



MACHINE PROJECT:
A FIELD GUIDE

to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art

G O N E T O

L A C M A

B E B A C K

M A G I C S O O N







THE ONES THAT GOT AWAY JASON BROWN
***A sestina for Machine Project at
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 15 November 2008***

Garden on top of the elevator. Student driver parking valets. Child docents.
Clap-activated lighting. Boat puppets. Laser eyed statue heads—please guard
your eyes. Beware of pie toss. Saint Bernard with brandy neck-cask wandering
around the landscape paintings. Abandoned luxury items. Preparator workshop.
Can we drill into the floor? Whoopie cushions, everywhere. A voice hidden
inside a pedestal occasionally shouts out a comment or interjection.

Zombie mob. 11 a.m. blackout on the lawn, snoozing to sunburn: Bladdo!
Sunset solitaire. Escalator skiing. Knitting while drumming. Docent
lecture: a close analysis of the design of those lovely little couches hidden
amongst Greco-Roman artifacts. Synchronized fountain wading. Security guard
misinformation campaign. Cookies... with curators. Solar oven workshop
and bake-off. Business card menger sponge. Professional dog walker wandering

the halls with a pack of hounds. Giant skunk. Loud procession wandering
through the entire museum. Welcoming birdsong. Art curators: Fight!
In a dark exit, a mysterious toilet. Motorized birdhouses—a workshop.
Contemporary art pole dancer. A surprise massage from a guard or docent.
Edible plants of the Miracle Mile. "Please Don't Touch the Fogel"—guards
keep people away from him. Truth or Bronze Casting? Hot tub hidden

in a stairwell. Skunk hunter with giant net. Methane gas alarm: the hidden
story. Carnival barker. Giant kitten. An insect door for insects wandering
in and out. Op-art handball. Acoustic theremin. Please be on your guard
inside the Richard Serra sculpture, as you may be mugged... by Hamburgler!
A secret play: "Afternoon with The Silent Guard and the Grumpy Docent"
Bumper cars. Grammar rodeo. Edible weed salad for sale in the gift shop.

Machine Project hot sauce: now there's something for the gift shop.
Obligatory Wizard of Oz reference? Paranoid-critical texts describe hidden
histories of object provenance. Mime trapped in real vitrine. Docent
tour on the changing fashionability of small heads. Wandering
paths marked with arrows on floor. Poetry stairwell. Monorail!
William Shatner oil painting. Giant lawn darts. LACMA security to guard

Machine while we're away. When confronting infinity mirror, guard
yourself against the vast power of infinity. Postcards in gift shop
of an overweight photographer reflected in a shiny art object: Nude!
Art appreciation air horn. Behind a revolving bookcase, you find a hidden
wing of the museum. Remarkably poor carpentry. Helpful docent wandering
through museum, discussing the art. Wait... is this person actually a docent?

The scent of popcorn. An oil drum with burning trash and hot dogs, disregarded.
Wandering through the artifacts of modernity, a lone zombie seeks the gift shop.
Hidden grow lab. Animatronic tabla. Erotic pottery, broken. Lost nose: Found!

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*Based on the Machine Project Field Guide to LACMA,
over ten hours of performances, installations, workshops,
and events, which took place on November 15, 2008 at
the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.*

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INTRODUCTION

MARK ALLEN

Etymologically speaking, “machine” is any means of doing something. Our explorations at Machine Project reflect this by investigating everything from knitting techniques to ideological frameworks for the construction of reality. Every event we host looks at the world from a different perspective—analytic, poetic, scientific, or discursive—joined by a thread of curiosity and appreciation for other people’s obscure obsessions.

Machine Project is also a loose confederacy of thirty or forty artists with whom I have been developing projects for the last five years, both at our storefront gallery and throughout Los Angeles. What I do in these projects tends to shift a fair amount depending on who I’m working with; typical roles include cheerleader, enthusiast, fan, collaborator, irritant, and organizer. These collaborations form an ongoing conversation that is at the core of Machine Project as a social organism.

The *Machine Project Field Guide to LACMA* started about a year before the show, when photography curator Charlotte Cotton invited us to think about doing some kind of event at the museum. During our initial visit, I was drawn to the dusty corners of the Ahmanson Building, and I suggested that perhaps Machine could use the whole museum as a site for a one-day event. Surprisingly, she agreed. I remember that for the first three to six months, my long-time collaborator Jason Brown and I were genuinely concerned that Charlotte was going to come to her senses any minute, but it turned out she had a much better sense of our capabilities than we did at the time.

Events that happen at Machine Project’s storefront space tend to be intimate, as the room only holds about fifty or sixty people. This scale creates a temporary bubble of community enclosing both the audience and the participants. Confronted with the massive size of LACMA, we decided to think of the day as multiple Machine-sized events erupting simultaneously throughout the museum, rather than trying to blow Machine up to museum-size. This would maintain a sense of intimacy by having performers share the same public space typically reserved for visitors, so that each piece would function like a street performance, where unexpected events are encountered within a space that usually serves another function.

Our projects rarely begin with a concrete curatorial concept, and the *Field Guide* developed out of many conversations that took place while visiting the museum in the months leading up to the show. We wandered around the museum taking notes in groups of three to five people, eventually ending up with a list of about five hundred ideas. This giant list was then sorted into categories such as:

- ideas we want to do
- ideas we’re hoping will magically happen but we aren’t willing to work on
- ideas which are funny to talk about but not actually worth doing
- fiscally or institutionally impractical ideas
- terminally impractical or dangerous ideas that were just never going to happen

The next stage was to determine which ideas had potential to evolve, and which ideas would get worse if you actually did them—an actor dressed as the McDonald’s Hamburglar mugging people inside a Richard Serra sculpture was an example of the latter. We tried our best to materialize everything that still sounded like a good idea. The remainder went into Jason Brown’s sestina “The Ones That Got Away,” a poem written in an elaborate and archaic form using project titles that were cut for various self-evident reasons (escalator skiing, teen driving school valet service, etc.).

We tried to think about LACMA the same way we would approach a project for a mall, a public park, a 7-11, or a dry ice factory. We looked at all available space at the museum, from the galleries to the air conditioning ducts, as possible sites to work within. The sheer volume of cultural information at LACMA made it a very easy space to work with, since there was an endless supply of content to riff off. One of the pleasures of LACMA is that it’s a huge museum filled with far more information than anyone can take in during an afternoon; its scale releases you from feeling the responsibility of having to see or understand everything. For the *Field Guide*, we worked to amplify that feeling of discovery and chance encounter: as you moved around the museum, many of the performances were also in motion, and you could come across pieces by chance. No one was able to see the whole event—including myself, despite spending the entire day jogging around the premises trying to take it all in.

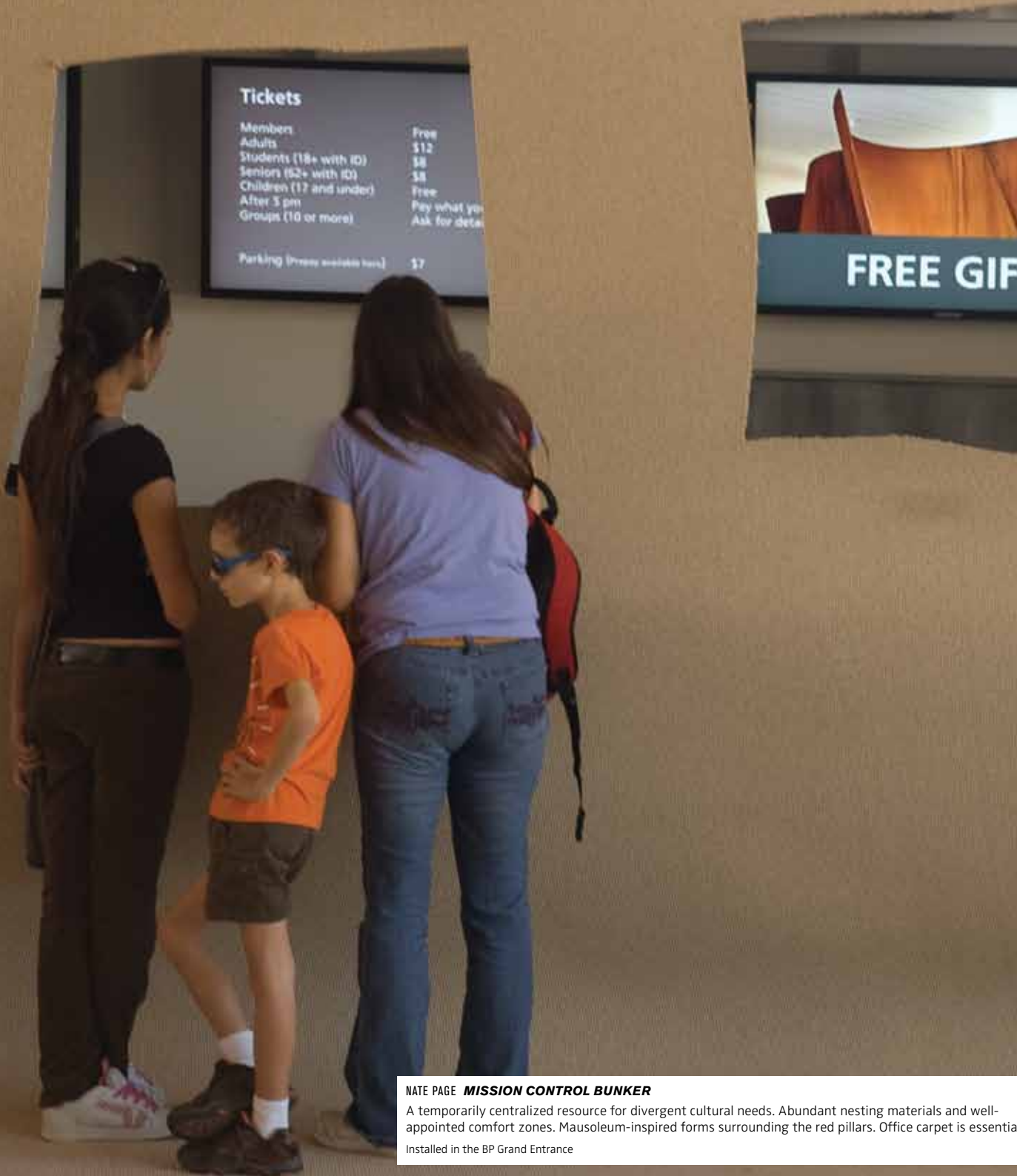
Given that parts of the show remain unseen to all of us, this document makes no attempt to be the *Catalogue Raisonné of the Machine Project Field Guide to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art*. Rather, just as LACMA’s collections were the starting point for the *Field Guide*, we’ve used the *Field Guide*’s projects and ideas as a starting point for this publication—including interviews with the artists, a nineteenth-century description of the invention of the glass harmonica, crochet patterns, a fruit salad recipe based on the museum’s collection, and instructions for building your own pizza oven. Should you be curious about the state of LACMA during the Pleistocene epoch, we have information on that. We have a really nice picture of Jim Fetterley, at least one flow chart, notes on flowers at the museum, a fragmentary history of LACMA’s architect, lots of information on clapping, and a variety of speculations on our motives. I hope you enjoy it.



(TOP) Front window of Machine Project with *In Search of a Myopic’s Leitmotif*, an installation by Ryan Taber and Cheyenne Weaver.

(MIDDLE) Sewing workshop at Machine Project.

(BOTTOM) Replica of the *Doorway of the Arms of the Count of Chazay* by Christy McCaffrey and Sara Newey, installed in the office at Machine Project.



NATE PAGE **MISSION CONTROL BUNKER**

A temporarily centralized resource for divergent cultural needs. Abundant nesting materials and well-appointed comfort zones. Mausoleum-inspired forms surrounding the red pillars. Office carpet is essential. Installed in the BP Grand Entrance

4. *Richard Serra Reading Room*

Learning From Learning: Machine Project Workshops as a Laboratory in Context

Synthesizer Workshop with the Machine Project Electron Wranglers

Birds for Chris Burden

Phylogeny and the Multiplex: Building a Nesting Box Community Demo

Andre, You Forgot About the Fire

LACMA Public Fruit Salad

Interview with Margaret Wertheim of The Institute for Figuring

Hyperbolic Crochet Plastic Bag Workshop

Foal Army (Budget Cuts)

Decisions - Decisions - Decisions

RICHARD SERRA READING ROOM *THE PUBLIC SCHOOL*

The Public School is a school with no curriculum. The Public School is not accredited, it does not give out degrees, and it has no affiliation with the public school system. It is a framework that supports autodidactic activities, operating under the assumption that everything is in everything.

At the moment, it operates as follows:

- FIRST** Classes are proposed by the public (*I want to learn this or I want to teach this*);
- THEN** People have the opportunity to sign up for the classes (*I also want to learn that*);
- FINALLY** When enough people have expressed interest, the school finds a teacher and offers the class to those who signed up.

The first class, on October 4, reviewed all proposals and decided to offer the following classes:

214 ***The Democratic Museum*** A Half-Day Seminar

Instructor ***Elysa Lozano***

Drawing from sociologist Joyce Rothschild's definition of a democratic workplace and Heckscher and Donnellson's post-bureaucratic network organization, we will look at artist co-ops and project spaces that exemplify these structures. Is it possible to design a complex museum or gallery structure that retains the non-hierarchical attributes of start-up exhibition spaces? In the second part of the seminar we work in groups to build several proposals for new museum organizational structures.

222 ***Blubber, Bowlines, and Boat Hulls***

Instructors ***Adam Katz and Caleb Waldorf***

This course would involve reading selections from Herman Melville's 1851 novel *Moby Dick*, plus a self-guided introduction to boat hulls, fluid dynamics, and nautical knots. Each session would focus on a specific section of *Moby Dick*, a partial overview of technologies/histories of boat construction, and nautical knot-tying techniques. The course would meet four times at LACMA with the possibility of continuing at The Public School afterward.

224 One Place after Another (Is Never the Same Place)

Instructor **Robert Summers**

This two-meeting course, which will, I hope, take place first in one space of the Serra in which we will perform a close reading of and discuss Miwon Kwon's essay "One Place after Another" and a selection from Fredrick Jameson's *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* on the Bonaventure Hotel, and in the second Serra space, on a different day, we will perform a close reading of and discuss Amelia Jones's "(Post)Urban Self Image," which critiques the (conscious or unconscious) blind spots of Kwon's essay and Jameson's chapter section and moves out toward a feminist-postcolonial-poststructuralist reading of space/place and so-called "site specificity."

225 The Economy of Giant-Ass Sculptures

Instructor **Kelly Marie Martin**

A conversation in four parts, each part in a different cavity of the *Band*: "Economy of Material," "Economy of Culture (I): Serra," "Economy of Culture (II): Hirst & the Market," "Econ of Icon." I would like to facilitate a discussion about the shape-shifting duality of the word "economy" as it applies to Serra's *Band* in terms of material, the artist, and the current economic crisis. I would like to do this by moving through the sculpture.

"You cannot separate a Picasso or David Smith sculpture from the welding torch. You cannot separate the *Spiral Jetty* from the bulldozer used to move those rocks into place." —John Perrault

230 Ekphrasis/Filling in Serra's Spaces: Writers as Artists Reacting to Art

Instructor **Erika Szostak**

First, what is *ekphrasis*? Simply put, *ekphrasis* is "the vivid and poetic response to and description of a work of art."

I propose an *ekphrasis* workshop in which we compose artistic responses to a piece of art while we sit inside that art. As we sit inside Serra's piece, literally filling in space, we can figuratively fill in untold pieces of the narrative. *Ekphrasis* often functions as a sort of *midrash*, telling the stories that get left out of the original: what came before the feeling/scene depicted in the piece, what came after, what came beside?



THE PUBLIC SCHOOL **RICHARD SERRA READING ROOM**

In the weeks leading up the *Field Guide*, Machine invited Telic Arts Exchange's The Public School, an autonomous educational entity, to host a series of classes inside Richard Serra's monumental installations.

Inside Richard Serra's *Sequence*, 2006



LEARNING FROM LEARNING

Machine Project Workshops as a Laboratory in Context KEN EHRlich

A group of crocheters in the courtyard making cloth birds to inhabit Chris Burden's *Urban Light*. Nearby, a boisterous bunch huddling around tables learning to solder components for a simple hand-held synthesizer. Between BCAM and LACMA West, a flurry of activity as visitors study images of ancient artifacts and produce cardboard and papier-mâché replicas. Families congregate on a second story balcony to learn basic woodworking techniques to create homes for nesting bird species. A cluster of crocheters hunched over tables surrounded by modernist paintings, acquiring techniques to transform strips of plastic bags into a hyperbolic coral reef. Near the entrance to BCAM, groups figuring out how to cut wood, operate small motors and put simple hardware to use in the creation of ambling automatons.

The workshops that took place during the *Machine Project Field Guide to LACMA* event, which are documented in this catalogue, are an extension of Machine Project's ongoing and evolving commitment to offering classes and workshops in a wide range of subjects, from sewing and electronics to computer programming and musical instrument construction. The usual format of advance registration and fee structure that Machine typically employs gave way to more porous and open-ended workshops at LACMA, in which museum visitors could engage a workshop as a participant or a viewer and the number of "students" fluctuated dramatically throughout the day. Museum-goers wandered in and out of the workshops, looking, listening, curious and amused. The unique circumstances of the Machine Project workshops at LACMA might be best understood in relation to existing educational programs in museums. The difference between the standard format of a museum's education department programs and the workshops designed for Machine Project's takeover of the museum is the investment in the cultural value of the objects within the museum. Traditionally, museum education programming, however dialogic or critical, aims to invest the objects held by the museum with cultural value. Machine Project's pedagogical offerings, by contrast, had no such investment. What, then, is their goal? I want to focus here on the educational programming at Machine Project, and the particular instance of the workshops offered at LACMA, within the larger context of alternative education experiments and a recent "pedagogical turn" within contemporary art practice and institutions.

Each workshop offered during the *Machine Project Field Guide to LACMA* was conceived by an individual artist or artist collective. In *Birds for Chris Burden*, Cheryl Cambras transformed her practice of crocheting cloth birds into a do-it-yourself learning session during which museum visitors complimented *Urban Light* with colorful strings of fuzzy companions. In *Synthesizer Workshop with the Machine Project Electron Wranglers*, Clay Chaplin, Pelle Henkle, Lewis Keller, Phillip Stearns, and Henry Solis instructed participants on basic soldering techniques for constructing small handmade synthesizers. Liz Glynn oversaw the transformation of the museum's trash into replicas of the classical sculpture collection in workshop called *Replica, Replica, for W.R.H.*, referencing William Randolph Hearst, who donated much of the museum's classical collection. Ryan Taber presented *Phylogeny and the Multiplex*, which he described as "a hands-on demonstration of avian nesting box building techniques using

materials recovered from the LACMA grounds and your favorite materials from home, culminating in the construction of a sculptural nesting box community space. For birds.” Christine and Margaret Wertheim of the Institute for Figuring led the workshop on how to crochet plastic bags into models of hyperbolic space to be integrated into their ever-evolving Crochet Coral Reef Project, which combines feminine handicraft, higher geometry, and environmental awareness. In his workshop entitled *Foal Army (Budget Cuts)*, Douglas Irving Repetto helped participants transform simple materials into walking wooden creatures. In all of these workshops, the process of participation enabled museum visitors to become more than spectators. The line between artist and audience blurred slightly, and through experiential learning, an unusual shift in the terms of museum spectatorship occurred.

To hear Machine Project founder Mark Allen describe it, the initial impulse to offer classes and workshops in Echo Park came out of a basic experience probably not so uncommon in graduate art programs. Interested in electronics and looking for ways to integrate his art practice with experiments in technology, Mark began to teach himself basic electronics. It was a slow and somewhat grueling process—without the classes he needed, he had to invent the classes he wanted. In the process, he realized that if someone could teach the very fundamental aspects of even a complex subject, one might more quickly begin the process of self-education. In this way, the classes at Machine began both with an eye towards demystifying ever more complex technologies and as a way to share forms of knowledge. The do-it-yourself ethos that surrounds Machine Project workshops is part of a much larger cultural context that seeks a democratization of technology. It’s not surprising, then, that many of the computer-related classes at Machine are based on open-source software. The variety of classes offered at Machine indicates, however, that the inspiration for learning is motivated by a broad interest in the intersections of art, science, and music rather than a specific agenda related to the politics of proprietary software.

Machine Project’s classes and workshops can be related to and situated within the dynamic of Southern California art schools. The evolving social network around Machine Project classes—and Machine Project in general—is in many cases an outgrowth and extension of art school education. In a sense, the informal education program is a parallel to the formalized art education model that has exploded in Southern California in recent years. In response to the growing corporatization, professionalization, and bureaucratization of art education, some critics have condemned the increasing proliferation of MFA art school programs. They argue that, through the MFA programs, students are asked to accept certain educational conventions in the same way they are asked to accept the logic of the market: *there is no alternative*.

But rather than simply critique the existing art school models, a more interesting question might be: How are various models of pedagogy informing artistic practice? Or more generally, what is it that leads artists toward an engagement with pedagogy as part of an artistic practice? In fact, beyond the growing numbers of artists who teach alongside their artistic practice, there are those whose artistic practice in fact consists in a kind of engagement with critical pedagogy. It is precisely *through* an engagement with institutions that pedagogy has become an integral aspect of contemporary artistic practice. Whether formal or informal, the classroom seems to be a space where artists are attempting to embody theory as activity. And besides, who can deny the seduction of the pedagogical mode that resists reification or the impulse to learn from learning?

Over the last several years, Los Angeles has seen the rise of a number of alternative educational experiments. In many ways, Machine Project classes and workshops are at the center of this activity. Importantly, all of these endeavors were initiated by artists and operate either as an extension of artistic practice or alongside an art career. Needless to

say, none of these institutions are accredited, nor do they offer degrees. The Mountain School of Arts, founded in 2005 and operating out of a loft above a Chinatown bar, accepts fifteen students for a three-month term, charges no fees, and encourages engagement with other educational institutions. Sundown Schoolhouse began in 2006 as artist Fritz Haeg shifted gears away from the generative salons he had been hosting at his domestic hilltop dome and towards an educational framework structured on flexibility. Initially housed in Haeg's geodesic dome and eventually taken on the road to a variety of art venues around the country, the Schoolhouse offered seminars, classes, and workshops that ranged from day-long affairs to longer series and included classes in everything from yoga and dance to sustainable food practices and marine ecology. Artist Anton Vidokle has also initiated a series of events based on the model of the seminar and workshop, including the Night School, a temporary school in the form of an artist commission at the New Museum in New York, and United Nations Plaza, a series of seminars organized in Berlin. Vidokle also is an editor of the journal *E-flux*, which has published articles on the "pedagogical turn" in contemporary art and on the notion of research as art. Perhaps most interesting in structure in Los Angeles is the relatively new Public School, a project of Telic Arts Exchange. The Public School creates a curriculum framework simply by inverting the usual process through which course offerings are determined. That is, anyone may propose to teach a class and if enough students are interested in the class, the class is organized. A student may also propose a class they would like to take and the facilitators of the Public School will try to find someone to teach it (the Public School organized reading groups in Richard Serra sculptures at LACMA in the weeks preceding the *Machine Project Field Guide to LACMA*). This model takes the informal structure and the "open to suggestions" model common among these experiments a step further by activating a distribution of the hierarchy of the pedagogical program. Machine Project classes often end up informally organized in a similar way; someone who takes a class may end up proposing another class to teach.

It is within the broader context of these educational experiments that we can think about Machine Project's program of classes and workshops. While there seems to be an obvious connection to the visionary utopianism of pioneering art school predecessors like the Bauhaus and Black Mountain College in terms of refusing the conventional disciplinary boundaries of a typical art education, a more meaningful network of associations might be found through a reconsideration of the liberation pedagogy of the Brazilian activist and author Paulo Freire. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire attempted to describe an active, dialogical model of education in which the standardized, stale dynamic between students and teachers—what he called "the banking model of education," which treats students' supposedly "empty" minds like a bank waiting for the deposit of meaningful knowledge from the teacher—is reconsidered through a process of "critical consciousness." Developed in the 1970s in the context of postcolonial discourses and heavily influenced by Frantz Fanon, critical consciousness relied on Marxist class analysis to develop a framework for revolutionary education. To reimagine the student as an active agent rather than a passive recipient in the formation of new structures of knowledge was, for Freire, the first step towards a total transformation the social order.

In an article titled "Cultural Action and Conscientization," describing highly technological, complex societies, Freire states:

In order to function, these societies require specialties, which become specialisms, and rationality, which degenerates into myth-making irrationalism. Distinct from specialties, to which we are not opposed, specialisms narrow the area of knowledge in such a way that the so-called specialists become generally incapable of thinking.¹

It seems obvious that neither Marxism, nor strict class analysis, nor revolutionary rhetoric, nor even radical pedagogy itself hold the sense of potential they did in Freire's heyday. And yet if it is possible to retain a certain amount of idealism regarding the potential for *learning*, then Machine Project's educational endeavors might simply demonstrate by example an argument against "specialisms." Machine Project does not explicitly reach out to the "oppressed." Instead, through workshops it offers highly refined knowledge and specialized skills in a manner that is broadly accessible. In its programming in general, and especially through classes and workshops, Machine spotlights the specialties of members of an extended community of artists, scientists, musicians, programmers, and others in a process of learning that actively discourages the narrowing of knowledge.

The integration of lifelong learning is one of the educational concepts that has motivated and structured workshops at Machine Project. Learning is not seen as something outside of the process of everyday life. The fact that participants of all ages were able to drop in on the workshops throughout the day at LACMA highlights this informal quality. Mark Allen suggests that "there are parallels between models of education and models of spectatorship: just as people learn differently, people see differently." An interest in experiential learning and the search for ways to make esoteric knowledge accessible to as broad a public as possible remain fundamental principles that guide Machine Project. The workshops offered at LACMA taught practical skills in the service of impractical objects. While teaching participants to do and to make, the workshops remained unprogrammable. It is precisely this engagement with curiosity, as opposed to results, that produces a meaningful pedagogical program. With its experimental pedagogy and through the workshops offered at LACMA, Machine Project asks questions through doing: What do we imagine education to be? What needs to be unlearned? Can we educate ourselves to think and do things we can't yet imagine? These are questions that are not easily answered but may simply require further active learning.

1. Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1985) p. 88.

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Visit machineproject.com/lacma for videos, audio, images, and more from the *Machine Project Field Guide to LACMA*.

(ON THE COVER)

COREY FOGEL **COUNTERCUMULATIVE MARCOTTING**

Pictured in the Ernestine and Stanton Avery Gallery

(BACK COVER)

MACHINE PROJECT ELEVATOR PLAYERS **MACHINE MUSICAL ELEVATOR**

Luke Storm playing the tuba inside the *Machine Musical Elevator*.

In the Ahmanson Building





On November 15, 2008, Machine Project took over the Los Angeles County Museum of Art to orchestrate ten hours of performances, workshops, and events experimenting with the museum's encyclopedic collection and seven-acre campus. Machine Project: A Field Guide to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art includes documentation of more than fifty artist projects, interviews, and essays. Highlights include a nineteenth-century description of the invention of the glass harmonica, a fragmentary history of LACMA's architecture, instructional diagrams for various do-it-yourself mechanisms, a fruit salad recipe based on the museum's collection, and a tour of the museum's campus during the Pleistocene epoch.



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