Jeanne Randolph and Cliff Eyland on Your Own Grad School, Nadja Pelkey discusses Neighbourhood Spaces, Golboo Amani and Francisco-Fernando Granados on The School of Bartered Knowledge, Mary Tremonte considers community print shops, Luis Jacob’s Anarchist Free School Minutes + Anna Hawkins on 3 types of instructional videos

syphon

3.2

Art + Pedagogy
Given that our educators with pedagogy must explicitly within academic institutions, it is easy to overlook the many moments in which we take part in informal forms of learning. Whether through solitary research and reflection or through casual exchanges that prove insightful or informative, our time together adds up. They are so often disregarded or diminished, however, no accident. This lack of recognition is the product of a specific value system that undermines vernacular knowledge and elevates the institution. This process, in turn, subdivides forms of learning further into disparate disciplines, continuing to ascribe varying degrees of importance to one field over another.

In opposition to this stratification, the current issue of Syphon explores learning that occurs outside of institutions. The features discuss projects ranging from artist-initiated programs to socially engaged residences, but all share a common interest in communal approaches to teaching and learning. Since its inception, the modern classroom served as a “pedagogical machine” with order and discipline inscribed in the very architecture. In turn becoming “not just a place of learning but an institution where we are taught our place within a hierarchical system of class, gender and race relations.” At their best, academic institutions can critique this system and illustrate a myriad of alternative ways of organizing society, but this is unfortunately often not the case.

This issue’s contributions by Jeanne Randolph and Cliff Eyland meet directly contest this pedagogical machine. Randolph and Eyland are two artists and writers who founded the Your Own Grad School program that has taken place at Modern Fuel three years in a row, with the fourth iteration scheduled for this fall. Randall brings attention to the commodification of our increasingly neoliberal public education, asking that those who are interested in advanced arts education reflect more deeply on their motivations and aspirations, while Eyland outlines an alternative graduate school model that would abandon grades for a more nuanced and insightful evaluation, one that responds to the specific needs and interests of those who are involved. If in Eyland’s model everyone “fails,” then what does that say of the systematization and standardization of success?

Rather than work with a standard, one-size-fits-all model, community-based projects like the Neighbourhood Space residency series in Windsor or Toronto’s Anarchist Free School explore radically different ways of exchanging knowledge. Nadja Pelkey, who served as Neighborhood Space’s Program Coordinator, discusses the educational structures that emerged in many of the residencies, considering how artists become integrated or involved in the groups that they worked with. Reflecting on the origins and development of the Anarchist Free School, artist Luis Jacobs installation Anarchist Free School Minutes (1990) explores the school’s democratic organization and the community that emerged through this process.

With a similar dialogue-based artist project, Golbourne's A New School of Bartered Knowledge (2013–ongoing) involves many direct exchanges of knowledge and information. In this project, individuals are invited to participate and share any knowledge or information that they deem to be of value or interest. Through these initial exchanges are fleeting, Amani asks participants to record some of the exchange on index cards that in turn catalogue the development of the project. We are excited to feature a selection of these cards in this issue’s centred.

In these and other projects included in this issue the hierarchy within conventional learning processes is itself subverted, where horizontal groups collaboratively decide what to address and how the process should unfold. Those taking part gain greater agency in the process, in contrast to the “pedagogical machine.” These alternative approaches to pedagogy impact not only the educational process itself, but influence our awareness of how society more broadly can be organized, as well as the values and culture that influence this mode of organization. As Jeanne Randolph argues, we need to reconsider the effects and outcomes of engaging with our increasingly neoliberal educational system, while acknowledging the value of alternative forms of learning and knowing.

ENDNOTES
3. The Agnes Etherington Art Centre recently acquired Jacob’s installation, and we are grateful for their support in reprinting some of the essays in this issue.

Michael Dibben is an artist and writer, and currently the Artistic Director of Modern Fuel.

Syphon is an arts and culture publication produced by Modern Fuel Artists-Run Centre that is meant as a conduit between the arts community in Kingston and communities elsewhere. It was created in response to the lack of critical arts commentary and coverage in local publications, and seen as a way to increase exposure to experimental and non-commercial art practices. Syphon has a mandate to feature local arts coverage in conjunction with national and international projects, and an emphasis on arts scenes and activities that are seen as peripheral. It acts, as a record and communiqué of correct training”.

For small regional arts communities throughout the country.

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Your Own Grad School

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A friend of mine recently applied to a prestigious American graduate school, and was rejected. There were 400 applicants, of whom 12 were interviewed for 4 slots, all for the privilege of paying $350,000 for a dubious experience.

Why do people do this? So they can hang out with 17,000 other North American graduate art school aspirants? Why do artists submit to these humiliating when there are more productive ways to further oneself? I am not against art school—I teach in one—but there are many ways to become an artist. The recent rise of the studio PhD has had many wonder if grad school alternatives might work for people who cannot or will not attend a graduate school in the visual arts.

To simply fly, to think, and to have time to make art is cheaper than school, but students often feel empty after having just graduated. They want respect. They want feedback. They want a community. They want support. They want to be somebody—anybody—their work. Jeanne Randolph and I came up with Your Own Grad School as a number of other graduates to school are being test marks everywhere.

I had thought about the old South Asian model of traditional teaching, in which education is free and for which the teacher is not paid. You might bring your teacher food or give them shelter, or you might sweep their studies for them, but money would have little to do with the relationship. I have never seen and board and transportation for Your Own Grad School sessions, but not fees. Instead we urge institutions to pay students to participate.

We “fail” everyone, we tell participants that we do not want to change their work, and we conduct reviews with the shared knowledge that all are expected to participate. Kingston’s Modern Fuel Gallery provided the ideal conditions to test these ideas. Students were given the gallery space to work in for the length of a show, and then we showed up at the end to do public crit sessions. Kingston has been our most successful FOGS venture so far, but my ambition has always been to expand the idea into a self-directed program that could be adopted by anyone with exposure in the arts, which is what I like to describe.

The student would assemble three people as a committee. The committee would include one member who is not an artist, but someone (preferably) schooled in the subject matter of the student’s work. The committee should be able to advise the student on technical matters having to do with their art, on professional practice matters such as resumes, documentation, artist statements, and theories of art. The committee should be willing to share their contacts with the student and to introduce the student to people and institutions.

The committee must be honest with the student. At their first meeting they may even advise the student to abandon their art career for something else, if so be it. Committee members see what a student can’t see in their work and in their own ambitions—the strengths, the weaknesses and the potential.

Students should attempt to make a body of work over a year that can become a solo exhibition. It does not matter where this exhibition happens. The committee should meet four times as a group over the course of a year. The meetings should take about an hour or so, more if prepared. An hour is usually long enough, but the committee may also meet at other times privately with the student.

The first meeting should introduce the committee to a student’s past works and their plan for their upcoming work and exhibition. The student should give a written outline of proposed work to committee members at this meeting.

The second meeting should attempt to find out how the student is adjusting to their full-time status as an artist and what progress toward a body of work they are making. No excuses are accepted for not making work.

The third meeting should be a mid-year evaluation of progress. Should the student stop, change direction or continue full-steam ahead?

The final meeting should be a pre-exhibition critique in which the committee members give their opinions about what needs to be changed in the student’s proposed exhibition, artist statement, and press release.

No grades are given, just verbal evaluations.

Having the discipline, enduring the frustrations, and making the effort to carry a body of work to its conclusion are the goals. The discipline of making a body of work will often involve the sacrifice of not allowing others limitations to do a student toward tival pursuits. The year will involve turning down opportunities and refusing to do things in favor of studio time.

What I have outlined may seem like a lot to ask of an independent person, but I would ask you to consider the very expensive and often fruitless alternatives before you reject it. I would also argue that if a student manages to pull off a year of full-time art making with a committee, they should be able to add another year, and yet many more years of full-time practice to their lives. Yes, we all have to spend time making money, but the discipline of regular art time is what distinguishes a real artist from pretenders.

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| Cliff Eyland | Formerly of Halifax, he moved to Winnipeg since 1994. He is a painter, a writer, and a curator. His latest public commission was installed at the Halifax Central Library in Nova Scotia in 2015, and consists of 5000 file card paintings. |

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**Your Own Grad School**

Cliff Eyland

**IMAGE CREDIT**


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**Your Own Grad School**

Cliff Eyland

**IMAGE CREDIT**


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**Psycho-Philosophical Musings upon the Existence of Post-graduate Visual Arts Degrees**

Jeanne Randolph

**INTRODUCTION**

I do not think an MFA is a waste of time and money, I do believe a PhD in the studio arts is probably a waste of time and money, or at least a once-in-a-lifetime luxury/disavantage. I do see the value of both to develop one’s inevitable entry into the Red that is looking for money.

In my limited exposure to art schools as institutions, my impression is that the education they offer is conducted on a myriad of unspoken assumptions and unconscious motives, none of which are likely to be openly discussed (in any school there will be a few brilliant and hardworking teachers committed to imparting knowledge).

Twenty-first century Canadian culture, like societies most everywhere, is under massive pressure to conform to a Corporate Ethics, to organize bureaucratically, to embrace a Technological Ethos and to produce mentally comfortable products. Universities seem to be failing financially; they might be closing to life by transforming themselves into technical schools—and by degrading humanism as social outreach, political analysis and a source of elite socio-political experts. Not that there’s anything wrong with that.

Do artists, however, flourish more creatively because of better business plans, more organized bureaucratic methods, accelerated technical innovation and extended reliance on socio-political analysis?

There are contemporary Canadian artists who are world-renowned; their financial situation more often than not is a secret. These artists are a credit to the country. But who among us art the 50% who will never be world-renowned and whose financial situation will at best be described as livable and at worst as pathetic? Am I? Are you?

The question to ask when considering whether to enroll in a graduate program is: “What difference will this make to me, who at the moment is in the 50%?”

**Here are some questions relevant to your contemplation of the above:**

1. What do I want to learn?
2. How will I develop my work on my own?
3. How to take time to contemplate, experiment and evolve my art at a natural pace?
4. How to make my work suitable for gallery exhibitions?
5. How to develop my work for a commercial gallery?
6. How to employ a variety of materials and media to embody my ideas?
7. What sector artists/professionals think is promising further developments of my work?
8. How to develop an effective peer group?
9. How to get access to curation and art criticism?

What can I expect to be taught because I cannot learn it on my own? See all through 9.

In what ways would the things I expect to learn and to be taught differ from what I might learn if I don’t attend a graduate art school program?

What are the personal/hedonistic reasons I believe graduate school is necessary to my artistic development?

About what aspects of the art make am I confident?

About what aspects of the art make am I insecure?

For what reasons—that have nothing to do with my artistic development—are I considering graduate school?

What psychological, subjective effect on me does making my art have?

Do I know what it is like to make art against all odds?

What would it be like to quit making art?

What do I actually believe constitutes success as an artist?

What do I actually know about the economic realities of practicing artists?

What do I know about the idea of art as a career?

In what way (and not) am I practicing art as a career?

How committed to the idea of art as a career is the Art School I want to attend?

In what way (and not) am I practicing art as a business?

How businesslike are the principles my preferred Art School promotes?

What are my wildest fantasies about the effect on my life of having a graduate degree?

How important is it to me to have artists as friends?

What are my wildest fantasies about the effect on my life of having a graduate degree?

How businesslike are the principles my preferred Art School promotes?

What are my wildest fantasies about the effect on my life of having a graduate degree?

How important is it to me to have artists as friends?

How will I pay back all the money I borrow to get a graduate degree?

How and when will I develop a skill for which I will be paid while I am a practicing artist?

Where do my parents stand regarding my choice to become a practicing artist?

If I pursue a graduate degree?

If I pursue a graduate degree?

Out of Psychoanalysis: ficto-criticism 2005–

**Jeanne Randolph** is a cultural critic, art writer and performance artist whose most recent books are Out of Psychoanalysis: ficto-criticism 2005–2015 and Shopping Cart Pantheism.
The School of Bartered Knowledge
Golfeo Amari & Francisco-Fernandez Granados

The School of Bartered Knowledge (2010-on) is a public participatory performance that facilitates negotiations of vernacular wisdom and everyday information between artist Golfeo Amari and an informal and alternative pedagogical framework. The School makes space for people passing by to engage in an open-ended conversation about learning beyond academic institutions. Since its first iteration in 2010, the project has been performed in Toronto at the University of Waterloo, Ryerson University, and the University of Toronto, among other locations. It is an evolving project that continually adapts to its context and the participatory relationships that develop within it. The School aims to create a space for personal and political knowledge that is not limited to academic institutions, and to encourage new ways of engaging with learning and knowledge.

Francisco-Fernandez Granados is a Toronto-based artist. His practice involves live and primarily process-centered work, extending from performance into a range of media that includes installation, video, text, and drawing. Recent projects include a solo exhibition at Third Space in St. John’s, a group show at the Atlantic Media in Barriefield, a billboard project for Minta Blahme in Toronto, and performances at Queens University and the University of Waterloo. He received the Governor General’s Silver Medal for academic achievement upon graduating from the University of Waterloo in 2012. He teaches as a seasonal faculty at O&M and University of Toronto.

INTERVIEW

LJ: You mentioned that you would like the installation to act as a guide for initiating similar projects. I was wondering what kind of response the work has generated and what your sense of its reception is.

MF: That this work has been exhibited three or four times, and every time it has been exhibited in university galleries. It was produced for an exhibition at the Art Lab at Western University. Then it was exhibited at the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen’s University. It was also exhibited at OCAD University. I hope that the exhibition takes place in the context of educational institutions. In that sense I think of the work as a kind of counter-public. Not that I think in such black-and-white ways about the difference between anarchist and non-anarchist schools and, say, Western University, but I do think it’s interesting to see this as a model of a different way of doing something inside of a place that has its own ways of doing something.

LJ: For me it’s important for students and young people to be able to see pieces like that to sustain the idea that if you need something and you don’t see it around you, then you can make it yourself. And even for people in their twenties, that’s a possibility. It’s a possibility in whatever we are trying to do—not just in the art world, but I think it’s a possibility in whatever we are trying to do—outside of the art world as well. If you see yourself as outside it, trying to get in, you are constantly seeing the people inside, “how do I get in? Please show me how.” It’s a subversive position.

LJ: If you saw yourself as someone who is able to initiate something—as well as plug into something—then it’s I think you are more empowered. It’s important to have these conversations, especially around young people.

LJ: I appreciate your installation fostering these networks, and showing ways brings attention to that.

MF: I’m just speculating, but it’s interesting to see—thirty years from now, if this piece is exhibited a few times—if you actually look at the archive of these that the work has occurred, and almost read it as the echoes of activism or anarchist discourse has evolved over time. There might not even be thirty years from now, for all we know, and that will be an interesting part of how the piece will have to evolve as well.

CENTREFOLD PROJECT


[0x0]INTERVIEW

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Information and Exchange: Educational Structures in Neighbourhood Spaces

Nadja Pelkey

Neighbourhood Spaces was a two-year long socially engaged and community arts resi-
dency program in Windsor, ON, that was conceived through a partnership between
the University of Windsor, the City of Windsor, and the arts council of Windsor &
Region. Financial support came from a federal grant through a network of agencies
funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The collaboration was developed through a
grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Collaborations—against them—led to a
structure for the residents and agreed on how each member would participate. Across
the program, the artist-in-residence was seen as an agent of the artist and a representa-
tive of The Collaborative / program. The added
tion in Leamington, located in rural Southwestern Ontario. In both instances the artist
directly solicited the community.

program was conceived three approaches to information and exchange. For some
projects the engagement model was to be more interactive and participatory, and
involvement in community decision-making processes. In Leamington, medium to
small scale public art projects were created and exhibited. The program was
community-based, open to anyone, and required no training or previous experience.

projects we are currently engaged in are creating store fronts, developing space
for the arts, and creating new social structures. The program is currently in its third
year and in the process of being re-launched. For more information please visit

ES SAY

COMMUNITY SOURCED RESEARCH

Both organizations have used City-wide research to identify issues worthy of inves-
tigation, and the artist’s interest was engaging community members as researchers in order to re-

My experiences working in community print shops in Pittsburgh/Brookland, Pennsyl-

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nevalia (Artists Image Resource and the Braddock Neighborhood Print Shop), Providence,

Amanda White, who addresses the relationship between humans and plants, had pre-

Seeds of the printed word can change things. The neighborhood print shop is
an agent of the artist and a representative of The Collaborative / program. The added

and the City of Windsor worked to ensure access to spaces for printmaking, collective
art-making, and presentation of work. Artists were invited to spend 6-8 weeks in Windsor and collaborate with a
community or group, having indicated where they would like to work in their application. As
time at the unemployed help centre speaking with job seekers getting skills training.

Community Sourced Research, where the artists worked in the community as an aggregator of stories that were

parts of conversations became the material for a series of screen prints, a document of
what she heard when asking Windsorites about work

Siegel published a book on the subject of...
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Upcoming Programming

June 25 to August 6, 2016
In the Main Gallery
Milly Ristvedt

June 25 to August 6, 2016
In the State of Flux
Neven Lochhead

Workshop
Anna Hawkins: Video Editing
Wednesday, June 29

Call for Submissions
18th Annual Juried Members’ Exhibition
Due August 1, 2016

Modern Fuel is proud to announce our new collaboration with Skeleton Park! The annual summer solstice celebration takes over McBurney park and the neighbourhood for five days with music, dancing, porch jazz, yoga in the park, and an artisan fair co-hosted by Modern Fuel. Visit skeletonparkartsfest.ca for more info!

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If you haven’t stopped by yet, be sure to check out our new, more spacious galleries at the Tett Centre for Creativity and Learning, a City of Kingston-owned heritage building on the Lake Ontario waterfront.

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Kingston, Ontario