the first time I saw Cy Twombly, and it was so messy and messed up and I was like, "*What?* How is this acceptable? But it's great! I love this!"

Like the radical pedagogies of A. S. Neill's anarchic curriculum, or John Holt's unschooling, Fletcher's interest in breaking convention

can be a playful reconfiguration of values.

HARRELL: Within the twentieth century—within Modernism, a common critique of Abstract Expressionism or something is "Oh, my kid can make that." And it has always been thought of as this really annoying affront, like, "What are you talking about? No, of course your kid couldn't make that. Only Jackson Pollock could make this amazing thing." And I just thought it was interesting to flip it and say, "Really? Who's your kid? I'd love to see their work. [Laughs] It should be in a museum; that stuff's great!" You can just sort of convert it in that way, like a martial art with ideas or something like that. Where the thing comes at you and you somehow flip it around and turn it into something productive. I guess that's something I've tried.

While the roles of teacher and student, artist and audience may at times be interchangeable in Fletcher's work, the voice of the learner is consistently his own.

ANNA: So your goal is to have access to all the interesting people everywhere?

HARRELL: This is actually a difference I have with that Beuys quote, that "everyone is an artist," which I actually find sort of imperialistic. But if you switch it and just say everyone can be an artist, if they want to be, if there's a reason for them to be, then that's different. That's how I'm looking at it. That everyone has the potential—everyone is possibly someone who I might work with. I don't know who it is in advance, because I don't have a set of guidelines. Instead, I'm able to use my privilege and agency to work with people who I want to spend time with and learn from. It's my ability to select my teachers.

ADELITA: The Ferrer School was an anarchist school that set up an environment where you would question authority and be engaged in understanding the structures that befell upon you from a very, very early age—even the structure of the school itself. You would be highly involved, for example, in the budgeting, beginning when you could count. If you needed, say, three pens for your class, then you would go and say, “I know we have five dollars for today—can I go and buy two dollars of pens?” And you would reach consensus with the group, and then you’d go. It was very much based on a collective decision-making. At the same time, there was a kind of autonomy and the attempt at constructing critical thought from a really early age, which was fascinating to me because I’m interested in political consciousness.

Adelita Husni-Bey’s work with pedagogy grew as a natural progression from her commitment to political awareness.

ADELITA: I think everyone who’s interested in the social-political realm eventually hits upon this idea that we’re educated into a particular normativity. That this ideology, which is seen as neutral, is in fact a very neoliberal understanding of how we’re meant to be on the planet. I think once you hit that, it’s sort of inevitable that you start looking at how we’re educated into it.

For her 2010–11 video Postcards from the Desert Island, Husni-Bey involved a group of seven- to ten-year-olds from an experimental elementary school to participate in an activity of building an imaginary community together. Husni-Bey chose to work with that particular school because their curriculum bears likeness to the model of integral education that was characteristic of the Ferrer Modern Schools. This free-school movement was originated in early-twentieth-century Spain by anarchist Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia, who was seeking to create an alternative to the existing educational system controlled by the church. The pedagogy of his Escuela Moderna became popular throughout Spain and was duplicated soon after in the United States—first in New York City and then as part of the Ferrer Colony anarchist community in New Jersey.

ADELITA: The Ferrer School had integral education—which is a concept that Kropotkin came up with in the 1850s—known today as project-based education. The idea was that you would never be in front of a blackboard. Instead, you would make things and learn through making. To create this integral model, the goal was to break down the class distinction between intellectual labor and manual labor. That was something I didn’t find elsewhere. I mean, project-based education happens in Steiner and Montessori schools, too, but how it lead to critical thinking was something that really struck me, and eventually led me to the writings of Boal and Freire, etc., later on. I feel that the Montessori and Steiner

schools became places of privilege, whereas Ferrer maintained a strong working-class element.

Husni-Bey works in what she calls a two-tier pedagogical model. First, she initiates her projects through workshops that are executed with a group. These are modeled on the theories and practices of radical thinkers like Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia, Augusto Boal, and Paulo Freire. During these workshops Husni-Bey plays a kind of hybridized role of teacher and anthropologist—following a method of participatory observation. Each group she works with is presented with an exercise, and their activities are documented by Husni-Bey. Finally, her documentation is usually (but not always) re-presented as an exhibition that she realizes independently.

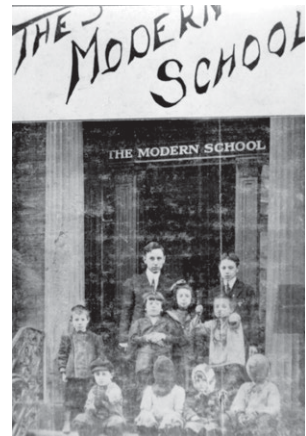
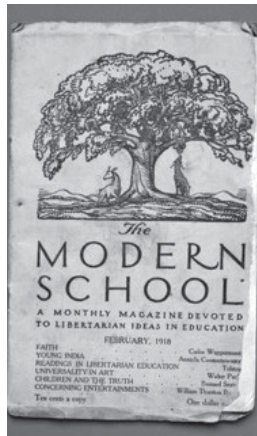
ADELITA: I work with different groups—but beginning with a lot of research beforehand, so I’m not just walking into a situation where I don’t really understand what’s happening. For example, with the film *Postcards from the Desert Island*, I integrated my project into their school curriculum. I asked them to treat my project as part of their actual school practice, which was accepted by the school. The children were introduced to the idea of the island as a space—looking at examples of islands in popular fiction—by their teacher during their regular class time for two to three weeks before the workshop took place. Although the workshop only lasted a few days, the lead up and preparation, as well as the “lead-out” (seeing the film together and talking about it) were all important parts of the process—even though these are not included in the representation itself. So the relationship isn’t me catapulting myself like a UFO onto the children for a really brief period of time. I think that is essential. With this workshop format, part of the pedagogical experience is in being there. Though I obviously come with some preconceptions, I try to break them down through the workshop. I am a participant, too. Then I have a document from which I produce a reflection on that specific experience. I hope the work that comes out, which is often a film, can be pedagogical in and of itself, so that it can be a tool or have a function.

Husni-Bey considers pedagogy as a means to open up understanding by putting the interpretation in the hands of the viewer.

ADELITA: I like to make the distinction between what I feel is didactic and what is pedagogical. I am interested in the artwork giving a viewer the building blocks to produce an understanding, whereas didacticism attempts to moralize or direct toward a complete answer or set of closed answers. I think that more interesting works don’t do that. They produce questions and allow the complications of negotiating collective space.

ANNA: Your example of the building blocks seems to set a model of early education in opposition to one of higher education. Is that comparison intentional?

ADELITA: Yes, I would want to make that apparent. ▶



With her 2012 exhibition “Playing Truant” at Gasworks in London, Husni-Bey created an installation that mixed her video and a viewing platform with documentary footage from the Ferrer Modern School archive as well as a historical timeline that mapped the privatization of education in the UK.

ADELITA: I think of the display as both a reference to the scholastic apparatus and functioning pedagogically in relation to radical models. In order to provide moments of interaction and reflection I use platforms, communal seats, small stages, etc. I suppose they could very well be related to pedagogical apparatuses, in how Fröbel intended his “gift” sets as blocks with which to assemble meaning. In *Postcards from the Desert Island* my intention was literally to put the audience on a stage, the backdrop being the same as the one in the film. The idea was for the audience to see themselves as “actors,” not in the exhibition space but outside of it: as actors who have a responsibility beyond recognizing and empathizing with representation.

For her workshops, Husni-Bey has been involved with young children and teens in different countries and communities, collaborating with a variety of public education programs. Her exercise of “building a society from scratch”—which led to her video Postcards from the Desert Island—was conducted with the students and teachers of an elementary school in Paris—École Vitruve. In addition to this, Husni-Bey also applied her interests in the critical collectivism and “rational education” of Ferrer’s pedagogy to a workshop held with high school students and their tutors at a self-run public high school in Paris—Lycée Autogéré de Paris. She also worked with thirty high school students in Italy—with the help of MAXXI—the Museo nazionale delle Arti del XXI secolo in Rome—developing a workshop on notions of power. In this instance, Husni-Bey adopted techniques from the “citizen studies” classes common to public school classrooms in the United Kingdom (noted by Husni-Bey to be considered among radical teachers as “the last bastion of socialism in public education”). This summer she will be collaborating with Authoring Action—a writing program for teens in North Carolina—through SECCA, the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art. For this spoken-word workshop on the privatization of space, she will borrow from methodologies used by Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed. In each of these workshops Husni-Bey is collaborating with a group of young people and an educational construct. However, neither pedagogy nor childhood is their subject. Instead what they create together is a forum for reflection on complex political questions.

ANNA: So in the videos and installations that you make from the footage of your workshops, you are re-presenting fragments from an activity—involving children—to viewers that are a lot older, and asking them to have a critical reflection on their own experiences. I wonder about this transposition. How do you deal with that discrepancy—taking the representation of a workshop with children into the context of an adult inhabited art exhibition?

ADELITA: For example, with *Postcards*—in that moment of presenting that particular piece I was thinking about anarchy

or authority as something that could be done away with, or problematized. So the children were asked to build a society. But the students of École Vitruve already had a particular understanding of society because of their upbringing within radical pedagogy. What I would like to happen in that transposition is for an adult who has maybe not had that same experience—or an adult who has another ten or fifteen or thirty years more life experience—to look at how a seven-year-old who is being brought up in that system [of radical pedagogy] reacts to political questions, which remain difficult and unanswered.

Throughout our conversation Husni-Bey and I talked about the emphasis on experience in pedagogy versus the necessity for artists to create representations. Her two-tier model seemed to create a split, wherein she played either the role of pedagogue in the process of the workshop, or that of the artist for the making of her exhibition. As we parsed the differences in the responsibilities of these two roles, I detected an aspiration to merge the two.

ANNA: The schools and educational programs that you work with are public or politically active in a way that is consistent with—and therefore representative of—the radical pedagogical philosophies on which they are based. As an artist working with and within these existing models, is this an effort to reconstruct the corrupt platforms that we have for contemporary art?

ADELITA: I would love to be able to do that ... but, of course, it cannot be done through one channel alone; I think it’s a huge collective effort. Every step in that direction is positive. I guess to some degree it’s a cause that keeps me personally interested in working within the arts and working within these institutions. Though you don’t necessarily have to work within the institutions, for me working within them is crucial. It creates the potential for these workshops and their representations to become part of a larger cultural discourse and to reach a diverse audience. So, on the one hand, this circulation into contemporary Western culture is important. On the other hand, the experience of the workshop—necessarily tied to a short temporal frame and for a restricted number of people—is equally important, although set to a different scale. This is yet another reason to work within the field—in terms of funding: to be able to divert exhibition budgets and grants toward projects that are pedagogical at their core. In this way, small budgets can be allocated to temporal, experimental ventures on the border of different disciplines, which have a critical political agenda.. ==