ENGAGING LIVES: A NOMADIC INQUIRY INTO THE SPATIAL ASSEMBLAGES
AND ETHICO-AESTHETIC PRACTICES OF THREE MAKERS

Cala R. Coats, B.A., M.A.

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APPROVED:

Terry Barrett, Committee Chair
Laura Evans, Committee Member
Joni Acuff, Committee Member
Denise A. Baxter, Chair of the Department of
Art Education and Art History
Robert Milnes, Dean of the College of Visual
Arts and Design
Mark Wardell, Dean of the Toulouse Graduate
School

This research is a nomadic inquiry into the ethics and aesthetics of three makers’ social and material practices. Deleuze’s concept of the nomad operated in multiple ways throughout the process, which was embedded in performative engagements that produced narratives of becoming. Over four months, I built relationships with three people as I learned about the ethico-aesthetic significance of their daily practices. The process started by interviewing participants in their homes and expanded over time to formal and informal engagements in school, community, and agricultural settings. I used Guattari’s ecosophical approach to consider how subjectivity was produced through spatial assemblages by spending time with participants, discussing material structures and objects, listening to personal histories, and collaboratively developing ideas. Participants included a builder who repurposed a missile base into a private residence and community gathering space, an elementary art teacher who practiced urban homesteading, and a young artist who developed an educational farm.

The research considers the affective force of normalized social values, the production of desire by designer capitalism, and the mutation of life from neoliberal policies. Our experiences illuminate the community-building potential of direct encounters and direct exchanges. The project generates ideas for becoming an inquirer in the everyday and reveals possibilities for producing pedagogical experiences through collective and dissensual action. Ultimately, the project produces hope for performative and anti-disciplinary approaches to education, rupturing false divisions that fragment the force of thought, to produce, instead, aesthetic experiences that privilege processes and are based in direct and collective engagements with life.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is about becoming living inquirers. I met Ken, Sue, and Amanda at different times and through varied circumstances, but I soon recognized that they were all part of a creative community engaged in ethical productive practices. I first met Ken, who had repurposed a decommissioned missile base into a home and community gathering site. Soon after, I met Sue. Sue teaches art at an elementary school and practices sustainable and ethical approaches to living that involve creative repurposing, gardening, and raising animals. Several months later, I met Amanda. Amanda graduated with a BFA in painting and drawing. While finishing her degree, she started Cardo’s Farm Project, an educational farm where she teaches through hands-on approaches and creative techniques. She is trying to build a community around healthy food and farm-based education. They each allowed me to spend time with them at their homes to learn about the significance of their creative and environmentally-conscious practices. Over the last two years, they became my teachers.

Producing Dissensual Force

My interest in this project came out of an affirmative desire to learn through social engagement focused on people’s lives. At the same time, I hoped to understand how power relations produced participants’ subjectivity. By using narratives and material culture, I questioned ways that limitations, sacrifices, and insecurities emerged and were negotiated. Through an analysis of the ways people internalize and negotiate power relations, I hoped to better understand their ethical frame and the possibilities for producing subjective ecologies differently.
I saw the potential for homes as spaces of dissensus, or individual action toward a collective effort. Guattari (1989/2000) describes dissensus in terms of a “rupture of sense” (p. 128), where affect becomes a tool. He also describes dissensus as a singularized active force for change, as opposed to “seeking a mind-numbing and infantilizing consensus” (Guattari, 1992/1995, p. 50). In this research, dissensus focused primarily in response to neoliberal, designer capitalism, or what Guattari (1989/2000) calls “Integrated World Capitalism”—contemporary forms of global capitalism with limited state regulation, driven largely by multinational corporate interests, that “seeks to gain power by controlling and neutralizing the maximum possible number of subjectivity’s existential refrains” (p. 65). The problem that I see with a neoliberal form of capitalism is that state and market policies have removed industry regulations and limited state funding resulting in the capture and commodification all aspects of life: social, mental, and environmental (Guattari, 1992/1995).

I found that all three participants were concerned about ways that consumerism produces negative effects on nature. While I see far broader impacts of capitalist production and consumption in terms of the commodification of knowledge and life as a whole, the specific concerns for my participants were ways that commercial development, industrialized farming, and accountability-driven forms of education, all of which promote capitalism, have had detrimental effects on humans and the environment.

A dissensual approach is situational, and derives from the production of subjectivity. Acts of dissensus are not motivated by a consensual commitment to predetermined moral code, group membership, politics, or set of rules. Instead, dissensus is singularized and active. This approach relates to the concept of the nomad as active and critical with the potential to generate unpredictable social shifts. To consider how dissensual acts become possible, I heed Guattari’s
(1989/2000) suggestion that “we are faced with an important ethical choice: either we objectify, reify, ‘scientificise’ subjectivity, or, on the contrary, we try to grasp it in the dimension of its processual creativity” (p. 13). To consider how subjectivity was produced, I worked with three people across varied spaces, discussing material structures and objects, listening to their personal histories, and collaboratively developing ideas.

Why Not Do-It-Yourself?

My interest in the potential of change through a nomadic and dissensual ethics stems, in part, from an introduction to DIY practices as a child growing up with my mom and my grandfather. We spent many weekends at relatives’ houses expanding bathrooms or remodeling kitchens, working together over months of communal family effort. Later, as a teenager, creative production was an important part of my life. My friends were skaters and punks, and we worked together to build a half-pipe skateboard ramp. I regularly painted my room and threw discarded furniture in the back of my truck and refurbished it at home. Whether I was working alone or with groups, these creative projects became ways of learning through the process of production. They required problem-solving, and when working with family and friends, the projects brought us closer.

Living in Austin, Texas as an undergraduate, I witnessed the political potential of DIY practices. The Yellow Bike Project (http://austinyellowbike.org/) and Critical Mass bike rides (http://www.critical-mass.info/austin.html) exemplified larger collective and creative efforts to encourage bike riding as a way of limiting the pollution and consumption generated from automobile usage. These projects were my first exposure to active and creative critiques of capitalist structures. Participants in both bike-focused efforts questioned ways that car culture and mass consumption had produced ill effects on the environment and separated people from
each other and nature by spending so much time in cars. To resist capitalism, communal bike repair workshops and group bike rides brought people together through education, exercise, and environmental consciousness. I had not been critical of capitalism nor recognized the political potential of DIY efforts prior.

Those experiences changed the ways I thought about consumption in the following years. Living in Chicago, I rode my bike everywhere. I tried to support local establishments as a way of strengthening communities and resisting large corporate chains that I felt had little long-term investment in the well-being of neighborhoods in which they are located. I became more conscious of my desire to purchase clothing and products, questioning whether my desire was motivated by marketing or necessity.

I found, though, that becoming a mother made living an environmentally-conscious and DIY lifestyle more challenging. I no longer had the time or will to ride my bike with children and groceries. By the time I started graduate school five years ago—older, with less free time, and fewer resources—doing it myself took too much time. I did not have free weekends. I no longer rode my bike, and I stopped repurposing used furniture. I drove more and bought more packaged goods. My days were typically directed by moving between work, grocery store, daycare, and home. I watched more TV, and I felt little sense of empowerment about my potential to change. As I looked back on the joy I derived from my earlier creative practices, I wondered how I had so easily become disengaged and apathetic.

I have never considered myself an activist, but I could see that I was more politically aware and critically conscious during those years living in Austin and Chicago than I am now. Consumerism is critiqued as a way of numbing consumers to the problems of the world, driven often by desire produced through marketing and other forms of media (Harold, 2007; Lasn,
Taken to an extreme, consumerism can produce debt. Debt becomes another form of control, where time that could be spent engaged in community work, creative activities, or education, is instead spent working to earn money.

I found that conscious choices of how to use time were one of the primary themes throughout the research. Time was an extremely valuable resource for each of the participants. Ken, Sue, and Amanda were willing to take time to produce things, rather than privileging immediate outcomes. They all see their time as valuable and consciously spend it in meaningful ways. Time became one of many themes that illuminated participants’ values. Learning about each person’s sacrifices, choices, desires, and insecurities allowed me to see how power relations produced their subjectivity.

So, as I began this dissertation, I hoped to see how a life that was embedded in creative and environmentally conscious daily practices might take shape. I saw potential for research that critiqued capitalist power relations, questioning how a DIY ethic was enacted in the everyday. Furthermore, I began to realize that each of the three participants enjoyed the process of making, doing, and learning that is often skipped or limited through practices of consumption alone. I saw for myself how I had stopped focusing on the creative process I previously enjoyed, to instead buy products. My increasingly limited free time and desire for comfort and convenience had slowly diminished my interest in process. As I moved farther from engaging in creative practices, I felt less empowered to be able to do things myself, to effect change, or to even change myself without the help of more products. The process of learning through making is an empowering force, and this research reveals how my subjectivity emerged from a return to active engagement inspired by Ken, Sue, and Amanda. So rather than solving a problem or achieving a
goal through this research, the inquiry allowed me to recognize how power might be negotiated through ethical creative action in the everyday (jagodzinski, 2009).

Producing Places

The research process emerged from my interest in place-based learning (Blandy & Hoffman, 1993; Ellsworth, 2005; Graham, 2007). In the fall of 2011, I started a photographic inquiry into suburban communities in North Texas. I photographed common suburban spaces, such as single-family homes, parks, and parking lots. The process of creating a typology of similar spaces across multiple suburban communities helped me to see how similar types became different based on their cultural, political, economic, and geographic contexts. Being in direct physical relation to spaces allowed me to understand Powell’s (2008) argument to “listen to previously silenced voices and also to analyze the ways in which these voices are interwoven with, speak through, and affect dominant narratives—the ways which voices ‘live on’ in the traces of our built, material, and visual cultures” (p. 19). I began to recognize how places became fluid geopolitical constructions (Ellsworth, 2005). In other words, places gained significance for me based on cultural codes, social practices, and environmental contexts. This post-structural perspective (Ellsworth, 2005; Rogoff, 2000) drew my attention to the vitality of space. Spaces produced social relations, and were equally produced through those relations, where meaning was produced through cultural and community-specific elements in flux (Trafi-Prats, 2006, 2009).

The photography project also increased my interest in ways that designer capitalism (jagodzinski, 2007) normalizes social practices through familiarity. I define designer capitalism as a form of capitalism that exceeds material processes of consumption and production to shift into mental and social relations directed by marketing and design aesthetics focused on the
production of desire. I realized as I traveled through unfamiliar communities, they became familiar, and even normal to me, based in part on logos. Recognizable design elements, such as the logos at McDonald’s and Starbucks, seemed almost natural. Hoechsmann (2010) explains, “One of the stabilizing influences offered by early marketers was familiar brand names, which ‘provide people with some sense of identity and continuity in their lives’” (p. 32). This idea of identity and continuity became evident to me in suburban communities. Corporate chains were familiar, making locally-owned establishments seem different and even suspect at times. I began to understand how familiarity could produce normalization. As I thought about how places are read as normal and familiar, I began to see how visibility can shape values. When things become normal, we may not question them in the same way as those that are unfamiliar, so actions or practices that operate outside of normalized consumerism may become strange or different.

Even as I entered spaces with a critical consciousness of designer capitalism’s power to produce desire and shape identity (jagodzinski, 2007; Sandlin & McLaren, 2010), I found I was subject to those tactics. The photography project illuminated the significance of visual culture art education’s focus on power relations embedded in types of visual culture and designer marketing (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Darts, 2004, 2006b; Darts & Tavin, 2010; Duncum, 2010). While I was reflecting on my reactions to my photographic inquiry, I became curious about the ways that capitalism operates through individuals’ daily lives. I wanted to understand how other people internalized the operations of capitalism and how people live differently. I also quickly learned that the normalizing effects of designer capitalism operate on ways we read people.

Still focused on place-based learning, I considered how homes might act as nodes for daily acts of resistance. I started with participants’ homes, listening to stories, looking at objects,
and discussing how they valued the spaces. By focusing specifically on domestic spaces, I was able to draw focused connections and to build long-term relationships with participants to better understand the complexity of their social practices across a variety of domains.

Our social engagements produced intersubjective relations, while their narratives revealed histories of becoming. I discovered a decommissioned missile base that someone had repurposed into a residence and community gathering site. When I met Ken, I realized that homes could tell very important stories. Soon after, I began student teaching and Sue acted as my teacher mentor. Sue’s values determined her domestic and environmentalist practices at home and in her classroom. I realized that homes might bear the significance of the residents’ histories and values, the way that occupants produce identities, or negotiate societies. I had seen posters around town for Amanda’s farm. As I discussed my research with friends, some suggested that I contact Amanda because her farm and residence might be of interest to me. Her history, based in art making, farming, and women’s histories, pulled together my, Ken’s, and Sue’s stories beautifully. I began to realize that together the three participants’ lives and lived spaces produced a lineage of environmentally-conscious approaches to the world through responsible creative practices.

I use Guattari’s (1992/1995; 1989/2000) *ecosophic* approach to consider how spaces are produced as subjective assemblages. This approach argues that spaces are produced through flows of social, mental, and environmental forces. The concept of the assemblage in this context positions material and immaterial elements as vectors of force, just as a machine is composed of multiple components working together to produce an outcome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1983; Guattari, 1992/1995; O’Sullivan, 2010). I viewed each home as a group of forces based in experiences, skills, values, and memories producing the material significance of the space. The
approach allowed me to see how other spaces are produced similarly, always flowing through social, mental, and environmental forces at play. The idea was not to place judgment or codify participants’ lives, but rather to ask how ethical frames are produced. I hoped by learning through Ken, Sue, and Amanda that I might better understand how to approach art education to focus on an aesthetic and ethical approach to the everyday by engaging students in living art practices.

Becoming Interested

Throughout the research process, I continually returned to Guattari’s ecosophic frame, considering how all aspects of the process were linked through mental, social, and environmental forces. So far, I have introduced DIY practices as the social element of the study and domestic spaces as the primary environment of the research. I will conclude this introduction to the background of the research with a more detailed explanation of the theoretical or mental frame of the research design.

I did not start out with a designated problem. Prior to starting dissertation research, I was interested in critical theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Foucault, 1978b; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 2006b; McLaren, 2006) and cultural studies (Hebdige, 1979/1987; Storey, 2003; Willis, 1977), but more importantly, I was interested in contemporary forms of resistance through creative community-building and participatory contemporary art (Foust, 2010; Green, 1999; Lasn, 1999; Meban, 2009; Thompson, 2012). I wanted to know how a DIY ethic (Duncombe, 1997) might take form in the everyday, particularly in relation to communities. My research interests continually brought me back to issues related to neoliberal global capitalism (Giroux, 2006b; Sandlin & McLaren, 2010).
It is difficult for me to untangle the knot that connects corporate globalization and neoliberal policies. I view neoliberal capitalism as a philosophy, government and market policies, and social conditions that aim to commodify all aspects of life. Deleuze and Guattari (1972/1983) argue that “capitalism is without a doubt the universal of every society” (p. 270) in its ability to restructure its force indefinitely to alienate, territorialize, and enslave. Neoliberal global capitalism functions through spatial relations that traverse the physical, mental, and social domains (Denzin & Giardina, 2011; Foust, 2010; Thrift, 2005).

Thrift (2005) describes capitalism as “a series of relations of relation instituted over time through different organizations of time-space” (p. 1), which points to the impossibility of identifying a singular structural source of power. Instead, power relations operate through networked and layered interactions. Analysis of capitalism’s non-linear and ubiquitous nature requires a relational and situated approach. In this research, the homes became nodes through which layered structural effects became visible.

In the late 1990s, significant changes occurred as a result of neoliberal policies, specifically related to NAFTA (North American Free Trade Act) (Foust, 2010; Harold, 2007; Lasn, 1999). NAFTA, as a combination of market and legislative policies, removed significant regulations over international trade functions. As Lasn (1999) explains,

Expansionists see the pursuit of sustainability as a much simpler proposition: Create as much wealth as possible by freeing up markets, privatizing government services, and eliminating barriers to trade. This will, according to their theories, produce a new round of economic expansion that will create the wealth we need to tackle environmental degradation, poverty, and other economic woes. (p. 88)

Considered in this light, we can begin to see how policies and practices have evolved over the last fifteen years. The idea of “liberalism” refers to limiting regulatory state policies over the market, even as many people think of a liberal ideology completely counter to this capitalizing
structure. Neoliberalism, then, is an exponentially more open and networked free market. It operates through increasingly limited regulations because people believe that the market operates naturally. Removing the state as a regulatory force allows trade and profit to operate without oversight.

Contemporary public schools bear the effects of the privatization of government services. By limiting state funding for education, private interests are allowed to fill in the gaps in resources. As a student teacher, I witnessed students take part in a corporate-run fundraising campaign. I saw fast food restaurants selling pizza and burgers in school next to the state-funded school lunches. These examples illustrate how the free market intervenes in services that used to be provided by the state. Desai and Koch (2012) suggest that,

The corporatization of education in schools and universities has shifted the terrain of education from a social good to a market-driven, strictly professional endeavor that is about outcomes and transferable knowledge. This global shift in education… is working in tandem with unprecedented politicization of education. (p. 37)

Changes in schooling serve as examples of the broad and complex ways that neoliberalism works on myriad levels publically through policy and commerce, which then transfers into mental, social, and environmental effects.

While I recognize that the history of public education is wrought with ideological injustices, the space of public education teaches social norms. Products introduced there are reified as natural and normal. Fast food restaurants serving lunch in school cafeterias produce the belief that those types of foods are normal (Giroux, 1998) or else why would the state allow them to be sold as a school lunch? These types of messages of normality are what I see as one problem with neoliberal shifts in spaces and services that used to be run by the state. Furthermore, commodifying a process, such as education, changes its form into something that can be packaged and sold. For example, the market for standardized testing has become active
and lucrative as a result of regulatory shifts requiring increased accountability in the form of test scores, making education itself into a commodity.

Furthermore, by eliminating trade barriers, international outsourcing of manufacturing increased exponentially (Foust, 2010). McLaren and Farahmandpur (2005) describe free market policies that have opened global channels to outsourcing and downsizing to shift production to cheaper labor sources in third-world countries. Policy shifts allowed the free market to take advantage of less expensive human labor in other countries, while increasing profit for goods produced and sold. This is problematic when corporations negotiate with international countries led by oppressive regimes, where the leadership of the country receives money from the corporation to use their citizenry as cheap labor. The individuals who labor to produce commodities are exploited so that corporations can yield larger profits. This is one of many examples of ways that liberal fiscal policies have dramatically changed the face of our contemporary society.

On a more individual level, the outsourcing of labor and manufacturing has produced a greater distance between consumer products processes of production. When processes of production become invisible, we become increasingly disconnected from the sources of our products. I find this to be problematic because it blinds us to the processes of destruction that may facilitate the production of goods. The most important way that this resonates with my research is related to nature and food production, but global industrialization relates to all forms of material production.

As I worked with Sue and Amanda, I realized how the fragmenting of processes and products has affected my own understanding of nature and the world. For instance, I was more familiar with a chicken breast than a live chicken, only vaguely associating the form of the
frozen chicken breast with a living chicken. Moreover, as I worked in Sue’s garden and on Amanda’s farm, I realized that I had never associated a living flower with its seeds’ regenerating potential. I did not know that seeds could be taken from plants and replanted. I only associated seeds with store-bought packages. The same disconnect relates to my limited understanding of textiles, such as wool and cotton. My knowledge of products is purely in their consumable forms. My concern with this is that we can easily allow other life forms, such as animals and nature, to become commodities at the service of profit rather than recognizing their ecological significance. Humans are one form of life, equivalent to all other forms of nature. The problem with limiting the visibility of processes of production, whether it is food, clothes, paper, or education, is that when they become packaged, we lose sight of the vital forces transformed to make them consumable. Their value, in turn, lies in use value and profit margin, not in their original purposes.

Putting Concepts to Work

As I engaged with three participants in their homes, I considered social and material environments as generative sites of becoming, asking how situated knowledge (Ellsworth, 2005; Rose 1997) may reveal potential for lines of flight (Braidotti, 2011; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) from our normal ways of thinking. Poststructural feminist methodologies (Braidotti, 2011; Gannon & Davies, 2007) along with nomadic and ecosophic theoretical approaches (Braidotti, 2011; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Guattari, 1992/1995; 1989/2000) frame the inquiry to construct cartographies of shifting subjectivity.

Theoretically, my research primarily utilizes the individual and combined writings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari because I find their relational approach to social, mental, and environmental forces profoundly empowering. I realized through the research that I had to
approach the entirety of the process through their frame because their concepts weave together as an entire approach to the world. Most importantly, Deleuze’s and Guattari’s theories allowed me to see the importance of thinking.

To defamiliarize my common ways of thinking, I adopted theories of the nomad, who is “a collectively oriented, externally bound, multiple subject” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 79). Nomadic engagement produced my perspectives on the spaces as relations of force, which revealed the potential of an ethic and aesthetic approach to life that is focused on situated and relational encounters. The work came from a place of affirmation, considering how subjectivities weave together through a negotiation of forces. This affirmative outlook allowed me to see how critical pedagogy shifts from a plane of power and resistance to a place where “we are in this together” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 85). I considered how we might use the force of desire in a way that is ethical, responsible, active, and collective. Deleuzo-Guattarian theories are critical, affirmative, and empowering. In this research, their theories helped me see potential for redirecting normative values through a realization that all forces of life are intertwined.

Nomadic inquiry (Braidotti, 2011; St. Pierre, 1997a, 1997b) guided my research through a focus on affective and aesthetic relations, considering how subjectivity is produced through daily choices and experiences. I decided to use nomadic inquiry to understand where ruptures in our normal ways of thinking are produced and to question the potential for individual change. The concept of the nomad operates in a number of ways in Deleuze’s writing as well as his writing with Guattari. In this research, I refer to nomadism in relation to affect, activated thinking, performativity, and memory. I was both reflexive and socially engaged, so the research works on two levels: through my research narrative, marking moments of rupture through
autoethnographic writing, and by tracing participants’ significant shifts through narratives, histories, and material production.

As I worked with Ken, Sue, and Amanda, I was conscious of moments of heightened affect. These experiences are woven throughout the chapters as ruptures in knowledge or flashes of awakening. At times, my affective responses took the form of anxiety and discomfort, and others were beyond words. They instead took the form of unexplainable tears, a racing heart, or feeling excited and overwhelmed by new connections coming to light. These affective responses triggered an awareness of moments of learning.

The research also questions the potential for the production of a nomadic ethics (Braidotti, 2011) through intersubjective relations based in direct engagements. Braidotti (2011) suggests that “nomadic ethics stands for… a regrounding of the subject in a materially embedded sense of responsibility and ethical accountability for the environments s/he inhabits” (p. 122). My research took shape through social engagements in various spaces, but to produce change, I examined how those engagements produced an ethical frame.

I consider nomadic ethics important because it places responsibility on an individual to question how and why he or she chooses and acts. As the research progressed, I realized that the concept of direct relations took on increasing significance. Not only did nomadic ethics rely on a relational reflexivity, but my interest in Do-It Yourself (DIY) derived from an interest in direct relations to process. Considerations of pedagogy emerged from an interest in how participants learned through making, where I began to question predetermined curricula. By focusing on direct relations, ways that those relations are limited or mediated became indices for power relations.
My work with Ken, Sue, and Amanda was grounded in material practices and social relations with a focus on processes of ethical production and shifts in consciousness. I examine the potential of Guattari’s (1995) ethico-aesthetic paradigm, considering the potential for an ethical existence in the everyday; where aesthetics refers to the quality of daily actions, choices, and encounters. This shift to a focus on process privileges ways that subjectivity is produced in relation to our environments: spaces, media, people, animals, and language—where existence is in flux and the potential for change is perpetual.

Assembling Ecologies

The purpose of this research is to consider how subjectivities are produced through direct engagements with living and non-living forms, and consider the potential for change through everyday social practices. The research acts as a form of community engagement starting with residential spaces, and then expanding through narratives and histories into institutional, community, and public domains. By working with individuals in domestic spaces, I consider how their material objects and productive practices reflect their values. I consider the conditions that produced participants’ understanding of social norms and ways they internalize and resist those norms. I see this project as a way to consider how neoliberal conditions and designer capitalism construct our habits of mind by me consciously engaging with people in domestic environments.

This research is critical, embodied, reflexive, and affirmative. The work emerged out of an interest in critical pedagogy as it questions power and seeks potential for change. The approach is also post-structural and feminist as an acknowledgement and analysis of ways that power operates through contingent flows. The domain of the work is focused on the production of space and subjectivity.
If we consider how spaces are assemblages of vectors of intensity, perhaps we can increase the intensity of those vectors that might produce more equitable, communal, and ethical outcomes with a consideration for other living beings. I use a poststructuralist lens to consider ways that spaces become fluid relations of power, knowledge, and actions in the everyday.

*The Process of Engagement*

This research project is an assemblage of informal interviews; embodied encounters with living and non-living forms; auto-ethnographic reflections; informal engagements in personal and public settings; photographic documentation; and cultural and historical research. Over four months, I conducted two semi-formal interviews with house visits to each participant’s home. The research answers questions asked about participants’ formal and informal educations; artistic practices; family histories and cultural values; and specifically how the persons’ values are reflected in their daily social and material practices.

The formal research started with two house visits, during which I administered semi-formal interviews. As participants’ answered my general interview questions, more questions emerged. Participants’ also provided a tour of their homes. During the tour, I photographed objects and engaged in discussions about meaningful elements, focusing on personal significance, intentions, and motivations. Based on information learned through the interviews, I conducted historical and cultural research on local practices, educational programming, and contemporary art practices that participants introduced. In addition to the more formal home visits to conduct interviews, data emerged from informal conversations that took place at parties, collaborative work in schools, and interactions in public. During my final formal interview visits, I shared ideas and concepts that emerged from the research, and we discussed how I perceived the participants’ practices in relation to larger cultural conditions and histories. These
discussions resulted in collaborative idea formation for many of the findings that resulted from the research. After writing each participant’s chapter, I provided him or her with a copy of the chapter to read for accuracy and approval.

Finally, throughout the research process, I reflected on my reactions and experiences through voice recording and written notes to retain the sense of immediacy of affective responses. I developed many reflections into mind maps, connecting concepts across the sites, through scholarship, and with my personal life and history. In addition to reflections, I photographed each site during tours and used the photographs as visual reflections of my experience of the spaces.

*The Affirmation of Life*

The significance of this research is that it pulls together a critical and affirmative frame to acknowledge how power operates and consider ways of living as nomad. Rather than arguing for better or worse ways of living, the research considers the outcomes of lifestyles. In other words, how might we engage with the world without a moral code, becoming conscious and responsible for the ways that each daily choice might affect human and non-human life?

For the field of art education, this research is positioned in a lineage of social reconstructionist efforts going as far back as the Arts and Crafts Movement to the Owatonna Project and Arts-in Education Movement (Efland, 1990) to address injustice through hands-on problem solving across disciplines using everyday life and community-based learning. The work relates to some elements of visual culture art education (Darts, 2004, 2006b; Jagodzinski, 2007; Freedman, 2003) by questioning hegemonic messages of designer capitalism in ways that are practical and based across domains of domestic, institutional, community, and public settings. Furthermore, this research draws connections between individual material production based in an
environmentalist frame with contemporary art and activist efforts to act as a pedagogical example of empowering individual actions in the everyday.

This work traverses a number of areas of art education to reveal ways that approaches across the field might all flow together. By engaging three individuals through a focus on material culture and social practices, this research uses Deleuze’s (1962/1983, 1990, 2001, 2004) and Guattari’s (1992/1995, 1996b, 2000, 2009) individual and joint (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1983, 1987, 1994) concepts as tools for engaging the force of life.

Limitations and Biases

This work is positioned from an anti-capitalist critical frame. I do not intend to suggest that this research is generalizable, but I hope that its significance derives from the specificity of individual lives. By working with three people, I limited the scope of my research to their social practices. There is a lack of diversity between the three participants. All are Caucasian and derive from middle-class socio-economic backgrounds. None currently live with children, and each has the financial capital to own a home.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that I romanticize the lives of and social practices of my participants. On a personal level, I think it would be disrespectful to be critical of them in this context, even if it might increase the validity of the work. I was attracted to aspects of my participants’ lifestyles, where they practice discipline, frugality, patience, and moderation in their daily choices, which I have found difficult to incorporate in my life. As I get older and have built a family with my husband, I find I want to deaden my brain at the end of the day with meaningless pop culture. I find it equally challenging to avoid the convenience of industrially produced food and textiles. In this work, I argue for the potential of recognizing and resisting
the power of global designer capitalism, but my interest springs as much from what I consider
my weaknesses as my participants’ strengths.

Engaging with the Dissertation

The research is pieced together as a subjective assemblage. To provide a unifying frame, I have italicized reflective narrative passages throughout many of the chapters that represent my voice in moments of rupture. The passages recount stories of my past that took on a new relevance, deeply affective moments, and profound realizations that occurred during the research process. My italicized reflections break up the other narratives, in part, to reveal the passage of time, and the organic nature of coming to know myself and the world differently. By allowing myself the time and freedom to learn and admit what I had not known, I am resisting our consumer-driven culture of quick and distinct solutions.

Chapter 2 introduces my methodological approach to the project by referring to literature that influenced my design, and illustrating ways that my methods came to life through narrative passages. The narratives reveal the way that I found Ken as a result of a photographic inquiry. Chapter 2 also introduces the concept of affect (St. Pierre, 1997b; Tolia-Kelly, 2006). I have tried to represent the affective moments that exceed language as best I can. At times, those emotions came from interactions with objects, animals, and the environment. At other times, I was deeply affected by what I learned through an interview or the interpersonal engagements.

Chapter 3 functions as way to explain the domain of the project. I begin with an inquiry into the development of the concept of a DIY ethic to consider how material practices could produce collective forces explicitly resisting capitalism. I needed to understand the shift from a set of practices or actions alone to that produced or girded by an ethical frame. I did this by researching a history of DIY. This chapter is more of a literature review of a concept than a
traditional literature review of similar studies. I was trying to understand how my research worked within the realm of material practices of resistance.

Chapters 4 through 6 introduce Ken, Sue, and Amanda. Together the three chapters read as a story arc. Even though I was working with all three participants simultaneously, I came to understand them at different times. Ken opened my mind to the possibility of this research, and I met him first. I also wrote his story first. Chapter 4 bears more of a tone of the naïve and bright-eyed new researcher. Even as I think back to my experiences with Ken, I see myself like a child, innocent and full of hope, looking up at her father.

Chapter 5 with Sue functions as a rupture or crisis in the story. The rupture was produced as I witnessed effects of the commodification of nature and education. The research took a more critical turn as I worked with Sue. I weave her story weaves together my time in her classroom and my time with her during the research. With Sue, I recognized the profound depth of what is I saw being altered in education and the environment through neoliberal global capitalism. I began to consider how the force of life itself is being restructured. My tone and the writing process were anxious, critical, and angry because I had not previously recognized structural shifts produced by capitalism.

Finally, Chapter 6 with Amanda’s story serves as the dénouement. Just as Deleuze and Guattari argue for a critical and affirmative approach to the life, in Chapter 6, I see the possibility of hope after my deeply critical feeling of despair. I pull together all of the narratives because there are elements and people from the other chapters that re-emerge in Amanda’s story. I hope that it might weave together loose pieces that had been introduced over the previous four chapters.
Chapter 7 draws connections across the three sites and explicitly answers my research questions:

1. How might nomadic or activated thinking generate new ways of seeing the everyday through a focus on affect?

2. How might an ecosphical lens that examines spaces as assemblages of social, mental, and environmental factors in flux produce new ways of understanding subjectivity?

3. How might the ethico-aesthetic paradigm and the concept of life as a work of art have potential for the field of art education and its practices?

Throughout the entire research process, I continually asked myself what the work meant for art education. The end of Chapter 7 lays out my hope for the field and the potential I realized through my work on this project.

At every site, I looked at objects that elicited stories about personal learning, creative production, historical context, and cultural significance. I have included my photographs from the experiences throughout the dissertation. I hope that they allow the stories to take on more nuance and specificity. I see the project as an assemblage. It does not fit a singular methodological approach. It is layered, borrowing elements from traditional, narrative, inquiry-based, sensory and visual, critical, and narrative ethnographic methods in a do-it-yourself approach that allowed me to engage each space and person on equal and respectful terms as partners in the research. This work has deepened my belief in the potential for a collective and dissensual ethos, one that recognizes the impact each of us has on life, where creative practices in the everyday can help us see how we are all in this together.
CHAPTER 2

BECOMING LOCAL NOMAD

Nomadic methodology works by empowering creative alternatives. This philosophical creativity operates a shift of paradigm toward a positive appraisal of difference, multiplicity, and complexity not as an end in themselves but as steps in a process of recomposition of the coordinates of subjectivity. (Braidotti, 2011, p. 232)

I begin with this definition of nomadic methodology to raise the possibility of a research approach that aims not to reproduce reality or uncover truth, but to create affirmative notions of difference—generating the potential to understand one’s self, community, and daily practices in new ways through inquiry. Such a methodology encompasses the production of subjectivity, and my project engages with this imperative through generative material encounters. To this end, I spent four months researching four residents of Denton, Texas, whom I found to live a creative and DIY (do-it-yourself) lifestyle. I focused on their homes as sites of production, considering how each person learned skills, assigned meaning to material objects, and forged perspectives on society and culture at large. To make sense of such themes, my research draws heavily on the work of Deleuze and Guattari. In what follows, I frame my methodology first in relation to a nomadic awareness, then proceed to define three separate ecologies related specifically to Guattari’s later work, which I address most specifically later in this chapter. Within each section, I present a story illuminating a marriage of theory and practice. The prominence of such stories in this introductory chapter establishes the central importance of narrative to the entirety of my research project.

I started this research to consider the idea of becoming nomad in a familiar geographical location to realize generative potential. As an art educator, I believe that improvised, DIY approaches to work and leisure can point to a more ethical experience of everyday life. As I began a nomadic inquiry (St. Pierre, 1997a, 1997b) into the Denton community, looking for
improvised uses of space, I began to recognize connections between diverse people, places, and objects that had no direct link besides geography. Semetsky (2006) explains,

Nomadic inquiry is specified by St. Pierre in terms of particular attention to particular places and earlier times, retrospective, as well as untimely, memories and dynamic forces, capable of affecting changes and contesting one’s identity to the point of a transformation of who we are and, respectively, reconfiguration of the where of our place at this point in time. (p. 94)

I began to see space as the stage for social practices that pointed to shifts in subjectivity. Over a four-month period, I found four individuals whose homes became the foci—nodes of research—of a broad consideration of creative practices ranging from DIY construction to craft to collecting to gardening, each of which I considered as the grounds for the production of subjectivity. As my perception of a network of people and places developed, I maintained a heightened awareness and recorded verbal and written reflections of my learning process. As I researched participants’ subjectivity in relation to their homes, I also mapped my own subjectivity as I realized the power of inquiry and active engagement to make sense of the complexities of my own local environment.

After the initial phase of identifying participants, I spent four more months engaging with them through interviews, house visits, and public encounters. The resulting nomadic inquiry has taken the form of an assemblage of stories of finding, learning, and coming to know differently. In the presentation of research that follows, I assemble a series of images that capture the range of my inquiry: sites that I discovered and ones that I produced; objects that participants made, collected, and repurposed; and histories of homes and their owners forged by participants.

Throughout, I weave an autoethnographic account of my research into the socio-cultural significance of three participants’ lives and social practices. The cartography develops in part through my experiences of coming to know my community and myself differently in relation to
the participants. I believe that the significance of this research resides in the learning processes revealed through a reflexive investigation of a local network of makers, woven through an intersection of mental, social, and environmental vectors. Ultimately, I use a nomadic lens (Braidotti, 2004, 2006, 2011; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) to consider ways of thinking beyond the limits of representation, through an awareness of affective forces and shifting relational knowledge.

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It was the spring semester of 2012. I was putting together a documentary on the new food truck craze. My interest in food trucks came out of an ongoing inquiry into ways that improvised uses of space materialized in developed suburban communities. I had been driving around every Friday for months photographing and interviewing local food truck owners. Having grown tired of the project, talking with so many young entrepreneurs nevertheless made me think about the American dream of owning property, especially the symbolic meaning of small businesses for many Americans. In the process, I had covered a lot of territory in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. I often stopped my car on residential streets to make audio recordings into my phone of nascent ideas, and I could not help but look at the houses where I would briefly park. Particularly in and around Denton, I began to notice underground shelters that were buried on the sides of or behind houses. Typically, a cement slab with metal doors and a vent in varying sizes and states of disrepair would be visible.

I had never before carefully considered the reality of a bomb or storm shelter. The suburb I grew up in was not developed until the late 1970s. I had seen pop culture references to bomb shelters in old movies and kitschy advertisements, but the idea of their existence in local backyards seemed impossible. I knew that in the United States bomb shelters had been built
primarily in the Cold War 1950s. Perhaps because I was already considering the nostalgic and mythical dimensions of the American Dream of freedom and ownership, I wondered how shelters constructed out of a fear of war and natural disaster fit into the culture of 1950s America. Many of the houses in Denton were built between 1940 and 1960, so the idea of a bomb shelter installed in the yard made sense. But what would that mean today?

Once I became aware of the shelters, I found myself looking for them all the time. I would get out of my car to snoop around people’s fences to photograph them where I could. I tried to capture their mystery in the photographs (Fig. 1), and this inquiry into local bomb shelters became both a diversion from food trucks and a new direction in my ongoing interest in improvised uses of space.

![Figure 1](image_url)

*Figure 1*. Image of underground shelter from photographic inquiry into bomb shelters.

As I asked around town, friends told me about an old missile base just north of Denton. It had been built during the Cold War, and having live missiles so close to town encouraged residents to install bomb shelters. I drove out to find the missile base, curious about its current

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form and how it might stimulate my newfound interest in bomb shelters and the links between feelings of fear and commitments to independence in American life.

I drove past what looked like an abandoned elementary school. The windows were knocked out, and all the buildings looked empty, but there was nothing else on the road that could have been the base. I turned around. There was a chain-link fence with a gate that said Keep Out, but thinking it was abandoned, I entered anyway. There was an empty guard stand as I entered the property. As I pulled in, I noticed a complex of buildings—all cement structures, few windows remaining, overgrown grasses, and old equipment piled up. I drove a little further into the complex. There were more Keep Out signs and I noticed a newer model car parked in the distance. I quickly turned the car around and headed back out the main gate. As I drove out of the gate and back toward Denton, I knew there had to be much more to learn about the deserted missile base.

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The Production of Ecosophical Assemblages and Ethico-Aesthetic Subjectivity

Here we are talking about a reconstruction of social and individual practices which I shall classify under three complementary headings, all of which come under the ethico-aesthetic aegis of an ecosophy: social ecology, mental ecology, and environmental ecology. (Guattari, 1989/2000, p. 41)

Guattari’s *Three Ecologies* is a touchstone for my consideration of the production of subjectivity, both in relation to the three research participants and myself. In *Three Ecologies*, Guattari argues that vectors intersect to produce environments. Guattari’s interest in ecologies is rooted in an ethical and political position as a member of the Green Party in France. While his approach derives from an environmentalist frame, Guattari broadens the more common ecological frame based in the natural environment to, instead, consider how any site becomes an assemblage where material, social, and mental registers flow together. I utilize Guattari’s
ecosophical approach to analyze how spaces are produced by considering the social, mental, and environmental elements at play, considering the ethico-aesthetic potential of each research encounter.

**Ecosophical Assemblages**

Genosko (2009) explains,

For Guattari, the three ecologies point the way toward emancipator praxes whose ‘major objective [is] to target the modes of production of subjectivity, that is, knowledge, culture, sensibility, and sociability.’ Ecosophy’s business is to attend to the regimes by means of which subjectivity is produced and intervene in them. (p. 77)

As a post-structural tactic, I use Guattari’s ecosophical lens to ask how subjectivity is produced in spaces.

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The first time I met Ken, he was alone on his land. Brent and I trespassed, and as Ken showed us around his property, he took on the role of steward of the land. He was artist, owner, and other at the same time because he seemed to be conscious of our reverence for his unusual home. Brent and I were nervous strangers on Ken’s land, and I initially positioned Ken as leader and hero to a certain degree. Over time, our relationship evolved. Rather than feeling nervous or anxious, I looked forward to casual visits and laughter. My visits to his house produced an intersubjective relationship, where my positionality as both a younger female and researcher took on a different significance. We developed ideas together over time through an increasingly complex dialogue.

At other times, though, the introduction of social and material elements altered our exchanges. During one of my interview visits to Ken’s house, we had been walking and talking for about an hour, when his girlfriend surprised us. As we approached the ballroom, she stuck her head out of one of the windows. Instantly, the ecology of the space shifted. I felt obliged to
include her in the conversation, and I felt awkward about having been there alone with Ken. Ken became more animated and jovial, making jokes and talking differently than he has before her arrival. The material environmental structure did not change, but the social vector produced a different kind of ecological space. We both behaved differently with the presence of his partner. My perception of cultural norms directed my behavior and attention to focus on the female as much as Ken in that situation.

At other times, these kinds of social and mental shifts would derive from the presence of the audio recorder, the camera, and the video recorder. These forms of technology produced a self-awareness that limited the spontaneity of our movements and dialogue. When I visited Ken’s parties, I recognized the strength of his community, where his friends took ownership over the place by enforcing rules about not carrying glass bottles for fear that they would break. His community cared about his land as if it were their own. Friends took me around the land and shared their stories of taking part in developing the property, while others seemed suspicious of me as a stranger and as a person admittedly collecting research. These incidents illustrate how Ken’s land was produced as an ecological assemblage through fluid social, mental, and environmental vectors, where self-awareness shifted through engagements with the land, shifting as new members such as myself arrived. Much of the materiality of the land itself only changed through seasonal environmental shifts, but the ecology of the spaces was always in flux.

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Approaching the construction of place in this way is not necessarily new. Scholars in the fields of anthropology, art history, sociology, cultural studies, and cultural geography have examined ways that power and knowledge are produced through social and cultural practice embedded in embodied engagements and material geographies (Anderson, Domosh, Pile, &
Thrift, 2003; Dickinson, 2008; Low, 2003; Rogoff, 2000; Till, 2008; Tolia-Kelly, 2007, 2010, 2012; Tuan, 1977). Although other philosophers have considered the production of space (Lefebvre, 1992) and social practices (de Certeau, 1984) as ways of thinking through space and cultural participation, I have decided to employ Guattari’s ecosophic lens to maintain consistency with the rest of the theoretical frame of the project, and because I feel that his philosophical base fits closely with mine in terms of an anti-capitalist, affirmative approach to change through direct engagements.

Through three ecosophical vectors, mental, social, and environmental, spaces and subjectivity are constantly in flux. I collected data to account for the three vectors, much of which came from affective shifts as illustrated in the passage above. The environmental vector is rooted in materiality, and in my research, this vector primarily derives from research sites, most often homes. Narratives and knowledge production also emerged from other places and experiences of materiality such as the elementary school where I worked as a student teacher, experiences traveling in cars, walking through town, and interacting with participants in public places. The social vector is produced through interactions, especially language and other social codes. I trace this vector primarily through interviews and socio-historical research. Finally, the mental vector is constituted through affective shifts that include anxiety, guilt, excitement, love, and admiration. Mental ecologies are the hardest vectors to represent, and I work to trace the meanings of affect through narratives. The data that produces this vector are wide-ranging: sensory, haptic, narrative, and didactic. My ecosophic lens works in conjunction with nomadic inquiry to consider how subjective awareness is produced through social, mental, and environmental vectors, reflecting a constant flow of forces and shifting ecological conditions.
Central to my reflections on developing subjectivity is the premise that a life may be considered a work of art, using DIY practices and a DIY ethic as one node to consider the potential of an ethico-aesthetic frame. The stories in this chapter illustrate how my subjectivity shifted through the initial stages of local inquiry. Rather than collecting data as an inert set of information to be analyzed, I began to generate new ways of knowing through encounters. Mindful of the complexities of ethnographic research in a neoliberal capitalist society, I relied on post-structural feminist theories of embodied knowledge as one crucial pillar of my research (Ellsworth, 2005; Freeman, 2005; Gibson-Graham, 1996; Haraway, 2000; Kwon, 2002; Lather, 2007).

**Ethico-Aesthetic Potential**

As I came to know the participants in my role as researcher, my subjectivity remained in flux as I assumed the position of nomad, engaging with the vitality of participants’ creative practices and their stories of *becoming*. Throughout my research, the participants’ homes became for me the material environment that both illuminated and made possible the conditions of emergence. As a nomad in these sites, I worked to forge partnerships with each participant, conceptualizing collaboratively ethical engagements with new possibilities in the everyday. Consequently, I dedicate the final chapter of this dissertation to examining broadly how the forms of subjectivity produced in each site contributed to the emergence of a distinct ethico-aesthetic paradigm.

As Guattari remarks this is to move us from a scientific paradigm where subjectivity is the ‘object’ of ‘study’ toward an ethico-aesthetic one, where subjectivity is always in process. It is also to invite us to become involved in our own production of subjectivity, to move us from passive spectators to become active participants, to take what we need from Guattari—or indeed from elsewhere—in our own project of ‘processual creativity’ precisely to treat our lives as a work of art. (O’Sullivan, 2007, n. p.)
The core of the ethico-aesthetic paradigm deals with the possibility of a creative restructuring of our social ecology for a more ethical future. This is an affirmative approach to social engagement that sees the potential for change through creative becomings. St. Pierre (1997b) suggests,

ethics is no longer transcendental and clearly defined in advance for everyone in every situation. Rather, ethics explodes anew in every circumstance, demands a specific reinscription, and hounds practice unmercifully. . . . If the self is not given, if there is no core, essential self that remains the same throughout time, if subjectivity is constructed within relations that are situated within local discourse and cultural practice – both of which can be resisted to some extent, then “we have no excuse not to act.” (p. 176)

This liberating and anarchic ethical perspective is grounded in a relational, immediate, local, and singularized responsibility. Nothing just is. Our world and our self are perpetually recreated by forces at play.

In Chaosmosis, Guattari (1992/1995) calls for a removal of the market and a redefining of the state. His focus is the production of subjectivities through new modes of social interaction and a transversal awareness of the communicability of all forms. This shifted realm of aesthetics would produce ethics relationally with the awareness that values are demonstrated through experiences in territories of practice. As I have explored through each of the three participants’ stories, their actions were rooted in a set of values, ethics, aesthetics, and daily practices.

Links between ethics and aesthetics are rooted in Classical Greek philosophy. Variations on ways to link ethics and aesthetics range from study of form as a superior form of knowledge (Plato), empirical modes of perception (Aristotle), and stylistics of life (Socrates). In terms of form, Plato’s concern with the kinds of behavior modeled in Greek tragedies is an example of an instrumentalist version of aesthetics (Higgins, 1996), where art plays a role in the moral development of a society. In terms of the field of art education, Blandy and Congdon (1987) have argued that teaching art and aesthetics can “educate its citizens to respect the processes and
cultural communication of all its citizens and cultural groups” (p. 76). This kind of democratic argument remains in the instrumentalist vein where aesthetic practices produce objects as a way of teaching and understanding the cultural values of a group. This instrumentalist approach places art as a separate field from living and the everyday, where the latter focuses on a performative engagement with life as the field of aesthetics.

While each of the three participants was engaged in creative practices, material production was one aspect of a much larger way of living. I argue that Ken’s practices of recycling and the development of his intricately designed walls are both aesthetic and ethical. He sells his skull assemblages in public, and I saw walls decorated similarly to those in his ballroom at a trendy hotel in Seattle. This may point to an aesthetic expression rooted in a contemporary air of ethical practices through object repurposing. Even the rows of trees planted to form ceremonial path between his large Stonehenge sculptures has a visual aesthetic quality. Sue also decorates her home with an aesthetic sensibility. Her collection of mid-century modern furnishings and even the placement of her plants in the backyard illustrate her deep interest in visual aesthetics. Amanda’s background as a practicing artist is based in painting and drawing, and much of her work is based in visual mimesis. Viewing each house in terms of formal aesthetics provides material examples of ways that an aesthetic practice can operates in the everyday, but traditional art making practices are only one aspect of their aesthetic lives.

Instead, if aesthetics are viewed more broadly as sensuousness or a mode of being in the world, then aesthetics could be rooted in consciousness and action, moving away from the art object as such. jagodzinski (1987) provides a useful history of the development of an aesthetics rooted in the idea of the “Good Life,” that defined created distinctions between theory and practice in art and philosophy. Rather than explaining the long history of philosophy examining
ethics and aesthetics, I think it is more important to consider how aesthetics can be seen as a stylistics of living. Nehamas (1998) positions Socrates as the “first who practiced living as an art” (p. 6). Nehamas traces a stylistics of living through Montaigne, Nietzsche, and Foucault, determining that the aesthetic quality of their lives is a self-styling that exists in multiplicity and difference. Deleuze (1990) also considers a stylistics of living through Foucault, explaining that the aesthetic quality is also driven by ethical choices or options, rather than a transcendental set of morals as handed down rules.

Aesthetics becomes active, ethical, and political. Bringing together an ecosophic approach to space with the idea of nomadic thinking, I argue that an aesthetics of engagement become an affective approach to the world through immediacy and becoming, where material, social, and mental forces act together on a plane of immanence. Guattari (1992/1995, 2009) recognized the potential of creativity to produce new forms of subjectification—so an aesthetic approach to life is about recognizing potential for mutant connections. Manning (2012) describes Guattari’s approach as “a politics at once applied and theoretical, ethico-political and aesthetic. . . . A politics always still to be invented” (p. 2). Through an active and relational nomadic approach to the research, I allow affective and ethico-aesthetic encounters to emerge in spatial ecologies.

Place-Based Nomadic Inquiry

My research foregrounds the power of affect to shape the meaning of inquiry for both researcher and participant (Braidotti, 2011; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In this way, my process of becoming nomad is fundamentally a mode of producing various forms of knowing through engagements with spaces and participants’ DIY practices. Consequently, I work to define specifically how place, particularly residential spaces, forms an assemblage of ecosophical
elements to construct a cartography of subjective production underpinned by the dynamic affective relations sparked among researcher, participant, and space. Therefore, the project ultimately casts such an approach to research as a minor science (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) wherein the process of inquiry becomes an affective relationship that continually both constitutes and transforms researcher and participants.

As I attempted to become nomad throughout my research, I sought to know the familiar differently, transforming habits of mind. The resulting record of the research process considers how inquiry might shift from a subjectifying (Kowalski-Wallace, 1997; Simpson, 2009) to an activated engagement.

The activity of thinking cannot and must not be reduced to reactive (“sedentary”) critique, but must also involve significant doses of creativity. Thinking can be critical, if by critical we mean the active, assertive process of inventing new images of thought. Thinking is life lived at the highest possible power, both creative and critical, enfleshed, erotic, and pleasure driven. (Braidotti, 2011, p. 84)

Considering community engagement and critical pedagogy as forms of active thinking expands possibilities in art education, making possible a synthesis of critical visual culture and ethnographic interpretation of community-based projects. This embodied, active, and generative approach to inquiry represents a way of knowing differently, learning through experimentation and practicing collectivity as an ethico-aesthetic way of life. Essential to the turn from objectifying inquiry to activated engagement in the context of my research is the physical act of searching. The process that started with me looking for improvised retail spaces evolved into an engagement with DIY practitioners in their homes, a dynamic that subsequently opened into a search for new ways of understanding myself as intellectually nomadic (Pryer, 2004). In this context nomadism has the power to “create a pedagogical life freed from a priori habits of thought” (Wallin, 2008, p. 318). Such a view illuminates the potential of public engagement to
generate new modes of everyday subjectivity, shifting not only our perceptions of community—and in turn, relations among members—but also our habits of mind (Dewey, 1916/2007).

My initial idea for the dissertation research was to drive, bike, and walk around Denton in a place-based inquiry into improvised uses of public space, encountering my own community as a tourist. Before consciously starting that work, I had already become attuned to overlooked, makeshift, hidden, or temporary spaces, and my potential inquiry into temporary retail sites, specifically food trucks, triggered an awareness of transience in the suburban terrain. I saw the potential of nomadic spaces as generative sites of becoming where situated knowledge (Ellsworth, 2005; Haraway, 1988; Rose 1997) might reveal potential for lines of flight (Braidotti, 2011; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). My ensuing photographic inquiry functioned as a performative engagement, illuminating the materiality of searching for unfamiliar places, which, in turn, generated new ways of understanding the affective complexity of aesthetics and cultural geography (Phillips, 2005). Poststructural feminist methodologies (Braidotti, 2011; Gannon & Davies, 2007) and nomadic theory (Braidotti, 2011; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) framed my initial desire to construct cartographies of shifting subjectivity. Taking form through a photographic inquiry into community engagement through bomb shelters, my initial search led me to the participant Ken, around whom I built a deeper photographic study. In this phase, I awakened to a body of local history and a network of people connected within it. I then began to perceive a framework of ethical connections that linked my own past experiences with my desire to expand the potential of the field of art education.

Inquiry-based approaches begin with curiosity, engaging with the unknown. The inquiry-based researcher may become nomad—open to the potential of activated thinking in the everyday. Inquiry-based learning is “an engagement with life that does not prescribe in advance
either rote answers or instrumental approaches to curriculum” (Wallin, 2008, p. 312). A relationship with the world with inherent risks, such inquiry can provoke unexpected knowledge even in the repetition of a familiar curriculum, defamiliarizing well-worn modes of understanding: “As we inquire, even the most familiar places become different in lieu of new understandings, perspectives, and changes in relationship with the landscape” (Wallin, 2008, p. 318). As I curiously looked in backyards for cement structures during my inquiry into bomb shelters, I became aware of a history that linked my community with a larger national history I had only known through popular culture.

Inquiry-based research privileges the process of coming to know, but its marriage with place highlights the significance of environments. The life of an environment, when seen through a nomadic lens, brings together material, social, and mental forces. Structures and objects in environments shape our awareness, along with historical, cultural, and social factors, including language, texts, laws, or cultural norms. Place is far more complex than a geographical or material site alone. As such, an engagement with place creates a space where histories, senses, affects, bodies, and objects intersect to form potentials for knowing and learning differently (Ellsworth, 2005). Applied to arts- and place-based inquiry, such a perspective can illuminate “the time and space out of which experiences of learning emerge” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 17).

Pedagogies of place (Callejo Perez, Fain, & Slater, 2004; Ellsworth, 2005; Gruenewald, & Smith, 2008) draw attention to the vitality of a physical setting to instruct, oppress, structure, and inspire. In art education, place-based studies often focus on the potential of learning beyond the institutional setting, into domestic spaces (Ballengee Morris, 2000; Congdon, 2006), public places (Duncum, 2011; Trafi-Prats, 2006, 2009), in the natural environment (Blandy & Hoffman,
1993; Garoian, 1998, jogodzinsky, 1987), and through direct engagements with built environments (Gude, 2004; Powell, 2008, 2010). Others argue the institutional environment’s potentially negative impact across ecologies (Graham, 2007; Wallin, 2007). This research project worked across domestic, institutional, community, and public spaces, so I will draw relations to previous work in the field where relevant.

Environmentally-conscious research in art education has questioned the hierarchy of humans over the environment (jagodzinsky, 1987) and “demonstrate the interdependence of all living and non-living things” (Blandy & Hoffman, 1993, pp. 24-25). This aspect is critical to my research. Analyzing spaces as a fluid assemblage may reveal the agency of both human and non-human actors. A humanist direction would position human actors as the primary force in the spatial assemblage, but it is critical to understand the vitality of material forces when considering the production of subjectivity and place.

Addressing the importance of space and site-specificity (Kaye, 2000; Kwon, 2002), my project focuses on a pedagogy of affect highlighting ways we understand the visual through public inquiry (Bishop, 2005). I discovered underground shelters visually, but my desire to understand them grew from affect that triggered and transcended multiple senses—their proximity with homes evoked an unnerving pall in the intimate juxtaposition of the funereal and the domestic. They seemed like secret spaces as, in my efforts to photograph them, I was forced to approach furtively and peer through or over fences. I learned that bomb shelters exist beyond simply narrative history, making sense fully only through the physical engagement of my photographic inquiry into place.

My visual curiosity then expanded to a new understanding of the cultural geography of Denton and its evolution over the last sixty years. It is possible to spark an activist collaboration
by engaging with spaces in one’s community that are yet unfamiliar, working within the local to identify matters of broad public concern (Trowell, 2010). In this context, Gruenewald and Smith (2008) examine ways that globalization shapes perceptions of the local as fractured and territorialized spaces. In response, they argue, a “new localism” (p. xiii) can address the effects of globalized corporatization on local communities, reclaiming the significance of the local, particularly through education based on the commons, “those relationships and systems that contribute to the well-being of a community and that have not been commodified by the capitalist-industrial system” (p. xxi). While bomb shelters may seem to have little to do with a new localism, as I will demonstrate, the research that emerged from my first photographic inquiry resulted in precisely this form of experience. To explore such insights, I draw upon Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) engagement with the signifying force of place, married with a political landscape in the real world. In relation to cultural geography, I will consider a nomadic corporeality characterized by transformation and intensive qualities produced by variable affects. How do we both read place as text and trouble that reading through an embodied engagement?

Visuality initially triggered my interest in temporary retail and bomb shelters, and those topics quickly expanded to include entrepreneurship, public ordinances, culinary education, design, and contemporary visions of the American dream. The enlargement of my perspective grew from rhizomatic thinking (Semetsky, 2006, 2008) opening to the vast significance and contextual overlap of any object or space. Each place or subject of research has the potential to produce transposition, wherein codes, genres, and modes of apprehension are mixed as a methodology (Braidotti, 2011). Braidotti (2011) argues that affective change is not linear or evolutionary, but instead a structural transformation. A nomadic approach examines ways that
disciplines can be transposed, as their fields of inquiry are in life, considering how rearrangements produce shifts in their genetic make-up.

Braidotti (2011) also explains the use of *transpositions* as “nomadic, yet accountable and committed; creative hence affective, relational, and cognitively driven; discursive and also materially embedded—it is coherent without falling into the logocentric inflexibility of instrumental rationality” (p. 226). When I visually encountered backyard shelters, their unfamiliar forms, seemingly improvised in a privately-owned suburban space, sparked new conceptions in my mind. The project begins from a place of affirmation (Braidotti, 2011), acknowledging my embodied and embedded location as researcher and asking how I may understand the potential of a *collectively oriented subjectivity*. Unforeseen connections emerged almost daily among the four sites, my larger community, and the culture and history of the area. The potential of a collective, communal subjectivity began to emerge as the most significant possible contribution of my research to the field of art education.

By examining homes and the cultural practices that structure their emergence as sites of creative potential, I also consider how agency and resistance are embedded in the everyday. This element is especially important, since I hope from this project to consider how to promote *localism* through place-based education (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008). In this way, I consider the project a form of activism, recognizing the potential for agency within such sites, whether produced from necessity, resistance, leisure, creative drive, or entrepreneurial pursuit. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) assert the exteriority of experience, wherein perception is continually knitted through the forces of affect. This view of experience is central to my consideration of meaning derived from the visual context of spaces, the social or cultural construction of signs, the destabilization of signs through engagement, and the troubling of my assumptions by
participants’ narratives. I work to push beyond the dichotomizing limitations of identity and representation to reveal ways that my knowledge and subjectivity are fluid and situated.

**Ethnographic Approaches**

This project employs a range of ethnographic approaches encompassing interviews, observations, audio recordings, reflections, photographs, and haptic awareness. Broadening more traditional approaches to include haptic knowledge, or perception based on the sense of touch, pushes the research to an embodied awareness of place that goes beyond the visual or intellectual. My engagement with participants became about more than objects, narratives, and histories—it was about being in places and learning through encounters. That kind of knowledge is material and corporeal. The selection of participants emerged from the inquiry itself, as we engaged as mutual producers of knowledge, and participants’ homes became vital objects of knowledge production rather than innate byproducts of human making.

Ethnographic methods became the vehicle for social and mental vectors in each of the research environments. Whether the data came from interviews, casual public interactions, thoughtful verbal reflections, or emotional moments of awakening, ethnographic methods acted as tensors to produce ruptures in each research domain. From a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective, spaces are assemblages of forces or flows. A tensor alters a flow of consistency to form a rupture, where the flow shifts and new directions of potential develop rhizomatically. In my work, ruptures occurred when I learned the limitations of replanting certain seeds because of genetic modification while working in the garden or when a participant described her frustration about a local vegetable merchant because he breaks the farmer-to-customer connections. These minor details triggered entirely new ways of understanding systems of production and potential for new relations.
Autoethnography within a Feminist Frame

Autoethnography may be defined as:

research, writing, story, and method that connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political. It is the study of a culture of which one is a part, integrated with relational and inward experiences. (Davis and Ellis, 2008, p. 284)

While many autoethnographers present evocative stories that describe insider experiences with a culture, group, or social phenomenon (Barrett, Smith-Shank, & Stuhr, 2008; Davis & Ellis, 2008; Roth, 2005; Scarles, 2010), my project, somewhat paradoxically, will examine how I come to understand as an outsider in a familiar environment. This perspective makes the project primarily an analytic autoethnography (Anderson, 2006) in which I maintain an emphasis on reflexivity and the visibility of the researcher’s self, while equally pursuing a commitment to theoretical analysis of the broad social meanings of my inquiry. For Davies (in Anderson, 2006), autoethnography should be seen “not in terms of self-absorption, but rather [in terms of] interrelationships between researcher and other to inform and change social knowledge” (p. 386).

A primary characteristic of any form of autoethnography is reflexivity (Davis & Ellis, 2008)—the fluidity and awareness of self in relation to the material elements on site. The approach is grounded in awareness of the production of my subjectivity in a “process that focuses on the subjectivities of others” (Semetsky, 2006, p. 92). Recognizing these perpetual states of becoming relates to what Semetsky (2006) identifies as the fold in St. Pierre’s work, where she was “working within a fold with her participants, using the image of the fold as the sign of the shifting boundary of otherness within identity” (p. 92).

Reflexivity includes an awareness of the ways perceptions are influenced by social norms (Adams & Jones, 2011) and the modes in which self affects research processes and outcomes (Anderson, 2006). A reflexive attitude allows researchers to more “fully understand the lived
experiences and relationship practices of research participants and the multiple interpretations, experiences, and voices emergent in the culture we study” (Davis & Ellis, 2008, p. 284). In this context, my work emphasizes the ways that social and cultural norms produce a subjective position allowing the emergence and recognition of difference. In many of the stories, reflexivity is the crux of the narrative, as a nomadic awareness of affect (often produced through an encounter with difference) also produces the potential for learning. Furthermore, accountability of reflexive awareness provides a form of authenticity that counters the myth of the objective viewer (Davis & Ellis, 2008).

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It was the middle of June, and the summer heat had set in. Brent and I sat in his living room considering whether we should get food or try to maybe split up and be productive for the day. I knew that neither really appealed to me. Brent was a professional photographer. I’d seen hundreds of his photographs. He created moods through his subjects, only rarely producing a mimetic accuracy of the person or object being photographed. Instead, there was something soul-wrenching, dark, flowing, moving in the images.

I had been thinking again about the missile base, but I knew Brent would find some excuse not to go if I said we were going to trespass on a possibly abandoned but potentially inhabited government building. I told him I had an idea. He lived just a short drive from the site, so I knew it would only take a few minutes to get there. Once I had him in the car I vaguely described where we were going. I explained how I had heard about this old missile base, but that this place didn’t seem to be military. I reassured him that he was going to get some great shots. He began to get visibly excited about an adventure on what seemed to be a boring summer day.
As we approached the long chain-link fence, the gate was open. I turned into the property and we started passed the old guard stop. I could sense Brent’s reluctance to drive any farther. He poked fun at how obviously military the property was with its guard stand and myriad Keep Out signs.

“Cala, maybe we really should Keep Out. I think we’ve passed four of those signs so far.”

“No, come on. Let’s see what it is. It doesn’t look like anyone’s here. There aren’t even any windows on the buildings. Isn’t it creepy? It feels like a post-apocalyptic elementary school.”

As I drove the car up past two more buildings, I noticed that the white car I had seen before was there again. It looked at least ten years old, so I told myself that maybe it had been abandoned there. As I stopped and turned off the car, Brent again suggested that maybe we had seen enough. I responded, “Oh come on, it’s fine. If someone is here, I’m a teacher, you’re an artist. My god, those are like the least threatening types. We’re here to take pictures and learn about Denton history—what’s wrong with that?”

As we slowly walked farther up the hill, I saw Tibetan colored flags and Christmas lights hanging inside the long building in front of us. Chairs were sitting in a circle just outside the doorway of the building. I looked back at Brent as he looked up at me. “Brent, what is this place?”

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In this story, reflexivity takes the form of a critical awareness of my engagement with an unfamiliar space, based on my assumptions, history, and education. At the same time, autoethnographic narratives begin to reveal the potential for nomadic thinking, an awareness of
the power of each moment or encounter to destabilize previous knowledge and activate new ideas. I brazenly entered private property, driven by curiosity and determined to photograph the site. I intentionally trespassed and mendaciously convinced my friend that we were on an innocent adventure. This experience was the turning point where I shifted from my initial plan of looking at transient public sites to focusing instead on residences. My shameless disregard for the owner’s privacy reveals a privileged subjectivity in my community. Why did I feel like it was not a problem to trespass on private property? Why would it be fine if I was a teacher and he was an artist? Why do I feel that kind of security in this place? Should a woman feel that safe? If I were black, would I feel that safe? As the experience unfolded and in my numerous later reflections on it, I became troubled and curious about my willingness to adventure and invade. While the experience was critical to my research, was it ethical? Is this the way to engage with community?

Affective Encounters and Haptic Knowledge

Like the story presented above, each narrative featured in my research will examine coming to know, both for myself and the four participants. Such narratives point to subjective shifts that unfold through material engagements. Some stories will explore affective encounters as research methods, encompassing moments of anxiety, fear, comfort, disappointment, and surprise. While these emotions are frequently overlooked in traditional research because they fall outside the realm of quantitatively measurable data, they can signal deeper ways of understanding (Crang, 2003; St. Pierre, 1997b). As affect and haptic awareness are triggered by social encounters, the activation of nervous or emotional awareness crosses into the mental ecology. As stated earlier, the term haptic technically references the sensory perception of touch, but in this context it refers to the perception of forces or vibrations often made
recognizable by affective responses. A common feminist concern is the fracturing of knowledge and haptic experience through a mind/body divide structured by paternalism (Braidotti, 2011; Grosz, 1994; Tolia-Kelly, 2010), wherein constructed notions of the reasonable mind are privileged over the embodied, intuitive, and sensual perceptions often attributed to children, women, and primitive subjects. As I engaged with participants, I was aware of the performativity of my experience as an embodied and embedded cultural subject (Bal, 2002; Braidotti, 2011; Grosz, 1994). In this way, I reflexively considered the ways understanding has been shaped through shifting cultural positionality.

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As we approached the doorway of the long building, we questioned whether perhaps the site had become some kind of art space. The windows were all missing, and we reached the top of a set of stairs that allowed us to see in. Inside, the cement floor was cracked with hints of old linoleum tiles. A waist-high brick wall divided the large room lengthwise, and there were plastic public-school chairs scattered around. Two skeletons were positioned next to each other on a steel counter that flanked an inset space with a large sink. The door to the building had been removed, and as I began to step into the space, a voice rang out behind us.

"Can I help you?"

We turned around with a jolt, and a tall, blond man stood in front of the last building we had passed. I hadn’t noticed until that moment that it was the only one with windows. The old car was parked in front of it. Two medium size dogs ran toward us. They crossed a gravel driveway from the cement porch where he held open a screen. How had I missed those details? The windows and the screen door?

The man yelled out, “Killer! Stop!”
The dogs stood near us.

“Um, oh well, yeah, hi. We were curious what this place is. I— I’m a teacher and he’s a photographer. We just wanted to look around?”

“What do you need?” He took a couple steps away from his door and down the steps to approach us.

“Well, I had heard something about a missile base. Is this it?”

We walked down the steps quickly to get back into the safer territory of the parking area. He slowly approached us, blank-faced but stern. As he came closer, I realized he was much taller than either of us.

“It was. What are you looking for?” His expression remained unchanged.

Brent chimed in, “Oh, so do you live here now?”

“I might.”

The dogs still moved around us, running nervously.

“Oh, I’m sorry we...” I tried to find a way out.

“Did you not see the signs?”

“Well, yeah, I did. I just thought maybe they were old. I was just really interested in....”

A grin spread across my face.

Brent quickly broke the tension. “Wow, so this was a missile base. When would that have been built? Cala and I are doctoral students at UNT.”

“Come this way,” he said, as he looked up the hill toward another large open building that looked like a garage. I looked at Brent. Our eyes said, “Should we?”

I shrugged, and we turned to walk up the hill. I walked two steps behind the owner. The ground was parched, and long stalks of brown grass leaned out into the driveway. There was no shade
from the sun on the gravel leading us up the hill. Large pale green and brown grasshoppers leaped through the air, flying almost as high as my head—I could hear their wings flutter as they zoomed past. No one spoke as we slowly followed him. Through the hum of the cicadas, I heard a car pass behind us on the highway outside of the chain-link fence.

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To this point, visuality primarily propelled the inquiry. I saw underground shelters, which triggered an interest in bomb shelters and a history of fear materialized in domestic spaces. That visual interest took me to the missile base, which developed a deeper interest in the project, based largely on its visual condition of disrepair, married with the deeper historical significance of 1950s America and the Cold War. Then, seeing the unexpected lights and decorations produced a rupture in my perspective. In the story above, visuality took a back seat to other forms of sensory awareness as a haptic encounter stimulated new learning.

Space resides between places and bodies as a grounded, real, and lived environment in which stories weave together to constitute meaning (Pink, 2009). As such, the transmission of sensory knowledge is embodied and participatory. In relation to sensory ethnography, such considerations illuminate sensory experience as a way of developing knowledge, along with understanding experiences and values. In my research, I examine sensory perceptions through audio and visual recordings, as well as written reflections, to consider how spaces produce knowledge in multiple ways. An embodied awareness, in other words, is not simply about physical sensations. More broadly, it is triggered by the ways we are positioned culturally in relation to gender norms, racial perceptions, physical abilities, and other forces. As the man surprised us emerging from the building, I became aware of my gender in relation to both him and Brent, conscious of my appearance, my nervousness, and the physicality of the research site.
The dogs approaching, grasshoppers flying, wind rustling the dried grass, along with an awareness of being in a remote place closed in by a gate, all affected my way of coming to know the site. In this case, a linguistic or hermeneutic analysis would be ineffective, but the knowledge derived from an awareness of my discomfort there taught me that I recognized difference. I became vigilant, engaged in the moment and the place. As we moved further into the site, introduced to the man who lived there and the history of the missile base, my activated approach invested the place with a profound attraction.

Emotional affect is a powerful source of action. As I argue for an ontological perspective that is relationally developed, the concepts of affective encounter (O’Sullivan, 2006) and haptic (Paterson, 2009) knowledge are critical. We do not come to experiences through our mind alone. Instead, our senses shape mental perceptions, while somatic affect impacts how we understand a place and our positionality in relation to it. Encounters are interpreted through a frame of previous encounters, so memory becomes critical to our ways of understanding the new and unfamiliar (Pink, 2009). Memories are recalled through sensory perception, and so the cycle comes full circle. All of these shifts produce emotional affect, which provides the potential to envision and activate social change (Ahmed, 2004). Paterson (2009) argues that “our first and foremost, most immediate and intimately felt geography is the body, the site of emotional experience and expression par excellence” (p. 771). As such, my data will derive in large measure from verbal and written reflections about emotional and sensory perceptions. Nevertheless, words must often fail to represent experience accurately, a limitation I must acknowledge and accept.

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We walked up the hill through the compound of buildings. I learned that the man’s name
was Ken. He didn’t smile. He answered questions directly with few words, and it was obvious when one of us asked a stupid one. He was not curt but he was direct, never elaborating about his background, history, or personal interests. It was all about the buildings, but every once in a while a clue would sneak out about his community or the place he used to live further up the road. I sensed that he liked our curiosity about his place. Each time I thought the tour was about to end, he would say, “Follow me over here. Have you ever seen a...?” And with every new direction came a little burst of excitement and nervousness.

Ken wanted to show us the old barracks. There was a set of steps shaded by the branches of a tree just outside the entrance to the building. I followed immediately behind Ken up the steps. I noticed him gently cup a grasshopper sitting on the handrail, then suddenly he shifted his arm backwards and tossed it at me. Startled by the insect flying at my head, I jumped back a little and gasped slightly. I quickly moved to the right to let it go past and looked up at Ken, perplexed. He looked back with a boyish grin across his face. I could see his straight white teeth and the life in his eyes that he had not revealed until that moment.

The next day, I sat on my porch and looked out at the road in the direction of Ken’s house. A flow of images ran through my mind as emotions flooded my body. I thought about all that happened there. Tears welled up in my eyes and I had no idea why, but that mischievous gesture and the expression on Ken’s face kept coming back to me. I had discovered something special. The property seemed magical with all of its whimsical decorations. It was a living artifact that embodied fifty years of change. It opened a door to a way of life and the possibility of communities hidden in plain sight. From that day on, I knew that there was an energy here in Denton, simultaneously hidden and evident, that I wanted to know.

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Affect, performativity, and space have become significant areas of interest for cultural geographers (Crang, 2003; Thrift, 2004; Tolia-Kelly, 2010). Non-representational theory (Anderson & Harrison, 2010; Lorimer, 2008; Thrift, 2004, 2008) examines how affective relations derive from a place of affirmation that is practical and process-based, exploring how we become through actions and interactions. Such considerations emphasize the understanding of sites through relational materialism and multisensual worlds, forms of thought-in-action (Anderson & Harrison, 2010). In my first encounter with Ken, there was little dialogue to speak of. It was nearly impossible to describe how the playful encounter with Ken tossing the grasshopper affected my understanding of the place and him, but it was deeply significant. The gesture alone was not all. Being in that place with the heat, grasshoppers, abandoned buildings, and facing Ken’s stoic disposition up to that point made the moment of playfulness a rupture—he revealed an entirely different side of himself. That action transformed the site. It became a site of ludic creativity, more than a mysteriously repurposed historical location. In this way, meaning emerged from bodily relations and subjectivity in flux.

A focus on affective relations may be viewed critically as a form of universalism, but the immediacy of affect may also inform a radically constructivist conception of subjectivity (Anderson & Harrison, 2010). Indeed, Tolia-Kelly (2006) argues that affective inquiry, beyond capturing immediacy and immanence, also illuminates power geometries, explicitly rejecting the universality of affect and asserting its socio-cultural positionality and context. In this light, to examine the messy and transgressive character of nomadic research, St. Pierre (1997b) addresses the meaning of affective data, questioning the possibility of transgression based on research methodologies limited to fixed meaning within language. She argues, in contrast, that new knowledge requires new methods. Consequently, she explores dreams and sensual responses,
the data residing in the folds of language, which can be mapped only by recognizing the shifting of subjectivity amid forces of bodily affect.

Drawing on such insights, my research asserts that while intellectualism, scholarship, and theory are critical to the writing of a successful dissertation, significant social change is not inspired by academic engagement alone. I engage with participants in their homes. Some have children, and all have intimate partners. This type of intensely personal engagement in a person’s home can elicit emotions in both researcher and participant that are often overlooked in social science research. In contrast, this project consciously examines how subjectivity shifts in relation to space and place as a result in part of affective perceptions such as anxiety, guilt, attraction, nervousness, sadness, exhilaration, awe, and shame (St. Pierre, 1997b).

To make sense of the broader implications of affect in research—particularly how public and private knowledge is troubled through embodied engagement—I also consider cultural memory in relation to feminist (Hirsch & Smith, 2002), narrative (Brockmeier, 2002), artistic, and place-based (Till, 2008) practices. Springgay (2008, 2010) has examined the potentials of touch and corporeal pedagogy in her study of knitting as activism in the field of art education. Focusing on the materiality of the body in artistic production, as well as the agency inherent in occupying space, she explores “knitting as civic engagement” (Springgay, 2010) in work with undergraduate students. In her view, acts of resistance become fluid and complex, no longer rooted in a singular subculture or issue, but a mode of life that weaves various scenes together. In a curriculum of the body, learning becomes relational, participatory, performative, and experimental. It is within such a framework that I consider participants’ homes, coming to know them through activated thinking and physical, relational engagements within domestic spaces or on participants’ lands.
Thus far, I have focused on inquiry, place, reflexivity, and affect, all of which point back at me. While my process of learning is critical to the story, and I remain the author of the study, the autoethnographic elements of my research integrate stories from the lives of the three participants and function to illuminate broad cultural and historical contexts. As I came to know each person, I began to understand differently myself and the sharing of community, culture, and history. None of the individual inquiries in my research are traditional long-term cultural ethnographies. Rather, I weave them into a cartography of shifting environments, a “processual assemblage” (O’Sullivan, 2010, p. 256). In other words, my pursuit of autoethnographic inquiry led me into smaller ethnographies, all of which I mapped together to assemble a larger story about the production of subjectivity through an openness to ethico-aesthetic existence.

In her analysis of the ethnographic turn in art, Desai (2002) examines the complex and problematic relationship between experience, interpretation, and representation when the public sphere becomes an arena for active investigation. Desai (2002) especially scrutinizes the weakness of “pseudo-ethnography,” wherein an artist enters a community for a day or week to engage in a brief cultural investigation, leaving “the socio-economic and political relations, which underscore the representation . . . hidden” (p. 314). I remained mindful of such considerations as I engaged with each participant during house visits and informal interviews on only two or three occasions. Despite the relatively small number of contacts, however, I am resolved that great significance lies in the potential becomings developed through personal interaction, during which participants’ social practices were highlighted and affirmed, producing unforeseen offshoots of knowledge and mutually engendered theory.
Such an approach to *micro-ethnography* (Powell, 2010) emphasizes how a daily disposition to critical community engagement may shift ways of knowing. Powell’s (2008, 2010) conception of micro-ethnography considers the potential of ethnographic methods in arts-based inquiry, while acknowledging her diversion from conventional long-term ethnography. She worked with an interdisciplinary group of college students to “investigate and depict urban spaces and places that would capture complex narratives of the lived experience of place” in El Chorrillo, a region of Panama (p. 45). Through visual and ethnographic methods, they examined the history of the place and the ways identity was embedded in cultural geography. They examined layers of history through photography, drawing, mapmaking, and collage, each of which at the same time reflexively interpreted their experiences as researchers seeking to understand local people based on observations and interviews.

Powell’s (2008) findings form a critical point of reference for my study, particularly her delineation of notions of citizenship and her examination of the ways territorialization of spaces produces hybrid identities with “cultural meaning produced by colonizer and colonized, of oppressors and oppressed, of politics and aesthetics” (Powell, 2008, p. 18). Powell (2008) notes, “As scholars, we should be called upon to listen to previously silenced voices and also to analyze the ways in which these voices are interwoven with, speak through, and affect dominant narratives—the ways which voices ‘live on’ in the traces of our built, material, and visual cultures” (p. 19). Employing strategies to map places in my own community previously unknown to me, I draw inspiration from Powell’s methods, adapted to capture the production of subjectivity in participants’ domestic environments.

Residential sites may function as nomadic spaces of affective force, and owners’ visions of the significance of daily social and cultural practices can point to potentials for broad social
change. In this light, my project recognizes the possibility of the *nomos*, which Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe as functioning in a *milieu of exteriority*, with no intrinsic properties, only situational ones (pp. 352-353). In other words, physical encounters trigger new ways of knowing, or *ruptures* in the logocentric patterns of the everyday. Affective relations are *becomings*, and this project is a *materialist cartographic practice* of becoming through *engagements* with places and people. Braidotti (2011) notes the transformative potential of such a framework:

> As a materialist cartographic practice, nomadic theory is well suited to the task of mapping out complex interactions among many structures, subjects, and social relations. The cartographies are accountable mappings of materially grounded and historically specific embedded and embodied locations. The point of these accounts is to generate the conditions for transformative or affirmative engagements with the present. (p. 241)

Before meeting Ken, I had developed an interest in temporary retail sites that produced a consciousness of the lack of privately-owned space in the suburban landscape. Through that work on material ownership, I developed a heightened awareness of improvised or makeshift spaces because they are conspicuous in their difference. This perspective, in turn, pushed me to new standpoints that transformed my understanding of cultural homogeneity and local difference. A rupture broke amid social interactions in the everyday, newly making community locations potential environments for change, a perception now available to my realigned subjectivity.

**Methods**

**Interviews**

I conducted formal and informal interviews with the residents of four residential sites. Interview questions focused on participants’ upbringing, their formal and informal education, influential individuals, and experiences that have shaped their social and cultural values and their
decisions to move, build, begin anew, or change spaces, along with the aspects of everyday life that participants consider important. The interviews varied in formality depending on the circumstance of the participant and the home. The interviews allowed me to develop an understanding of the ways that homes have meaning in the context of their histories, the daily practices of participants, and the objects within the homes, either produced or collected by participants. This approach led me to confront my own assumptions, ignorance, and bias. The interviews form the basis for all the stories in the individual chapters on participants.

**Journaling (Written and Oral)**

In this autoethnography, my primary mode of representation is necessarily written narratives that describe encounters with lines of flight in knowledge and subjectivity. I also use written diagrams to map ideas and make connections to visualize the ways I made meaning of spaces, events, ideas, and phenomena. In this way, reflective journaling forms a primary data source to map the flow of the project. Written journals also function as visual and linguistic diaries of how I came to understand both individual encounters and the experience as a whole, documenting the biases and assumptions that framed my search for sites, my feelings about approaching spaces and people on site, and how interviews unfolded.

**Photographs**

Photographs function as artifacts from each encounter, as well as serving as triggers for reflexivity during the research process. In each case, as I engaged reflexively with spaces, the camera becoming a material trigger for awareness of my cultural positionality in relation to the sites and people present.
Cultural and Historical Research

Where relevant, I conducted cultural and historical research about architecture, types of site, social practices discussed in the homes, and other emergent cultural contexts.

Cartography

Together these narratives, reflections, interviews, and photographs produce a cartography of the potential of becoming nomad: awareness, if only momentary, of the intermediate space of being in-relation-to that may trouble modes of representation, identity constructs, and aesthetic interpretation (Braidotti, 2011; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Tamboukou, 2010a, 2010b). I view the paper as a map of coming to know myself and participants differently. There are many paths that seem to veer off and meander, but they typically intersect with other narratives or concepts later in the work.

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I drove out to the missile base and first met Ken over the summer while I was writing my comprehensive exams for the dissertation. After that day, I became attuned to the potential of residential sites as environments that could tell stories, reveal cultural significance, and point to ways that social practices produce change in the everyday. I decided that I would focus on specific sites for the dissertation, but I did not know what they would be. I knew that I wanted to work with Ken, but nothing more.

During the following six months, I student-taught for art teacher certification and continually talked with people in town about my project and my interests. By January, I had three other participants in mind: the elementary art teacher who practiced urban homesteading and had acted as my mentor during student teaching; a woman who lived in a community of
people dwelling in dome houses built in the 1970s, and a young artist who was running a farm-based education program.

Together, the four participants and the stories around their homes formed a network and history of makers, activists, and educators in Denton, Texas. While a number of terms described similarities in their social and cultural practices, such as sustainable, creative, resourceful, fundamental, and handmade, the primary term I could think of was DIY. DIY seemed to link a spirit of collectivism with the resourcefulness, criticality, and residential focus that drove my research interests. The next chapter introduces DIY as a learning map to trace the ways I came to understand better how I positioned my participants as I started the research, along with how I came to consider the term DIY culturally insufficient.

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Research Questions

The following questions, which remained the basis of my research through an open-ended and emergent process, frame my inquiry as a materialist “practice of disidentification from familiar and hence comforting values and identities” (Braidotti, 2011, p. 219), which can activate nomadic thinking. Drawing on poststructuralist theoretical models, my project examines the ways that meaning is fluid, relational, and situated, offering perpetual potential for change in each moment. While I started this inquiry thinking about DIY practices, my research led me to three guiding questions that conceptually align with my nomadic and ecosophic frame:

1. How might nomadic or activated thinking generate new ways of seeing the everyday through a focus on affect?

2. How might an ecosphical lens that examines spaces as assemblages of social, mental, and environmental factors in flux produce new ways of understanding subjectivity?
3. How might the ethico-aesthetic paradigm and the concept of life as a work of art have potential for the field of art education and its practices?
CHAPTER 3
TRACING A CONCEPT: DIY AS PRACTICE AND ETHIC

As my inquiry progressed, I realized that there were a number of threads woven through my research sites. An essential historical and conceptual framework that connected the participants is a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethic and artistic imperative embedded in a critical response to capitalist development. Rather than including a traditional literature review that attempts to address the myriad connections between the sites through comparable studies (some of which will be included in this chapter, while others were addressed in chapter 2), this chapter will trace the historical development of the concept of a DIY ethic in relation to specific forms of DIY practice. This is a literature review of a concept, considering DIY practices and a DIY ethic as the conceptual domain and starting point of the research. Chapter 2 introduced a mode of engagement through relevant literature in the field, while Chapter 3 will place the study in a specific domain of social practices. I feel that this approach further illustrates the dissertation as a tracing of my coming-to-know, where I am able to draw connections between my interests in creative domestic practices and punk culture that attracted me to this topic and my specific participants.

Early in the research process, I began to recognize a network of individuals in Denton who were engaged in aesthetic production emerging in a variety of local and domestic spaces. Outside of the term, creative, the only way I could find to identify a similarity in their combined practices was DIY. While I recognized the inadequacy of the term DIY to describe the variety of creative, environmental, communal, and constructive practices of the three combined sites, it was a start. As I analyzed the term, I realized its socio-cultural complexity, as a constructive practice commodified by profitable forces and as a politically revolutionary stance.
One could argue that art making in general is a DIY practice that incorporates tools, media or materials, knowledge development, problem solving, and creativity. The term DIY suggests that an alternative to doing it oneself exists. Examining DIY practices can highlight where choice and privilege exists, and often the significance derives from a relation to objects or projects that could be completed by a skilled professional or purchased in a mass-produced form. At the same time, for many lower socio-economic populations, doing oneself is a necessity, at the same time, among populations with less monetary capital, we may recognize broader forms of capital, such as family and community networks.

The following definitions of DIY illustrate a continuum in the ways the term/practice is conceptualized and deployed: (a) “Mintel, defines DIY as, ‘repairs or additions to the home or garden, including installing a new bathroom or kitchen, putting up shelves, fixing a fence, building a barbecue, etc.”’ (Mintel, 2003 quoted in Watson & Shove, 2008, p. 72); and (b) “DIY is essentially the simple idea that you can do for yourself the activities normally reserved for the realm of capitalist production (wherein products are created for consumption in a system that encourages alienation and nonparticipation)” (Holtzman, Hughes, & Van Meter, 2005, p. 7). While the first definition is essentially a set of activities or projects, the second is an ideologically-driven concept. Together, these begin to reveal the fluid nature of DIY practices.

While I knew that at least one of my participants engaged in almost every project listed in the first definition, I did not know if those projects were driven by a belief in the second definition—which is characteristic of a DIY ethic.

As I used and questioned the term DIY, I quickly learned that I was more interested in a DIY ethic than simply the practice of doing something on one’s own. While they are linked, a DIY ethic is more deeply rooted in a value system. To develop a better understanding of how
DIY has been positioned and possible reasons for my reluctance to use it, I reviewed a swath of literature covering artistic, musical, domestic, and commercial applications of the term. This literature review will examine historical and political uses of DIY, in addition to contemporary critiques and conceptual expansions on the term. First, I consider the emergence of subjectivity from practices based in a DIY ethic by tracing a history the term, DIY. DIY is grounded in practices of consumption and production, so this literature review begins with a general background and studies that examine how DIY serves a number of subjective purposes as resistance to and reification of the consuming subject. The initial section also examines DIY as a form of domestic and public pedagogy that operates through public networks outside of institutional learning.

Next, I examine ways that folk and domestic art practices function similarly to DIY but are positioned differently in part because of their traditional roots. This section examines ways that community-based art education brings together communities around creative practices which is significant to all of the lives of all of my participants. Looking closely at a specific study about Folkvine.org (Congdon, 2006) reveals a continuum of community-based practices ranging from more traditional arts to those explicitly described as DIY, revealing the political potential of a DIY approach.

The third section uses a history of the production of zines to bridge create practices in art education with a larger anti-consumerist punk movement. Considering how zines can be used in the classroom as well as their broader role as underground forms of resistance and communication highlights introduces the concept of a DIY ethic. By exploring the development of zines specifically, we are able to trace a specific path of creative material production that promotes DIY as a mode of anti-capitalist resistance. Zines allow us to move back into youth
culture and artistic responses to neoliberalism. As DIY practices shift from a set of activities into an ethical approach to consumption and production, specifically as a mode of resistance to capitalism, we begin to see a complex continuum of knowledge development, necessity, choice, citizenship, and resistance. I, again, look at DIY practices within the field of art education, specifically in visual culture art education. Finally, the chapter examines DIY collectivism through public works, international groups addressing corporate globalization, and contemporary art approaches. This final section that merges community, visual culture into socially-engaged public art will be examined again in the final chapter as a possible future of art education. The primary idea will be the shift from product to process and the production of knowledge and subjectivity through engagement.

DIY Practices as Domestic Production and Consumption

In the field of cultural studies, DIY is often linked to consumption and daily residential life, and indeed, the term DIY finds its origins in domestic sites. A number of key studies illuminate a methodological lineage that identifies common characteristics and critiques of DIY. Such studies especially explore the emergence of DIY specifically in a historically suburban context. Rosenberg (2011) and Powell (2009), for example, both examine DIY in relation to residential practices influenced by media production, particularly television. Rosenberg (2011) traces DIY historically to the development of a movement for “constructive leisure” in post-1850 Britain, encouraging a productive citizenry and specifically urging men out of pubs and into the home.

Critical Pedagogies of Consumption

To better ground these arguments about consumption and production, I provide a brief history of critical pedagogies of consumption. Sandlin and McLaren (2010) suggest we “take the
processes of consumption as our staring place . . . and explore how education and learning are impacted by, grounded in, implicated with, and tied to consumption” (p. 1). Consumption is the focus of a significant body of research in the field of cultural studies that considers how identity, social practices, and power structures shape and are shaped by consumption-oriented processes (de Certeau, 1984; Storey, 1999). Sandlin and McLaren (2010) provide a historical context and four theoretical perspectives on the meaning of consumption, positioning it as the primary characteristic of postmodernity. The first is a Marxist perspective rooted primarily in Adorno’s concept of the “culture industry” that produces a disenfranchising belief in false needs and inability to resist. The second theoretical perspective is based on ideas of cultural capital, where consumption produces sites of social status, grounded largely in Bourdieu’s (1998) work. The third perspective assumes more agency on the part of consumers, who actively produce an identity—largely attributed to Baudrillard (1996), where the aesthetics of identity are derived from appropriation and hybridity, intentionally creating a sense of individual identity.

Sandlin and McLaren’s (2010) fourth perspective is grounded in “everyday life practices” (p. 5). They credit de Certeau (1984), Martens (2005), and Paterson (2006), considering the complexity of ways identity, social status, and cultural capital support choices that spring from religious, ethical, and even spiritual concerns, illustrating the potential for resistance where consumers act within the power structure to question or resist the power of global corporate power by buying “sweat-free” products or repurposing goods, creating resistance rituals, considering “consumption as both an expressive and performative act” (Sandlin & McLaren, 2010, p. 6). While the concept of “consuming subjects” is not new (Adorno, 1991; Benjamin, 1969; Kowaleski-Wallace, 1997; Veblen, 1899/2007), I hope that engaging with the
performativity of consumption may reveal ways that ethics, intentions, and resistance are part of everyday life (Borgerson, 2005; Saltmarsh, 2009).

Sandlin and McLaren’s (2010) theories echo and are rooted in earlier historical and theoretical perspectives on power and pedagogy. Foucault (1978b, 1982/1994) describes direct and networked power relations where we make ourselves subjects of control through choices, rhetoric, and internalization of ideology: “Power is exercised only over free subjects” (Foucault, 1982/1994, p. 342). He explains further, “there was an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of population, marking the beginning of an era of ‘biopower’” (Foucault, 1978b, p. 140). Institutions, such as the army, the school, and capitalistic industries, such as healthcare or advertising, develop uncontrolled power through rhetorical and ideological systems, or what he would term, “a technology of power” (Foucault, 1978b, p. 108), where power does not exist in and of itself, but operates indirectly through the actions of individuals and groups—actions upon actions. Understanding ways that power operates through networked paths or flows opens possibilities for viewing power as generative rather than oppressive. Examining ways that we realize power relations or become subject to it through popular and visual culture is a significant focus in art education today.

Creative Domestic Practices of Consumption

Creative domestic practices continue to be promoted today in advertising and media to promote DIY activities as a mode of consumption. Rosenberg (2011), for example, shows how lifestyle television programs around home renovation shape the identity of DIY practitioners and their education as consumers, arguing that interest generated from viewing projects on television produces an increased participation in online communities related to lifestyle television. This increased participation reflects a form of neoliberal governance in which the promotion by
popular culture of consumption, in addition to a broader cultural increase in work hours, and limited critical reflection support a form of “governing at a distance” (Rosenberg, 2011, p. 176). This idea of distanced governing derives from the idea that by increasing desire for a specific lifestyle, consumers will develop types, norms, and standards based in consumerism.

Consumers are often unconscious of ways that they become subject to a type of product-driven lifestyle in the attempt to pursue an identity. Consumers, unknowingly, pursue an ideal of individualistic freedom that serves primarily to increase productivity and reinforce prevailing economic and social structures. Rosenberg’s (2011) examination of the neoliberal quality of a popular form of DIY approaches reflects a pervasive critique of the DIY concept in cultural studies. The critique ultimately argues that DIY becomes another mode of fracturing the population through an ideal of individualism, increasing the amount of time practitioners spend working rather than critically examining practices of consumption, and strengthening corporate consumerism in our society. Nevertheless, Rosenberg also notes the significance of “organic knowledge” developed by the enterprising neoliberal citizen in the process of hands-on DIY projects, reflecting on potential for critical pedagogy and community building outcomes within even the most consumerist forms of DIY.

At the same time, the participants in Rosenberg’s (2011) study revealed the significance of “organic knowledge” developed through the process of engaging in hands-on DIY projects. Participants reflected on a satisfaction in learning new skills while acting as examples of the enterprising neoliberal citizen. Rosenberg’s study highlights the neoliberal potential of a DIY approach, but also its complexity as a mode of consumption. Like Rosenberg, Powell (2009) considered the relationship of television to DIY practices, but her research examined the decline
of DIY as a result in part of a shift in the ways that time and leisure are positioned together culturally.

Powell (2009) rooted DIY practices in capitalist citizenship examining a history of hobbies where 18th century handicrafts were made by women to guard from idleness and provide a form of self-expression. She focused on the class-based nature of DIY and the possibility of engaging in homemaking as a middle-class pursuit. Like Rosenberg (2011), Powell finds that engagement in DIY activities may be linked to pride related to home-ownership and that the primary sites of DIY are countries such as the US, UK, and Australia where home-ownership is identified as success and citizenship. Powell’s most significant finding in relation to my research identifies DIY as a form of leisure comparable to watching television. She identifies a shift that has intensified since industrialization in relation to time and leisure—where the process-based focus of hobbies is downplayed to instead emphasize consumption. Rather than DIY functioning as an identity aligned with productive citizenry, she focuses on the way DIY activities are aligned with time and labor. TV shows misrepresent the quick output of a home renovation project, focusing on the finished product rather than the time-intensive labor of doing the DIY task.

With an increased commodification of time since industrialization, the practice of DIY as home renovation has declined due to a desire to have the product without the time involved in doing it oneself. Powell (2009) explains that particularly in a post-Fordist culture, employees are asked to work longer hours and work is entwined in more areas of their lives for equal pay. One practical example is access to work e-mail and documents from home. Access that is framed as convenience or efficiency actually results in employees extending their work day into the morning and evening outside of the work site to continue addressing e-mails or finishing projects.
from home with the unchanged expectation in normal on-site work hours. As a result, activities undertaken on the weekend or free time have less to do with labor because time itself is seen as a limited commodity.

These two studies represent important conceptions of DIY for my research. Situated among contemporary conditions of time, labor, leisure, and identity in a consumerist culture, DIY can facilitate acquiescence to prevailing norms of labor and consumption. Nevertheless, DIY can also function as a deliberate refusal to participate in consumer culture, particularly in practices that resist the commodification of time (Powell, 2009). Csikszentmihalyi (1997) notes that “DIY has the capacity to be reborn as a humanizing activity that has the potential to create an alternate temporal experience, or ‘flow’ (that counters the overwhelming sense of time pressure currently experienced by many” (p. 104).

As I engage with my research participants’ long-term engagements with DIY work in four residential sites, I explore the value-systems that underpin participants’ desire to make, repair, collect, or garden. It is with such considerations in mind that I examine alternate, critical possibilities of DIY, posing the questions, how do my participants view the work they do in/on their homes? Is it a form of labor, leisure, or something else? Do they see the time spent as a form of entertainment or as a sacrifice?

Watson and Shove (2008) formulated an insightful approach to such critical potentials of DIY. They interviewed conventional DIY practitioners, specifically home improvement enthusiasts, as well as retailers to examine the relationship between consumption, production, and material culture in DIY practices. They considered “craft consumption” a skillful “posthuman” engagement with tools and technology that sustains “hybridized and distributed knowledge systems” in cooperation with other practitioners (Watson & Shove, 2008, p. 80).
Through interviews and site visits to homes and stores, their study traces the emergence of distinct forms of subjectivity through craft learning and the movement from a self-conception of amateur or novice to capable practitioner. Watson and Shove found that the assemblage of tools, individuals, and materials in an “autopoetic” DIY process. In other words, their constructive practices produced new forms or knowledge that generated new directions of production, so their DIY practices became self-expanding. This way of considering DIY surpassed the blandishments of consumerism to create a space for true autopoiesis of self and domestic environment in a communal context. Thus, the work of Watson and Shove also forms an important pole in my conceptualization of the potentials of DIY as my study engages with the homes and the objects my research participants make, considering especially how their DIY commitments allow them to identify and activate potential for critical meaning making in their daily lives.

As such, I ultimately affirm that while DIY practices can be driven by neoliberal forms of consumption and profit, they can also breed action and participation. Engagement in making, even if it begins in the pursuit of a commodified identity, is active and creative, opening possibilities for diverse subversive transformations of subjectivity. In this way, we may see DIY as a domestic, everyday practice of “serious leisure” (Rosenberg, 2011), a use of materials distinct from conspicuous consumption that points to the potential for an active citizenry. Indeed, such a focus emphasizes DIY as a form of production that can generate powerfully critical aesthetic, cultural, and civic engagements.

DIY and a History of Art Education

Based often in an institutional setting, where educators act as interlocutors between ideas, communities, and practices, our field of art education must frequently tread lightly in political
matters. I have decided to position this section of the chapter between that of more private of domestic practices in the previous section and the strongly political activities of punk and anti-capitalist modes of DIY in those that follow. In a search for “DIY Art Education” in a university-based library research database, the most frequent results are lessons published in *School Arts Magazine*. Some examples describe constructing a large ceramic mural without using pre-made commercial tiles (Nigrosh, 1993), making paper from recycled and plant-based materials (Schantz, 2004), and using Easter eggs and plastic cups to construct ceramic Limoges boxes (Cobb, 2003). Each of these examples presents a self-titled DIY approach because there are commercially-made products that could facilitate the process more quickly or with fewer steps.

Educators in these example made a choice not to utilize the products that may have saved them and students time to instead draw on other objects, processes, and/or materials that may also have been mass-produced but were perhaps more readily available and less expensive. It also highlights an industry that caters to the art educator, producing supplies and curricula (that utilize those supplies) for educators’ convenience and a profit. Like DIY projects at home, the choice not to use more expensive supplies may derive from a lack of resources or an interest in learning through a variety of methods and materials. While the term DIY may not be paired explicitly with folk arts, literature on “handmade objects” in relation to folk and material culture draws on similar ideas.

**DIY and Social Reconstruction**

Studies of folk and community arts are typically considered with community-based art education (CBAE). CBAE addresses work made outside of institutional setting, work created from communities coming together to make public art (Congdon, 2006) and art based on
practices and narratives derived from aspects of a particular community (Ballengee-Morris, 2000; Zemel, 1999). Folk and “naïve” artists are often grouped under community art (Bain, 2000) because the work they create is largely self-taught (Ulbricht, 2000), or derives from handed down practices, and the use and exhibition of this work is frequently based outside of an institutional setting. While DIY practitioners could fall under the title, self-taught artist, I will address neither the vast research on folk nor naïve artists in this literature review or this study. I am choosing to portray DIY differently although some characteristics of self-taught artists and DIY makers overlap.

More significantly, I argue that this work follows a history of social reconstruction in art education. As early as the Arts and Crafts movement, William Morris and John Ruskin used creative and material practices to question capitalism, industrialization, and an increased distancing from nature (Efland, 1990). In the 1930s, Dewey (1916/2007) questioned how the spaces of institutional education and pedagogical content of public schooling were intrinsically removed the everyday life (Efland, 1990). They argued that education had become about teaching for the middle and upper middle class. Furthermore, in Art as Experience, Dewey (1934) attempted to merge what have been traditionally fractured into artistic production and aesthetic reception. He describes a process where flows are unified into a sensitivity of being. His argument is embedded in a larger philosophy or educational pragmatism that is part of a Progressive Education. During this period progressive education was a form of social reconstruction encouraging skills and practices that drew from the everyday, unifying communities through a pragmatic and problem-based education (Efland, 1990).

A similar form of social reconstructivism emerges in the 1960s and 70s as part of the arts-in-education movement. Again, proponents argue against the fragmenting force of
“disciplining” education, where art is set apart as a creative practice outside of the everyday (Efland, 1990). They promoted problem-based learning in local environments, and saw art as integral to all subjects. Unlike the Progressivist efforts of the 1930s, arts-in-education advocates of the 1960s and 70s looked to the work of performance artists and encouraged the direct involvement of practicing artists in educational settings (Efland, 1990).

I recognize similarities between my work as part of a lineage of social reconstructivist efforts in art education and education in general. By working with makers in their homes, I address ways that creative practices do not have to come from people who call themselves artists. Instead, I use the term makers to illustrate how material practices become part of participants’ everyday, producing a sense of agency and resisting forces of capitalism. As a follower of earlier forms of socially reconstructive art education, I recognize how my work operates with an anti-capitalist bias in a form of capitalism that is exponentially more complex as a result of globalism. I see my approach as part of a lineage from the Arts and Crafts Movement, that recognizes the pedagogical potential of delegitimizing disciplinary boundaries by engaging with communities of makers.

Community-Based Art Education

Beyond material practices, CBAE is about the production of community spaces. On one hand community-based art education is about communities coming together in both formal and informal communal sites, incorporating traditional and non-traditional art objects and social practices “as a catalyst for dialogue about individual and group identity, local and national concerns, and ultimately the pursuit of social justice” (Congdon, Blandy, & Bolin, 2001, p. 3). Practitioners aim for democratic learning by incorporating many voices in non-hierarchical venues that invite local histories and knowledge to be heard or experiences, while examining
power structures that silence those histories or subjugate that knowledge (Hicks, 1994; Keys & Ballengee-Morris, 2001; Lawton, 2010; Milbrandt, 2001). I am interested in community art engagement that investigates invisible narratives in our community, asking how we engage based on cultural geography, and creating a dialogue with unfamiliar community-members. Bell and Desai (2011) examine art’s role in an embodied inquiry to make “visible the stories, voices, and experiences of people who are rendered invisible by structures of dominance. . . . The arts confront how we have learned to see and provide new lenses for looking at the world and ourselves in relation to it” (p. 288).

Folkvine.org

I have decided to address other specific literature related to folk, domestic craft attributed to women or hiddenstream (Bain, 2000; Blandy & Hoffman, 1991), and community-based art in the chapters dedicated to individual sites, where that literature may be tied more closely than in this broad overview. One exception is Congdon’s (2006) work with folkvine.org as it addresses similar questions and appears methodologically similar to my full study in a number of ways. With a group of researchers in Florida, Congdon created a website called folkvine.org. The collaborative arts-based research project attempted to introduce a community of folk artists in Florida. The research included visits to the homes and studios of the artists, interviews about their work, and contextual information about their region. In addition to biographical and contextual relationship about participating artists, the project presented the information through a humanities frame that addressed three concepts: (1) re-creative identity, (2) place-making imagination, and (3) social economy. I was interested in this study based on its methodological similarity to my research, in addition to ways that the concepts stated above parallel Guattari’s three ecologies (or ecosophical approach).
In the folkvine.org project, each artist is presented through a biographical narrative that links their social context and key elements of their artistic practice with an aesthetic for a website splashpage about them. One artist is described as living a “DIY life” because he built his house, utilized non-institutional educational resources, and repurpose objects as a daily practice. Congdon’s (2006) differentiation of a DIY practitioner from the rest of the community artists affirms differences previously made in this literature review. While Congdon (2006) did not employ Guattari’s theoretical frame, her findings echo his ideas of collective aesthetics and an ethico-aesthetic paradigm. Participants’ work and living spaces reflected a connective and collective aesthetic that drew from a flux of cultural identity, lived experience, and their environments. By framing the artists’ pages with humanities concepts, the group attempted to bridge the global and local, finding broader relevance for local understandings.

Interestingly, Congdon (2006) calls Folkine.org, “folklore in hypertext” (p. 46). This term reveals that attempted marriage of traditional art making methods with contemporary digital technology. This is an important element for my research, as I hope to discover or construct connections that each of my participants has with contemporary world, rather than presenting traditional approaches that may seem nostalgic. She also highlights ethnographic choices and creative liberties that the team employed constructing the website as a representative medium. While I will not embed my stories in a website or hypertext format, the narratives are my construction, a quilting together of multiple stories and concepts to produce a larger message. She ultimately describes the project as “creole,” where the work of the scholars, students, and artists comes together in a kind of “creative disorder, as a poetic chaos” (Congdon, 2006, p. 48). I hope that the “creole” nature of my work will operate as an assemblage.
Ultimately, Congdon’s (2006) project was quite similar to mine. I, too, am grappling with questions of ethical representation, framing a vast network of knowledges, as well as culture in the making. The most significant difference between her work and mine is the concept of subjectivity. Congdon’s piece is more about her team’s pedagogical process moving through the research and website production, where the participants were relatively static subjects and the process of representation provided a complex interaction. Jagodzinski and Wallin (2013), while complementary of many aspects of Congdon’s project, critiqued its limited form as representation of artists’ process that ultimately simplifies the active mode of subjectivity production within the life of those being surveilled by the online website. The non-representational aspect of subjectivity is the life of aesthetic engagement, and it is almost impossible to identify as a form of data.

While Congdon’s (2006) work dealt with a group of individuals who identified as artists and the work they produce, broader concepts around material culture (Blandy & Bolin, 2012; Bolin & Blandy, 2003; Congdon & Blandy, 2005) address objects that would not necessarily be described as art. A consideration of the objects produced through DIY practices may relate more closely to material culture, as the later describes the expanded field of “human-mediated objects, forms, or expressions, manifested consciously or unconsciously through culturally acquired behaviors” (Bolin & Blandy, 2003, p. 249). Blandy and Bolin (2012) address important ways that the study of objects and expressions points to larger social and cultural practices. Expanding this literature review to an in-depth engagement with material culture studies is beyond its scope. Specific aspects of material culture studies, such as collecting, repurposing, and environmental aesthetics will be addressed where relevant within the chapters on individual sites.
So while there seems to be a division between what are defined as artistic practices, DIY practices, and craft, there are also a number of overlaps. Distinctions often seem to come with gender, purpose, aesthetic, and modes of knowledge production. DIY and craft are often assumed to be a mode of leisure, not assigned seen as serious or requiring the same skill or knowledge as art.

To begin to address more politically-motivated creative practices, I will trace the production of zines as a way of bridging art education, material culture, and DIY, as literature on zines appears in all three. Furthermore, zines may serve as a hinge between DIY making as creative outlet and DIY and political engagement. This takes us to the next section of this literature review, which explores more fully the concept of a DIY ethic, exemplified in fanzines and independent punk music labels. I will return to art education as a direct form of resistance to neoliberalism and consumerism in later sections.

Zines as Material Culture Embodying a DIY Ethic

Zines are handmade magazines. In art education literature, zines are directly related to DIY, as “a pedagogical strategy for encouraging students to participate in postmodern discourse” (Congdon & Blandy, 2003, p. 46). The production of zines in the classroom serves as a creative and productive method to engage larger social and political issues. Congdon and Blandy (2003) describe how “zines can critique consumerism and the relation of art to our buying sprees” (p. 46). They operate in the domain of popular culture but not mass production. They also offer a format for visual storytelling and reflection (Klein, 2010) that may incorporate digital technology (Stankiewicz, 2004), while “introducing students to a wide array of quality cultural productions outside of mainstream culture” (Gude, 2008, p. 98).
Like culture jamming promoted by Darts (2004, 2006a, 2008) and Sandlin (2007), Sandlin & Milam, 2008), the production of zines can function much more politically as active cultural resistance to conditions of inequality, such as neoliberal globalization. The political motivation espoused by Darts and Sandlin is critical to a DIY ethic, so as we turn to a more political mode of DIY, zines will function as a hinge between a politically neutral form of DIY cultural production and a conscious resistance to consumerism and corporate capitalism.

Duncombe (1997) explains that in relation to zine and punk culture,

> Doing it yourself is at once a critique of the dominant mode of passive consumer culture and something far more important: the active creation of alternative culture. DIY is not just complaining about what is, but actually doing something different (p. 117).

The domain of zine production has expanded significantly over the last seventy years. Historically, zines were born in the 1930s from science fiction fans that produced comic-style books to communicate and share stories. Duncombe (1997) explains how the format exploded primarily in the underground punk scene where fans recognized a low-cost way to communicate about music and culture ignored by the mainstream media. In addition to music zines, a wide variety of categories emerged, such as: sports, tv and film, politics, “fringe culture,” religious, vocational, health, art, and more (Duncombe, 1997, pp. 11-12). For marginalized groups, such as gay teens, or youth who felt like they did not have a voice in the conservative atmosphere of the US and UK of the 1980s, zines operated as a low-cost, self-published “platform for the individual” (Spencer, 2005, p. 13).

The concept of a DIY ethic emerged in the 1970’s punk scenes in Britain and the U.S.. While DIY practices had taken the form of residential home and car repair in the suburban landscape for decades prior, attaching the idea of an “ethic” to the acronym DIY pushed it beyond a set of productive practices to the domain of values and a way of life. While DIY as a
set of practices began with individuals taking on residential tasks independently, the idea of an ethic or lifestyle is inherently collective, where groups of like-minded people make daily choices or form communities of actors in a combined effort to resist larger for-profit entities.

The idea of a DIY ethic was developed most visually in the punk music scene that began a movement to produce and distribute albums independently (indie). Initially the practice emerged in response to being rejected by large corporate labels who did not find the music marketable, and then the new movement of indie artists intentionally resisted corporate labels to produce music freely and without corporate constraints. This shift from necessity to choice is a sign of the emergence of DIY as an ethic as opposed to simply a set of practices. My research explored the complexity of deciphering the ethical dimensions of everyday choices based on sustainability, creativity, and DIY practices looking at three makers in their home. The spectrum I will examine moves from necessity to activism, and I will consider craft and repurposing in similar ways through an inquiry into three homes as sites of production,

Within the punk scene, zines functioned beyond a communication device, they embodied the ideal that readers should go out and do it themselves: learn to play an instrument, form a band, put out your own records, share bands’ music through self-made tapes, and produce a zine. This was first borne out of necessity, as the punk scene was given little attention by commercial labels in the US. Later, zines acted as modes of resistance to the selling out and commodification of punk music, as well as out the desire for individual control over representation of a band’s work or image. Applying Benjamin’s analysis of the progressive potential of art in relation to relations of production, Duncombe (1997) notes,

it is exactly [zines’] position within the conditions of the production of culture that constitutes an essential component of their politics. In an increasingly professionalized culture world, zine producers are decidedly amateur. In producing cheap, multiple-copy objects, they operate against the fetishistic archiving and exhibiting of the high art world
and the for-profit spirit of the commercial world. And by their practice of eroding the
lines between producer and consumer they challenge the dichotomy between active
creator and passive spectator that characterizes our culture today. (p. 127)

In this description, we see zines’ anti-capitalist potential, where the visibly amateur production
constitutes their political significance.

Dunn (2012) expands on the significance of Benjamin’s argument to relate it to the
significance of the DIY punk scene. He rephrases Benjamin’s message as, “it is not what you
say, but how you say it” (Dunn, 2012, p. 218). For Benjamin, the significance for political
efficacy was in blurring the dichotomy between production and consumption, where consumers
become collaborators. This practice is common today with Web 2.0, but as the punk scene
developed and adapted to its own potential to become yet another musical commodity, the will to
remain DIY has become more visible. Like zines, record production from DIY punk music
labels follows certain criteria: not-for-profit, collaborative, amateur (to a certain degree), and
often without the use of contracts (Culton & Holtzman, 2010; Oliver, 2010).

Recognizing the creative, independent, and collective spirit of punk labels points in part
to the potential of larger DIY practices, but pairing that notion of agency with a political stance
highlights the possibility for social change. Spencer (2005) explains the emergence punk music
as taking, “roots of the anarchist spirit; the social philosophy arguing that people have the
potential to live without government control” (p. 251). Contemporary forms of this ethos are
now seen more within the Occupy movement and directed at corporate capitalism, recognizing
the potential to live outside of neoliberal capitalism, as it is now enmeshed with and has arguably
usurped the governing position of the state. Put differently, contemporary government and
corporate forces are deeply enmeshed, so anarchist efforts must now be directed at corporate
control, where anarchy used to apply to the state.
To better understand ways that politics operate through a complex flux of space, subjectivity, and social practices, Culton and Holtzman (2010) researched a DIY punk scene in Long Island considering how values were illustrated and indexed though systems of relation. They concluded that daily participation in cultural or political activities alone if not girded by a value system was not enough to cause change, and a political stance too removed from the limitations of everyday practice could be equally ineffective.

This spectrum that ranges from the appropriation of radical styles or activities as a consumerist practice to an extreme mode of isolating political activism is significant to understand both the demise of a genuine punk movement and the ways that DIY functions. Neither is easily definable nor limited to a singular definition, but is instead enacted through cultural participation, object production, and ethical positionality. Mattson (2001) provides a thorough illustration of a history of cultural radicalism that fleshes out the DIY spirit that influenced punk and emerged from it. Mattson argued that the most effective programs for change came from local movements that worked through collective efforts based on individual ethical actions against the apathy and deadening effects of mass media and corporate consumerist culture. Examples of productive forces against cultural homogeny and declining activism were vegetarian boycotts of corporate products, alternative media and pirate radio stations, the Yellow Bike Project in San Francisco and other large cities, guerilla theatre, “No Business as Usual Day,” and Positive Force aimed at “nurturing collective political education” (Mattson, 2001, p. 81). Ultimately, the thriving punk scene of the late 70s to early 90s lost its force, as it was stylistically embraced as a commodity and internally fractured through political fractures. The next section will examine the potential of DIY activities as modes of resistance to capitalism.
DIY as Anti-Capitalist Tactic

DIY is also a way of reconstructing power relationships in a manner different from those found under capital, by abandoning the institutions of capital and the state and constructing counter-institutions based on fundamentally different principles and structures. DIY is the struggle of the collective individual against the production of its subjectivity, against its reproduction as a commodity of Capitalism (Holtzman, et. al., 2005, p. 8).

This quote explicitly argues for DIY as an anti-capitalist tactic. The important distinction between capitalist production and DIY production is exchange value versus use value. Production through DIY in Holtzman, et. al.’s terms is intended for a purpose, be it communication (zines), functionality (cars, homes, craft), or cultural activity (art, music)—not for profit. DIY against capitalism shifts social relations where time and labor are for use value rather than earning a wage for a product meant for third-party use. As with the making of zines or independent production of music, DIY emphasizes direct participation with the object being produced and a broader DIY community.

While the broad revolutionary punk movement faded by the late 80s, other movements developed out of DIY cultures. Food Not Bombs (FNB), Reclaim the Streets (RTS) and Critical Mass (CM) continue in multiple forms to resist corporate capitalism that has developed an extreme imbalance in terms of the exploitation, privatization, and pollution of natural resources, such as vegetation, space, and air. FNB recovers food being discarded by retail businesses and give it to those in need. This is often considered an outlaw activity, as the companies discarding the food see it as their merchandise, not be given away. RTS and CM stage mass street parties and bike rides through major public streets and spaces to encourage grass-roots participation in communities and the taking back of congested roads that cause pollution. These interventions often result in traffic and disrupt commercial flow, while inviting people to an enlivened participation in the everyday spaces that breaks the commodified norm of time and space usage.
These politically-active DIY groups reveal an alternative to the power of capitalist structures. These types of interventions in the everyday are geared at changing or highlighting inequality in the everyday. The critical shift is a collective subjectivity (Beaver, 2012; Culton & Holtzman, 2010; Holtzman, et. al., 2005; Jeppesen, 2011)

Sandra Jeppesen’s (2011) autoethnographic narrative of her experience with the anticapitalist group the CrimethInc. Ex-Worker’s Collective, centered in Toronto, illustrates the ways collective, participatory cultural production can challenge neoliberal economic and social structures to produce alternative visions of subjectivity and community. Jeppesen’s “The DIY Post-Punk Post-Situationist Politics of CrimethInc.” describes her journey from a youth in Canadian middle-class suburbia to immersion in anarchist punk communities in the 1990’s. Jeppesen’s narrative affirms the vision of punk anarchism, along with back-to-the-land movements of the 1970s, insisting that giving up the privileged North American lifestyle of waste and consumption is necessary to the development of both equitable global relations and meaningful local communities. Jeppesen explores how CrimethInc.’s remarkable production of texts and community arenas—from posters and stickers to documentaries, autobiographies, and live events—celebrates modes of life outside of the capitalist system, destabilizing the norms underpinning the suburban North American lifestyle.

Jeppesen’s (2011) work is particularly significant for my research in its reflections on the Situationist International, an important inspiration for Guattari and for the Paris student uprising in 1968. For Jeppesen, contemporary punk-inspired community anarchism borrows from the spirit of the Situationists International, whose conception of the spectacle was the starting point for resistance to the alienation of everyday experience in capitalist society. The Situationists recognized capitalism’s ability to create alienation through the reproduction of images that
produce wants and needs to the detriment of human interaction—life lived through spectacle. In response, they sought ways in the daily round of workplace and home to disrupt the continual reestablishment of power relations through passive consumption of goods and images.

Additionally, Plant (1992) notes,

One of the distinguishing features of situationist theory was its recognition that all forms of criticism, dissent, and resistance occupy an internal relation to the system they oppose. . . . Any attempt to develop a critical analysis of the totality of social and discursive relations must recognize that the meanings, tactics, and goals with which it works are already implicated within the relations of power they resist. (p. 75)

The Situationists realized the power of the spectacle to co-opt and commodity and cultural production, emptying the resistant potential of even the most explicitly radical art. This capitalist disenfranchising strategy seems to have expanded exponentially, where the concept of subculture, activist, or potential revolutionary is immediately folded into spectacular and commodity culture. For example, in my research on temporary retail sites, I learned very quickly that new popular and corporate-owned food trucks exemplify this strategy. Where the individually owned trucks or artisan stands may have initially occupied a space of independence, large restaurant chains and wealthy venture capitalists now operate adjacent to or in their place. The challenge of searching for the mobile sites became less interesting when those spaces came into focus.

Furthermore, the Situationists recognized capitalism’s ability to create alienation through the reproduction of images that produce desire to the detriment of human interactions. Life is lived through the spectacle. To combat cooptation, they constructed “situations” that “…involved transforming an ordinary place (and all those within it) into a performative reality, amalgamating “theatrical experience and ‘real experience’” (Foust, 2010, p. 175). Carefully imagining situations that could not easily be represented in the terms of prevailing discourse,
Situationist performances and events sought to elude the relentless imaging and commodification of human relations (Harold, 2007).

In my examination of the work of my research participants, I draw upon Jeppesen’s application of the Situationists to contemporary anticapitalist community endeavors, viewing each of the participants’ experiences as situations that question the pervasive power of commodities and capitalism. Ultimately, Jeppesen (2011) argues that anarchism has developed a collective ethic that undermines capitalism. As part of a post-punk movement, she and CrimethInc. acknowledge the whiteness and privilege of the earlier punk movement, embracing that potential to subvert the suburban norms from which it derived. Through collective and multifaceted cultural production that is online, free, participatory, and international, the group builds on past DIY movements to resist neoliberal capitalist production directly, rather than producing an alternative life as a mode of escape. As a principle guiding my research and my conception of its ultimate application to the practice of art education, such a conviction enables a critical perspective on the imperative of consumption that suffuses contemporary American society.

Visual Culture Art Education

Visual culture art education (Duncum, 2010; Freedman, 2003) appropriates tenets of critical theory and pedagogy (Freire, 1970) with the fields of visual culture (Mirzoeff, 1998; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001) and cultural studies (Storey, 1996) reflecting postmodern shifts in art, research, and education (Efland, Freedman, & Stuhr, 1996; Fehr, 1994). Visual culture studies position all images as texts. VCAE is frequently cited or recommended for a social justice agenda (Ballangee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Bell & Desai, 2011; Dewhurst, 2010, 2011; Duncum, 2010; Quinn, 2006; Stuhr, Ballengee-Morris, & Daniel, 2008) because it questions
pervasive messages of normality, beauty, and common sense. Darts (2004) highlights ways art has been used historically for political purposes by ruling parties, arguing for a pedagogy (specifically in the art classroom) that engages students as “informed citizens within the contemporary cultural sphere” (p. 314). He (Darts, 2004) argues for the power of visual culture to “reconsider the commonplace” (p. 316), promoting art education as a shift from passive forms of spectatorship to generative resistance and cultural production. Unfortunately, some approaches to visual culture examine how advertising messages or popular media operate on us, without also asking how we are complicit in reifying the power of those cultural messages. Furthermore, while VCAE can broaden the curriculum to consider lived meanings of art (Freedman, 2000), it continues to privilege ocular perception.

One limitation to VCAE is its privileging of the visual over other sensory engagements, which is argued to further a humanist philosophy that perpetuates oppressive environmental practices. To engage instead in embodied practices that recognize humans as equal to all other living forms also diminishes capitalism’s power to determine human value by commodifying the human body as object separate from the mind or soul.

Jagodzinski (2008) addresses the privileging of the visual over other sensory perception and posits a way to challenge what he calls “designer capitalism.” He draws from Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) ideas of traces left from a flow of experience. Jagodzinski recognizes the limitations of representation and identity in globalized capitalism, where a “non-identity” emerges from the “hybrid hyped-stereotype” produced from capitalist management and regulation of bodies and space (p. 148). He suggests ways that resistance can merely produce more representation and pseudo-individualism to be captured and appropriated by the capitalist system. Post-capitalist, post-structuralist, and posthuman theories appear in jagodzinski’s work,
but he notes how quickly these shifts get appropriated or *territorialized* by designer capitalism. In response, he argues that to shift the aesthetic from the eye to the body through performance and its focus on affectivity, the encounter and the nomadological shift from fixed to displaced spaces. Jagodzinski (2008) explains,

> Art becomes a way to say what is unsayable, unthinkable, and invisible. On the other side of the ledger, the reception of the processes of artistic *becoming* demands an *encounter* of the art process as an *event* by the inter-actor to rupture habituated forms and expose the interpassivity of the coded flows. The body becomes a work of art in the sense of its ‘becoming-other.’ (p. 154)

In this quote, he addresses one aim of my research—to disrupt everyday ways of knowing by engaging with often overlooked members of our community as a possibility for performative *becoming*. In its focus on the ways that designer capitalism and art intersect, his work is a transition to the performative or relational shift that is happening across a number of disciplines and must be addressed in art education. While VCAE has shifted toward performative public engagements, community-based art education has long focused on invisible cultures and community engagement. Together, this research recognizes our contemporary condition where capitalism, community, and corporeality are almost inextricable linked.

**DIY as Activist Participatory Cultural Practices in Art Education and the Everyday**

One path to a fundamental critique of spectacle in everyday life is activist art. Rancière (2010) argues for a critical art that “questions its own limits and powers, that refuses to anticipate its own effects. . . by artistic practices that infiltrate the world of market and social relations and then remain content to be mere images on cibacrome, screens, and monitors” (p. 149). He points to the potential of political cultural productions, specifically the importance of process or *doing* activist art—using art making as critical inquiry transcending limitations of modernist aesthetic frames that can diminish the possibilities of art in the larger spectrum of the everyday.
Rancière’s approach uses photography as a simultaneously pedagogic and artistic act that interrogates market systems and ways of knowing. This approach also parallels a shift to the relational in contemporary art considered by Bourriard (2002) as, “the realm of human interactions and its social context” (p. 14). Similarly, Bourriard (2002) highlights contemporary possibilities of work that addresses “learning to inhabit the world in a better way, instead of trying to construct it based on a preconceived idea of historical evolution” (p. 13). Such a conception of the centrality of newly generated forms of social relations is essential to the idea of an activist art that engages questions of politics and power relations.

In the generation of untested forms of social interaction, the very messiness of contemporary artistic activism is critical to its efficacy. In this context, Bishop (2004) embraces the destabilizing meaning of relational aesthetics, claiming that congenial encounters are not enough to produce critical affect. Instead, a critical situation must express a relational antagonism that troubles customary modes of representation “going to public space to engage with ways that participants perceive ‘conflict, division, and instability’” (p. 65) in local communities. The resulting discomfort of defamiliarized experience can trouble subjectivities in ways that illuminate new possibilities.

Places for public discourse become significant as spaces of equality and democracy (Congdon, Blandy, & Bolin, 2001). They also diminish the high/low dichotomy of fine art, craft, and popular culture through recognition of different communities of practice and tradition often devalued or made invisible (Agostinone-Wilson, 2001; Stockrocki, 2001). Duncum (2011) discusses diminishing public space as a result of corporate capitalism, and activist pursuits to reclaim it through art and activism. This research has further troubled this dichotomy of public and private.
New Genre Public Art Education

How do we understand public space if it is used for market or commercial use? Who can be there and who cannot? Green (1999) discusses the positive outcomes of what she calls *new genre public art education*, specifically the benefits to the artist and community’s perception of the power and function of art. She defines new genre as a combination of traditional and non-traditional art methods merging art and life to make socially-conscious art. She promotes social-based pedagogy through constructive projects with the use of critical thinking strategies in community-based art education that work with and in the community to develop problem-solving skills that are socially relevant and merge art and life.

VCAE and CBAE have become woven together for many practitioners interested in activist approaches to art education that question consumerism and the privatization of space. Just as VCAE has expanded from object- or image-based studies on representation and semiotics, community-based art education has similarly shifted to a performative and activist engagement that questions ways that art education can address the everyday. Duncum (2011) describes a spectrum of art educators engaging with the public to critically investigate ways that neoliberal policies and corporate consumerism impact behavior, perception, and discourse. He notes a distinction between the performative interventions that take place in public versus those that critique ideologies or media messages in the classroom or institution. Public engagement takes the form of community and environmental interventions (Inwood, 2010) as well as more activist public art (Darts, 2004) addressing social injustice derived largely from corporate capitalism.

The important shift that happening now is an awareness of the significance of critical pedagogy as public engagement with space and place (Duncum, 2011; Ellsworth, 2005; Powell,
2008, 2010; Trafi-Prats, 2009). The most significant distinction between my project and the deconstructive (Darts & Tavin, 2009), interventionist (Darts, 2006b), and culture jamming (Darts, 2004; Sandlin & Milam, 2008) projects cited by Duncum is the former’s focus on participants’ reflexive and relational understanding of local geography as culturally negotiated spaces.

Art that engages with community members to discuss local issues may engender relational aesthetics, making the resulting event the basis of “collective art praxis” (Kwon, 2002, p. 154). Meban (2009) describes such an encounter in a project designed by a group of English graduate students who placed couches in Hyde Park in Leeds. The park had become unsafe, and the performance provided an opportunity for community members to inhabit the space to discuss possibilities for improving safety. For Meban, this form of activist art played out through relational aesthetics, with dialogue as the art medium and discussants and art students as co-participants, while the couches in the park became pedagogical sites. Meban’s analysis of this incidence of art activism raises questions about whether we may simply frame every conversation as performance, aesthetic act, or art, but such a view certainly underscores the potential of framing activist experiences with relational aesthetics, an essential component of my work’s examination of consumption as a performative act and the defamiliarization of community experience through inquiry-based encounters.

**Performative Public Art as Activism**

Kester (1998) highlights the blurring of roles that was happening during the 1970s in relation to photography, activism, pedagogy, and curatorial practices. One example is Haacke’s work that asked gallery attendees to place a pin in a map to identify the location of their residence. In the end, the interactive piece reflected how “closely confined” the art world was at
that moment. It was another example of a shift that revealed art as a social, economic and geographic condition. Kester (1998) claimed, “the current political moment demands an activist aesthetic based on performativity and localism…. An activist art…defined as an intersubjective ‘communicative action’” (p. 15). Although this statement was made fifteen years ago and some of his statements clearly demarcate the artist/audience divide, his ideas point to a shift to a local action-based art-making process that is about change with a community, rather than art that stands apart to transmit a message. Kester positions activist art as performative act in the local, which is exactly the way I see this project. This detour to literature referring more to the art world than cultural practices in the everyday illustrates the broader collective shift occurring in both high art and craft. The two worlds are overlapping to address systems of inequality through local engagements.

Other activist community-based art education pursuits include environmentalist (Cornelius, Sherow, & Carpenter, 2010; Graham, 2007; Inwood, 2010), rebuilding (Hutzel, 2007), and local events to promote awareness (Hutzel & Cerulean, 2003). I see this type of activist community art as something different from Knitivism (Springgay, 2008), Park(ing) Day, Occupy Wall Street, and Guerrilla Gardening. The latter rely more heavily on or are directed by artists and activists rather than educators (although I do not mean to make those titles mutually exclusive). Residential sites can act as a form or art and/or design as well as signify spaces of inequality through our representation of them. This research recognized the blurred line of the pedagogical with hybrid forms of performance, activism, and public art where public and private intertwine.
From DIY to Self-Organized Cultural Activity – Collective Singularization

Having explored the historical lineage of DIY and its cultural and ethical underpinnings most salient to my research, I conclude by taking note of contemporary adaptations of DIY that represent particularly vital threads of critical engagement by artists, adherents of craftivism, and community activists. Surveying such contemporary efforts in relation to historical and theoretical elaborations of the meaning of DIY has allowed me to place the works of my research participants within a framework that draws on critical conceptions of DIY as a resistant, politically engaged practice. As a contemporary culture or lifestyle (Beaver, 2012; Duncombe, 1997; Jeppesen, 2011; McKay, 1998; Spencer, 2005), DIY encompasses a broad range of practices such as urban homesteading, sewing, canning, repurposing/recycling, and sustainable environmental activities. Smith (2010) identifies the core ethos of today’s broad field of DIY, craft, and handmade lifestyles as a commitment to simple living, expressed most vividly in an emphasis on handmade objects. She notes that today’s practices are not a nostalgic return to a “better time,” but rather a focus on practicing fundamental skills, owning meaningful objects in a world full of products, and developing relationships through making.

Through a content analysis of DIY and craft books from the 1950s to the present, Smith identifies shifts in pedagogical approaches. In the 1950s, authors emphasized step-by-step instructions for specific projects incorporating skills that may have been handed down through families or communities. By the 1970s, influenced by feminists who rejected the didactic form of craft books and the assumption that sewing and craft suggested an oppressive domesticity, DIY books focused on self-exploration through craft with little attention given to technique, as many women were expected or required to learn basic technical skills through home economics classes or through training at home. Today’s young men and women may have never been
exposed to hand or machine sewing, the cultivation of produce, or analog music recorders. Smith realizes that today’s how-to books not only include a wide variety of projects but also more specific step-by-step processes to introduce new learners to traditional techniques. By examining how pedagogical techniques evolve, we see how they are directly related to social and cultural norms and priorities of an era. All of my participants learned in a variety of settings, and this range of skills becomes critical to the core of the DIY ethic often privileging fundamental skills and knowledge.

The contemporary expanded field of making reflects the ongoing proliferation of communication outlets. Learning happens online, in person, in paper texts, through educational and cultural institutions, and in everyday exchanges. To limit a cultural field of production to one domain is no longer desirable or possible. To explore the ways that digital media and communication have shaped emerging critical uses of DIY and indie craft, Levine (2008) toured the United States interviewing makers, collectives, shop owners, and independent online sellers and designers. Her interviewees revealed a wide range of motivations, encompassing the pursuit of creativity, a commitment to environmental sustainability, a quest for a realm of personal freedom, an ethical stance of anti-capitalism, and the desire for income. Such producers’ works often synthesize multiple media and grow from a repurposing of traditional techniques, allowing makers to embrace their works as their own (Levine, 2008).

White, Garoian, and Garber (2010) also underscore the intertwining of technology, art, craft, and design with deep ethical investment in such work, explaining, “the techniques and skill to express experiences, ideas, and emotions is what they are after” (p. 144). Establishing the conditions for such work through online communication, such contemporary DIY practitioners use digital communications to foster what Abbott (2012) has called “self-organized cultural
activity.” Identifying as a cultural producer, artist, musician, intellectual, and activist, Abbott argues that the term DIY, co-opted by neo-liberal state and market forces, must be reframed as a moral stance for “self-initiated and community-focused activities . . . as the foundations of a given order” (p. 16). A similar conception underpins the initiative of Edupunk (Kamenetz, 2010), a self-education movement that stresses the use of digital media, originally conceived as a mode of open source, free learning. To account for the maturation of movements for community-based DIY with explicit ethical and political outlooks, others have coined the term “DIWO” (Do It with Others) (Garrett & Catlow, 2007) to describe this broadened domain of collaborative cultural production.

Contemporary analysts of self-organized cultural activity movements note the nomadic potential of a DIY approach to methods, ideas, people, and disciplines, as makers travel across traditional disciplinary borders acquiring knowledge, resources, skills, and collaborative partners (Jeppesen, 2011; Ray, n.d.; White, Garoian, and Garber, 2010). Where capitalism fractures community relationships to facilitate commodification, critical DIY practices promote seeking out, traversing divides, and learning anew. It is in this context that I define DIY for my research as a distinct ethic promoting collective cultural production in a spirit of critical resistance to the commodification of everyday life. I approach my participants with the knowledge that my conception of them as DIY producers is a fundamental node that will take me in myriad directions as I come to know how their cultural practices produce objects, environments, and collective subjectivities.
This chapter reintroduces us to Ken and his home in a repurposed missile base. In figure two, we see the view as one pulls into the property from the highway. Ken incorporating his name into steel bars of the fence he built (Fig. 2). I did not recognize his name there until I pulled in one night to attend a party, and my headlights shined on the steel revealing the name. That experience was symbolic of the process of coming to know Ken and the story of the missile base. Details that seem so obvious to me now, slowly became visible over months of getting to know him.

In 1995, Ken bought ten acres of land that held the administrative buildings and control center of a decommissioned Nike missile base in Denton. To assess the meaning of Ken’s transformation of this property, I employ Guattari’s concept of the ecosophic to trace environmental, social, and mental vectors that intersect to produce the site as a collective assemblage.
The bulk of the chapter delineates ethical, material, and political transformations of the space as ecosophic phenomena. First, I describe the history of Project Nike, which developed bases like Ken’s in the 1950s. Then, I introduce the property today as an environmental vector, exploring material embellishments Ken has added to produce a creative environment. I map the social vector through physical objects that illuminate the site’s shift to a focus of community.

Finally, I conclude the story by tracing the mental vector encompassing Ken’s ethical framing of the meaning of the site, which is informed by a particular DIY ethos. In this narrative, I work to illuminate ways that subjectivity is produced in diverse ways through collective choice, at times based in resistance to capitalist development, at others to juridical policies. Finally, I reflect upon the potential of repurposing such sites of control in other domains.

Consensual Assemblage

Project Nike began in 1944 as a Cold War military ammunitions program. The project included the production of Nike missiles and 241 missile bases throughout the United States. The missiles the Nike project employed were self-propelled, guided weapons directed at targets by a computerized system. Missiles with similar capacities had been developed first by Germany during World War II, and at the end of the war, the United States began to set up a long-term missile-based weapons system in North America. Construction of Nike missiles began in 1951, and the building of the first bases started in Maryland in 1953. As Bender (2004) explains,

During the first decade of the Cold War, the Soviet Union began to develop a series of long-range bomber aircraft…. The perception that the Soviet Union might be capable of constructing a sizable fleet of long-range, nuclear-armed bomber aircraft capable of reaching the continental United States provided motivation to rapidly develop and deploy the Nike system. (n.p.)
The US government stored live Nike missiles underground on the bases, which were often positioned close to large urban areas or key military sites. Such Cold War military installations contributed to the fear and anxiety about atomic warfare pervading American society in the 1950s, materialized most dramatically in the form of backyard fallout shelters (Rose, 2004).

The newly-constructed bases had a uniform structural layout with three parts. The first area was the integrated fire control (IFC) that would occupy approximately six acres that included the radar systems and direct the missiles with a computer system to control targeting. The second was the administrative area located next to the IFC with “the battery headquarters, barracks, mess, recreation hall, and motor pool” (Bender, 2004, n.p.). Typically, a little more than one hundred officers and men ran each base continuously. The third part of the base, the underground missile magazine was positioned away from the IFC, occupying approximately forty acres. Each magazine contained approximately four launch assemblies. Nike 3D/18H/12L-U, as the base in Denton was officially designated, was divided into two plots. The northern acreage contained the launch site and the IFC and administrative area. The southern portion held the barracks and associated buildings, set on ten acres, comprising a compound of seven structures (Civil Defense Museum, n.d.).

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Military life and work are based on regimented sets of hierarchized routines, each day structured into regimented schedules. The approximately one hundred men occupying the Nike missile base in north Denton each had specific roles, and the living quarters, administrative buildings, and structures housing technology such as radar and computers were designed to facilitate their work. Ken described the base as a city unto itself where hundreds of men lived. The soldiers who occupied the buildings were a community in and of themselves. They were
hired to protect against attack, but like any soldiers, they were a team of men living in close quarters, forming a small society with regimented procedures. Each base included recreational spaces and barracks. While military social relations may be ordered and hierarchical, they still create a great deal of community as soldiers sleep in the same rooms, train as teams, and group into squadrons. If the missile base in its original form could be described as a military assemblage, its composite elements, then, would comprise a regimented social order in which each individual serves a specific function, and each environmental structure is similarly organized. Each building plays a role in the larger purpose of the base as a site of military readiness and intelligence. Subjectivity of occupants is produced from hierarchized roles, mapped into the spaces and ordered through social structures determining accepted modes of interaction. A military assemblage is structured by an institutional hierarchy that codes the order of social relations in spaces. Where does that order unravel?

While military training is extremely systematic, tactical problem solving and communalism among soldiers are critical to surviving during warfare. I have considered how experimentation and nomadic thinking by soldiers takes shape within this regimented system? And how might forms of resistance and dissent alter the ecology of military assemblages? As I began to think about Ken’s community-driven and at times collective changes to the decommissioned missile base, I realized that military life can have similar characteristics. My initial perspective simplified the space’s function to a dichotomy between rigid militarism and communal partnership. Realizing links between its current use among a creative community its past military occupation reveals the fragile line between a collective effort based on potentially blind consensus and that of collective efforts based on singularized dissensus. The physical spaces on the base retain a legacy of military order rooted in a different historical and political
context. As we trace the life of the base with Ken’s through a timeline that connects the Cold War era from which it was erected, through Ken’s youth in the 1960s, into his generation’s general dissolution with government that emerged through Vietnam, and his later participation in a back-to-the-land movement in the 1980s, their histories map a shift in American psyche. Its visual likeness to a crumbling elementary school may say something about the current condition of the large national institutions (i.e. education and military) that were so trusted in post-War American society when the base was initially constructed. I will now turn to the ways experimentation with the space in a new context may create new possibilities.

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*Figure 3. Image of the building closest to the entrance to Ken’s land.*
The first time I saw the missile base, I thought it was an abandoned elementary school. The long stone buildings (Fig. 3) with wooden double doors and barred windows immediately struck me as institutional. The thought of children approaching it frightened me for some reason. It felt like a memorial, a relic of some other time. Even though I was consciously searching for an abandoned missile base, I envisioned something shinier or more high-tech. The land seemed old and dead. When I took the photograph in figure 3, I did not know yet that the land was inhabited.

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In May of 1972, the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which regulated the production of nuclear weapons for both countries (Hardt & Negri, 2004). Hardt and Negri (2004) argue that this move shifted or ended the condition of modern warfare, characterized by “unrestrained high-intensity conflict” (p. 38). Instead, a new form of war would be composed of ongoing, smaller conflicts, the Cold War struggle now no longer based primarily on the singular threat of ICBMs. In this new context, after twenty years, the U.S. government ended the deployment of the Nike bases in 1974. The Army National Guard offered bases to local municipalities and school districts rather than being demolished. During this era, the base in Denton passed to the Denton Independent School District after the Army National Guard moved out (Ken, personal communication, February 2, 2013). The school district used it for storage, so the structures once used as administrative buildings, a mess hall, and barracks were filled with colored plastic school chairs (Fig. 4), like the ones I saw the first time I approached the building. After Ken bought the property, the chairs would facilitate a different type of learning, bringing together a community of friends to share ideas. The chairs pictured in figure four were left on the property from Denton Independent School District. Ken
laid the cement visible in the photograph to create radiating semicircle areas for standing outside of the windows.

Figure 4. South-facing exterior wall of the mess hall building.

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As I read how decommissioned missile bases were often handed down to school districts, a wave of ideas emerged about the similar transformations of military structures and US manufacturing industries. I especially considered Hardt and Negri’s (2004) comparison of the American textile worker with the soldier in which early 20th century manufacturing and warfare served parallel productive functions. The soldier and the factory worker each had a singular purpose. Both roles have now been outsourced to contractors or overseas manufacturing plants that can do the jobs with less regulation and government oversight. How do sites like the Denton missile base or empty factories represent a post-Fordist era, where manufacturing and many
military operations have been outsourced to private companies and international manufacturers? What potential might these abandoned structures hold for adaptive reuse?

Furthermore, from an educational perspective, the idea of turning a military defense site into a public educational venue a generation later intrigued me. Does our education system fit the same regimented, hierarchized structure as the military? Is there some symbolic connection between the education of generations and the fact that it usually takes a generation for us to understand what our military has been doing during our lifetimes? Is education the last priority for budget and resources? I wondered if money, research, and technology are given first to the military for imperial tactics and its self-generated defense requirements, then filtered down to citizenry through diluted information, used buildings, and second-hand resources. My mind was flooded with new ideas of how this missile base fit into the larger currents of American culture.

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Dissensual Assemblage

In 1995, Ken drove by the decommissioned missile base on North Locust Street. He had moved to Denton in the mid-1970s to study anthropology and archeology at the University of North Texas. His interest in archeology had taken him to sites throughout Mexico, and he visualized the base as a type of archaic structure. Aztec ruins such as Tenochtitlan were composed of a group of buildings, each serving a different purpose. For Ken, the military base was the same:

I had a strong interest in anthropology, archeology stuff. I went to Chichenitza…. I lived in community north of here where it was build your own home, so I kind of saw what I could do without code and city permits and stuff. And then I saw this place for sale, and it was government so it was all built to spec.—extra concrete better materials. (Ken, personal communication, February 2, 2013)
For the six years prior to buying the missile base, Ken lived far north of town with a community of people who, together and without contractual labor, had built their homes in the ground using ferrocement and rebar. Relations between the community members had broken down, and Ken was looking for new land. Ken bought the missile control side of the base and ten acres of land for $50,000. It took him three years to clean out the buildings from the previous twenty years of storage and deterioration. In the following sections, I will map the ways that Ken changed various rooms and outdoor areas on the land to produce a community space adorned with appropriated industrial tools and cement structures. He repurposed the site from a base that held a small, highly-trained civilization of men ready to launch missiles into a ceremonial space for community gatherings and artistic production.

*Repurposing an Environment*

The new ecosophical example indicates the lines of reconstruction of human praxis in the most varied domains. At every level, individual or collective, in everyday life as well as the reinvention of democracy (concerning town planning, artistic creation, sport, etc.) it is a question in each … (Guattari, 1989/2000, p. 33).

Guattari (1989/2000) argues for a reconstruction of everyday human relations as praxis based on a new type of democracy. As we enter Ken’s world through his experience of repurposing the missile base, we may consider how the production of a communal subjectivity in this space illustrates Guattari’s vision of the synthesis of praxis and emergent democratic forms in everyday life. Nevertheless, Ken (2013) also described the purchase as a smart investment:

I saw it for what it was—a big piece of property with a chain link fence around it. If you were to buy a piece of property and put a barbed wire fence around it, red flags would go up all over the place. (personal communication, February 2, 2013)

Ken tactically bought a property created by the government to capitalize upon the structural integrity of the buildings, originally required by military contracts. His priority was the strength and design of the structure, and he saw the land as a readymade community center. It was
secluded but close enough to town and his friends to afford easy access. From that groundwork, Ken produced an environment based on bringing people together and adorned the land and walls with repurposed objects.

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Picking up from where our story left off in Chapter 2, as Brent and I left the mess hall following Ken, I could barely see into the building highest on the hill. It had a large open door like a garage door on a warehouse (see Fig. 5). There was a window on the backside of the building, so the interior was darkened like a silhouette from the brightness outside the window.

As we got closer, the patterns on the walls became visible.

![East-facing exterior wall of the ballroom.](image)

Figure 5. East-facing exterior wall of the ballroom.

I entered the building and was immediately struck by the number of objects that adorned the walls. The room was huge, and every wall was covered with agricultural tools and industrial parts. They seemed chaotic at first. Brent and I stood quietly, reading the shapes and patterns. Images emerged from juxtapositions: an American flag (Fig. 7) and an old cartoon face (Fig. 6). Many of the objects were repurposed agricultural tools or parts to larger machinery.
We looked across the large open room in awe. I didn’t know what to say. The busy walls suggested obsessiveness but were amazing.
I looked at Ken, “How long did it take you to do this?” He looked down and whispered, “All my life.”

“I made this piece first (Fig. 8)—reminded me of hieroglyphics. You can make a story out of it if you want.”

Figure 8. Detail from interior of the ballroom (south end of the building).

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When he moved in, Ken started by setting aside interesting objects that had been left behind as he cleared out the property. He hung them on the wall and began to fill in the spaces with “little junk” (Ken, personal communication, February 2, 2013) he bought at flea markets. In the photographs below, there are two large circles that flank one corner of the room (Fig. 9). Attached to the circles are metal rectangles with rods that jut out from them. Ken positioned the parts together to make large round eyes with spikes that point down at angles or out from the wall, signifying eyelashes (Fig. 10). He intended them to represent Betty Boop’s likeness.
Ken calls the room the ballroom because there are two large tables pushed together at ping pong level, inviting visitors to play ball across the tables (Fig. 11). While the mess hall (which I will describe in the next section) functions more as a gathering space to eat, talk, and
play music, the ballroom is intended for play. He also kept the recreation court intact and has a weekly game of stick hockey with many of his friends. These spaces come alive when kids are on the land.

*Figure 11.* Northern interior wall of ballroom with large tables pushed together.

*Figure 12.* Empty room adjacent to ballroom that previously functioned as swamp cooler.
In the same building, adjacent to the ballroom is what used to be the swamp cooler controlling the temperature of the large computer held there (Fig. 12). Ken decorated the swamp cooler room with drips of various colors that are echoed in the building facing the ballroom. Painted floor to ceiling with red, yellow, and blue splattered paint, it is called, unsurprisingly, the Jackson Pollock room (Fig. 13). Ken seemed enthusiastic about showing us the space when he realized our sincere interest in the aesthetics of the ballroom. Unlike the previous space, though, the Jackson Pollock room did not invite physical engagement. It seemed to function more as an exhibition space. Particularly at night, when the hanging lights shone down on the cylindrical welded sculptures, the room felt like a gallery (Fig. 14).

Figure 13. Interior of the Jackson Pollock Room with Ken’s cylindrical sculptures displayed.
Figure 14. View from outside of Jackson Pollock Room at night.

Ken learned how to weld after settling at the base, and the spherical pieces on the floor are examples of one type of his work. The pieces adorn the space, and he sells smaller sculptures, but Ken does not talk about the spaces or his work as art, the way a self-described artist might. As we looked at the spherical pieces at night, though, I could not help but think about Donald Judd’s work in Marfa. In 1972, Judd moved to Marfa from New York. He bought two artillery sheds on an army base there in 1979 and redesigned the roofs and many of the exterior walls to display his work. Exploring the influence of Judd’s work in on other art spaces such as Dia: Beacon outside New York, which occupies a factory complex known as the Nabisco building to show large-scale works, Fluckinger (2007) borrows the term *adaptive reuse* to describe the practice of using abandoned industrial buildings to show art.

While he is not familiar with Judd or the Dia: Beacon, Ken’s employment of adaptive reuse in art spaces links his transformations of the Nike base to similar forms of ethico-aesthetic practice. All three properties offer practical, capacious rooms to hold large works, and
repurposing military and industrial sites points to ways that art can inhabit the blight left from capitalist and military development. Rather than occupying new land or producing objects from newly manufactured resources, adaptive reuse offers a distinctly ethical approach to aesthetic practices by illustrating the potential of limiting waste through repurposing. Ken repurposed the land, the buildings, and all of the decorative objects. Just as his welded pieces are small assemblages of repurposed industrial and agricultural tools, his entire residence is an assemblage, a fully repurposed environment.

Collective Reconstruction

A social ecosophy will consist in developing specific practices that will modify and reinvent the ways we live as couples or in the family, in an urban context or at work…. We would be implementing effective practices of experimentation, as much on a microsocial level as on a larger institutional scale. (Guattari, 1989/2000, p. 35)

The physical structure of the missile base produces a disorienting affect on me. Its cold facade with serial cement buildings is profoundly institutional, but Ken’s modifications ruptured that order as he altered the site to invite in a community. His transformation of the social ecology of the missile base produced the potential for what Guattari calls transversality across time and space. The concept is rooted in Guattari’s rethinking of the meaning of transference in psychoanalysis, challenging the privileged function of interpretation by the powerful and all-knowing analyst. Transversal relations, on the other hand, become a striving to overcome hierarchies of coding and interpretation in Guattari’s work, to produce maximum communication among actors positioned variously within social structures (Genosko, 2009). For Guattari, customary hierarchies produce a fractured subjectivity limiting the subject’s potential to envision multiple positions in relation to various groups and domains, or in other words, to effect transversality.
In the realm of art, Elliott (2012) examines the problem of transversality in terms of the relationship between artist and critic, wherein the work of the artist, known through the critic’s interpretation, is compartmentalized by critical interpretation. Such a framework codes and mediates viewers’ experiences with an artwork, just as such structures mediate all communication among individual subjectivities through the various social formations in which they are embedded. Guattari’s alternative to such forms of coded interaction works to open channels that recognize and activate possibilities of crossing disciplines and domains, thereby engendering multivalent subjectivities open to reformulations sparked by relational encounters.

On Ken’s land, not only are social relations among humans leveled, but the physical structures and the animals become significant actors. Especially important in this process was Ken’s collective approach to reconstruction. The space is collective in its purpose, use, and physical structure. Ken explained that he was planning to leave Rainbow Trail because interpersonal relations had turned sour there, but he wanted to find a place that would still allow his community to come together freely, without the monetary and regulatory limitations of a commercial location or a place too close in proximity to other residences for fear of appearing disruptive.

Ken had been living about ten miles outside of town at a community called Rainbow Trail when he bought the missile base in 1995. Rainbow Trail started as a community of people who had built homes buried in the soil, constructed primarily from rebar and ferrocement. Individuals purchased plots of land and then the community assisted each member with the construction of the first room of his or her house. Ken felt disconnected early on there. He refused to use ferrocement, and he was seen as breaking with community codes. Nevertheless, from the experience of building a two-room home, Ken developed an understanding of the price
of materials and the significance of structural integrity, particularly for concrete structures. For these reasons, he relished the opportunity to buy the compound of buildings on the missile base property.

The Rainbow Trail community had been close-knit, positioned as a group of homes miles away from other developed land. The individual homes lay along a winding road, relatively close to each other. The community hosted large parties with hundreds of people, bonfires, but fireworks. Ken left when his interpersonal relationships there began to deteriorate, and while he did not want to live on that land any longer, he still wanted a place to bring friends together. Once Ken inhabited it, the missile base quickly became a party place. He invited people to play drums, be loud, and run freely without the friction of Rainbow Trail or close proximity to neighbors. Having been built as a residence for over one hundred men, the infrastructure with electricity, large restrooms, and a spacious dining area was ideal for big gatherings.

I have attended several parties there during my research. Although Denton is visible from Ken’s land, I felt like I was removed from town, looking out onto it. Parties almost feel like family reunions because there is such a wide range of ages and a sense of comfort and absence of judgment. Because the buildings are clustered, large groups of people can move through the different spaces easily without feeling disconnected from other events on the land. The parties are typically potlucks. Ken holds an annual birthday party for his friend, Mike, who owns a local coffee shop and ran for a seat on the local city council. It is the largest party of the year, and the women from several local belly dancing schools perform. Children from toddlers to teenagers play throughout the property.

Ken noted that the parties are not about him. He sees them as a conscious effort to sustain community. As an example, he showed me a table he built in the mess hall, explaining
that if he were to build the table for himself, it would be the average height of a dinner table, with room for two-to-four place settings. Instead, he constructed the long wooden table (Fig. 15), approximately three-and-a-half to four feet off the ground intended for standing. It is approximately twelve feet long and can hold fifteen or more dishes brought by visitors. He built the table specifically for potluck-style dinners where each visitor contributes to group dining. Furthermore, Ken explained that he does not make a point of being visible at parties because he wants the gathering to feel like all members are at home in the space, rather than appearing as owner and guests.

![Figure 15. Interior of mess hall with long wooden table built by Ken.](image)

The group of large buildings, open land, and solid cement structures provided enough room to feel together and free to roam with some amount of privacy. In addition to the table,
Ken altered the windows and doors of the mess hall to make them inviting and limit the feeling from outside of being closed out of the space. He realized that people standing outside of the building could not talk to those inside, so he removed the south-facing windows and the main door to the mess hall. He explained, “...the last thing you want is a door opening and closing. You want to be able to walk in and it says welcome, not ‘who’s there?’ You know what I’m saying? So all the other doors and windows button up to block the north wind, but this side stays open” (Ken, February 2, 2013). Figure seventeen shows the facade of the mess hall (Fig. 16). The plywood painted black and inserted into the window openings is there to fend off cold—this visit took place in February. In addition, it not only keeps the room warmer in the winter but also creates the illusion for passing cars that the building is vacant.

The mess hall is the main performing space where visitors dance, drum circles form, and bands play (Fig. 17). In the back of the mess hall, Ken created a space for belly dancers to prepare for performances by constructing stairs into a room that had been an empty storage area and hanging mirrors at varying heights for the women to dress and apply make-up (Fig. 18).
As a striking illustration of the communal focus of the site, Ken explained that he worked with a group of friends to do much of the work on the base, a process he experienced first at Rainbow Trail. Many of the changes, such a cement seating area, were constructed to enhance
the experience of visitors at parties. He and his friends share knowledge and skills collectively, recognizing strengths in a group approach, where they bring individual strength, knowledge, and/or resources. The group is stronger together, and no single individual acts as leader. For example, Ken noted that he learned to refurbish the sewage system through guidance on plumbing from a friend: “he gave me free advice. Most of the trades are easy to do if you know what to do” (personal communication, April 20, 2013). Making an analogy to Amish barn raising, Ken described buying a bucket of chicken and some beer and having friends over when work needs to be done. Nevertheless, he emphasized that the builders he collaborates with have particular skills, knowledge, or resources, and they barter for future help or trade goods for labor. Their community is built not simply through goodwill but, more deeply, on interdependence. The feeling of community derived from combined labor and festive generosity produces intersubjectivity among participants. The residence illustrates how the social vector (community members operating transversally) might affect physical structures (reconstructing, altering, and occupying land and architecture) as an ecological assemblage that produces subjectivity for many participants at once. The intention for the space is communal; alterations are made collectively to affect a feeling of equality and community engagement.

Hence, in short, transversality becomes a talking across environments, modes, milieus, and groups to realize the fluid nature of subjectivity. In Guattari’s terms, the significance of such experience is the creation of “complexes of subjectification: multiple exchanges between the individual-group-machine” (Guattari, 1992/1995, p. 7). This shift, Guattari argues, emerges through a process of direct encounters. In this context, Ken’s alteration of social practices, space, and environmental affect created conditions for transversality within the missile base, producing new subject positions across human and non-human domains.
Ken’s physical transformation of the buildings to foster community space invites a reconsideration of the possible meanings of repurposing discarded construction, embodying in itself deep communal engagement. In this context, his work engenders avenues of transversality in many ways. By incorporating repurposed artifacts into a repurposed building, the space talks across time, and the community that dwells together periodically on his property has been coming for almost twenty years. I have friends who lived in Denton in the 1990s, and they attended parties at the missile base. He has created a space that holds a collective memory of American history and local culture, and while the embellishments of the ballroom produce an aesthetically charged environment, the physical alterations to the mess hall generate a social vitality on the land.

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Hearing Ken’s descriptions of borrowing trucks and tools, and working together for a bucket of chicken and a twelve-pack of beer brought back memories of my childhood. My grandpa, Lu, was a cabinetmaker, and he remodeled everyone in the family’s houses at some point. Gran’s house had the most changes: expanding the guest bathroom, adding a master bathroom, adding an extra bedroom, remodeling the kitchen, and extending the porch all happened at different times over the years. Weekends meant going to her house to help. Sometimes there would be a rolling cart or an old box that was fun to play with, but usually it meant playing out back, squishing yellow berries that fell off the tree in her yard. She had a swing set, and if Uncle Chuck came over to help he might bring his daughter if she were visiting for the weekend. Otherwise, I would play on the swing set and try to stay out of my mom’s way while she helped Gran and Lu. There would usually be a large bucket of KFC sitting at eye-level
on the kitchen bar. Donnie, my stepdad, would usually have a yellow Coors can in his hand and several empty ones sitting on the counter.

There was always someone’s house being remodeled. If it was Aunt Shirley, I’d play with the elephant ears out front, and Uncle Chuck’s was really boring. At the same time, there was so much energy in the houses. There would be cycles of intensity and tension if something was not coming together as planned. Or the group would take a break while Lu thought through the next step. Sometimes there would be arguments, but usually there was laughter and excitement about the job finally being completed or the better-than-expected look of the new tile, kitchen countertop, or paint combination. When the family was between jobs, visits would be filled with plans and suggestions for the next improvement.

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Community can emerge when people combine knowledge in hands-on processes to construct meaningful spaces. Just as our family came together regularly to alter our homes, Ken utilizes the collective knowledge, abilities, and resources of friends to refigure the missile base as a site of collective production. His friends recognize that together they have a powerful set of skills that can accomplish the work they envision without spending money to outsource their labor. The missile base builds upon such community to further engender distinct social practices embedded in a wide-ranging collective ethic. The social vector of community through collective assembly produces a collective subjectivity. In this sense, the social relations among the community Ken assembled around the missile base is characterized by a thoroughgoing tranversality, creating new syntheses of group knowledge through physical encounters with the land, sparking the emergence of collective skills, resources, and identities through first-hand,
collective engagement. The assemblage of people, processes, and space, then, triggers the creation of a distinct ethico-aesthetic paradigm:

By means of transversal tools, subjectivity is able to install itself simultaneously in the realms of the environment, in the major social and institutional assemblages, and symmetrically in the landscape of and fantasies of the most intimate spheres of the individual. The reconquest of a degree of creative autonomy in one particular domain encourages conquest in other domains—the catalyst for a gradual reforging and renewal of humanity’s confidence in itself starting at the most miniscule level (Guattari, 1989/2000, p. 69).

Subjectivity in the Making

…it is no longer possible to claim to be opposed to capitalist power only from the outside, through trade unions and traditional politics. It is equally imperative to confront capitalism’s effects in the domain of mental ecology in everyday life: individual, domestic, material, neighborly, creative, or in one’s own personal ethics. Rather than looking for a stupefying and infantilizing consensus, it will be a question in the future of cultivating a dissensus and the singular production of existence (Guattari, 1989/2000, p. 50).

The creation of an ethico-aesthetic paradigm and the production of collective subjectivity amid Ken’s repurposing of the missile base supports the emergence of a form of tactical environmentalism based on a posture of defiance, an outlook that may be examined through a Ken’s points of view on his own values and the meaning of his DIY practices. In the final section of this chapter, I will explore how Ken’s choices reflect an everyday dissensual approach to capitalism and regulatory forces cultivated through practical choices. Ken does not see himself as an activist, and he goes so far as to call environmentalists petty, refusing what he sees as a blinkering consensus required to identify as such. This concept of blinkering is related in part to the blinding or blinker hoods worn by horses to limit their sight. In terms of a consensual following, blinkering refers to blinding oneself to other perspectives in an effort to follow a singular ideology.
Furthermore, Ken stridently refutes passive consumption, opting for his own methods of production through revitalizing antiquated technology. Indeed, Ken operates nomadically amid a state of deterritorialized flux, and I came to realize the complexity of his dissensual approach each time I tried to interpret his actions definitively. Ken bought the government property in large part because he recognized its structural integrity after having built his own home out of cement at Rainbow Trail. Ken developed a respect for material integrity from working with his father, whom he described as a fix-it man:

He could fix it—kids’ toys, he had a work bench tools, add on. I saw how he could pour slab. The work is just work, anybody can do it—it’s knowing how to do it. How thick? Do you need a spacer, all that. I never had any formal training in the trades. I did learn through experience that this is all you need. You can get by with this if you do it this way. Not everybody’s like that. I mean most people are turn-key. (Ken, personal communication, April 20, 2013)

Growing up, Ken once poured concrete with his father to extend a patio. He described the simplicity of mixing Readymix cement in a wheelbarrow and spreading it with a trowel, and the experience was clearly an important touchstone in his development. Indeed, cement became an important symbol woven through decades of Kens’ stories. He repeatedly described learning through pouring cement with his father as a kind of initiation. Living at Rainbow Trail, Ken’s use of Readymix rather than ferrocement made him an outsider. The community expected the ferro approach because that was their tradition, but Ken considered it unnecessary when Readymix was cheaper and easier. His pragmatism distanced him from the regulations of a group that thought of themselves as escaping regulations. In a feature of the missile base particularly important to his vision of the meaning of space, Ken extended the patio outside of the mess hall to allow more people to be near the building. As we talked about the annual parties for solstices, he pointed down, “This I’m proud of.”
The cement slabs outside the mess hall (Fig. 4) were not noticeable to me at first. When he pointed them out, I recognized the artistry in creating arches that radiated below each window. He wanted as many people as possible to be able to see the belly dancers performing inside at his annual party he holds in May. The work is aesthetic, practical, and ceremonial.

Most of Ken’s structural and large-scale embellishments are made from cement, and it is particularly prominent in the features most meaningful to him. At the highest point on his land, there is a strip of land bookended by cement columns. On the east side of the strip of land there are three tall columns that Ken describes as his “Stonehenge” (Fig. 19). He repeatedly referred to his interest in ancient cultures, reflected in his former study of anthropology. On the other end of the area is a circular platform with three shorter cement blocks (Fig. 20). Between the two ends is another group of three cement columns, with a welded bird-like figure atop one and a sink and bathtub between the columns (Fig. 21). Together, this series of structures forms a ceremonial space for Ken.

So it’s a big long hall covered with trees shaded—if you squint you can see it. It’s like some big ceremonial something or other. I played into that. This is a sacred spot. I finished putting the trees in, and I mowed this little patch here, and I bet it looked tacky, and this helicopter flew over. I bet he wasn’t forty feet off the ground, and I just stood and stared at him. This is my property. It looks like old rustic pasture, and there’s a landing strip and a guy standing there. (Ken, personal communication, February 2, 2013)
The trees that line the Stonehenge path were the first Ken planted, and since then, he has added approximately eighty more live oaks to the property. Ken describes the trees as his act of defiance. Ken explained that the land around the missile base has been purchased for residential and commercial development. By planting 100 Live Oak trees, he has produced a challenge financially and logistically for developers to eventually build on his land. Removing Live Oak trees requires that builders acquire a separate permit for each tree, with a fine and a reforestation requirement for each tree damaged or destroyed. Ken imagines the visual potential of the trees
when they have all reached maturity: “there’s about a hundred trees, I’d like to plant a hundred more. It’ll be my contribution. Imagine this 200 years from now. Going who in the hell did this? That’s the mark I’m leaving” (Ken, personal communication, April 20, 2013).

Planting the trees is an act of resistance. Ken exploits environmental policies in tactical ways to mount a defense of his land in opposition to local commercial development. Similarly, when Ken moved onto the land, he also bought goats and sheep to gain the advantage of Texas’ tax policies for agriculture land use: “I cut my taxes and became a farm and raised sheep” (Ken, personal communication, February 2, 2014). Ken recognized the potential for a symbiotic relationship with animals. They could roam over a large area of land, save him money, and keep the grass low, while he used state tax policy to benefit all of the property’s human and animal inhabitants. Constructing a tactical subjectivity in his defense of the land, Ken appropriated a federal site built for war to build a community center, created a population of farm animals supported by state government tax breaks, and planted trees as a way to protect the land by invoking environmental regulations.

Ken’s ethics emerge from practical choices. Planting the trees was a tactical production using resources that benefit the land, and he had bought the land in the first place because it already had a strong infrastructure. Ken brought together a community to develop the site, creating a communal investment in sweat equity:

You can do it or pay someone else to do it. I mean you can physically do it yourself. Everyday chop wood, haul water—eventually you’ll get it done. If you’re ever faced with a problem that you don’t understand, do the part of it that you do understand and look at it again…. I don’t want to pay someone else to do it …. It’s not that it’s a waste of money, but money you could spend a different way. And this place when I bought this it was already built. So just restore it. Fix the doors and windows, and a sewer system that runs across the street. (Ken, personal communication, February 2, 2013)
Ken’s pragmatism is evident to me. His choices seem to me to not be based on an explicit commitment to activism or politics. Instead, he is actively engaged in a local struggle to protect the integrity of his land and community. I asked Ken if he sees himself as an environmentalist, and he responded that he sees an activist form of environmentalism as a diminution of a truly ethical relationship with natural and human environments:

I cycle. Not recycle, I just cycle. It’s so petty—we have an island of garbage the size of Texas in the middle of the ocean and you’re telling me not to throw a plastic toothpick on the ground? We got factories belching smoke in the air, and you’re telling me I can’t burn one tire? So I’m not really an environmentalist. I try to be practical – just throw it out the window – I mean you don’t want to get pulled over with an open beer, so just chug that beer and throw it out the window. (Ken, personal communication, April 20, 2013).

In the end, Ken told me that he developed a belief in the potential of objects and a desire to live simply from his parents. “If something breaks, don’t just throw it away. You could probably fix it. You have to be in it for the long haul” (Ken, personal communication, April 20, 2013).

My initial experiences finding the missile base and meeting Ken directed the focus of my research into residential spaces. Initially, I saw the space as an exciting approach to creative repurposing. The military aspects were intriguing, and I could see how the story might be a valuable example of creative practices based in sustainability. As my friendship with Ken developed, I recognized a deeper pedagogical significance to his practices. His history at Rainbow Trial and its connection to the Whitehawk community illuminated contemporary example of communal living, where the land is developed through group work, a scaffolded pedagogical approach as new members enter the community, and a direct relationship with the environment.

I realized Ken’s productive practices are girded by an ethical frame and a pragmatic approach that flows throughout Ken’s interpersonal relationships, societal rules, and the land.
He recognizes that change takes time and long-term personal investment. Ken’s subjectivity is tactical and collective, engaging in direct relations with people, objects, and nature; and resisting oedipalizing forces of consensual thought, predetermined morality, and capitalist development. He thinks critically, questions prescribed codes, and uses juridical codes to his advantage. While the missile base is a fascinating artifact, it is the byproduct of Ken’s ongoing ethico-aesthetic engagement with life.
I spent seven weeks as a student teacher in Sue’s classroom. Our friendship took root the first weekend I started. That Sunday, Brent and I went to her house to photograph her chickens for the annual Chicken Coop Show at The San Angelo Museum of Fine Art. Brent had recently photographed his mother in her back yard holding a ceramic rooster, and it triggered ideas about what the chicken signifies in American society. We considered taking pictures of people holding live chickens and juxtaposing them with that of Brent’s mother. A friend suggested Sue might let us photograph her with her three chickens. Even though, we had only started working together that week, she agreed. We planned for Brent and I to come over Sunday afternoon. Arriving at her house, I was initially uncomfortable. Here she was, already generously taking me into her classroom for seven weeks as my mentor—now it’s Sunday, I have only just met her, and I am going to her house for yet another favor.

She showed us around the house briefly and introduced us to the elaborate ecosystem of humans, animals, garden, and compost in the backyard. Each element contributed to and fed on the other. I was frightened of the chickens. It was amazing to watch Sue hold them so comfortably. One would wrap its claws around her hand, as she talked about its coloring; differences in their feathers, demeanor, and ways the climate affected each differently. The dogs ran around us as the sun was going down. In her yard, it felt as if we had left Denton.

Before we came to her house, Brent and I had decided we would try to make a triptych of photographs by adding a third image. The first would be the image of his mother and the second would be an image of Sue and one of her chickens. The third photograph would represent the
way a chicken typically appears in my life: as frozen boneless chicken breasts. I brought two frozen chicken breasts in a plastic container. They began to thaw while we were visiting with Sue. She allowed us to photograph the frozen breast image in her kitchen. Her stainless steel refrigerator provided a nice contrast to the more organic backgrounds in the other two photographs. I wore a black tank top that revealed my tattoos. I held the thawing chicken breasts in front of my chest creating a connection that I don’t think I recognized at the time. For me, it was an honest representation of the chicken’s status in America.

Together, the three images (Fig. 22) represent nostalgia, consumption, and environmentalism; using the chicken as a metaphor for life in America. It considers how the vitality of life itself is often nostalgized through images of farm life, suggesting a simpler time, frequently from the first half of the twentieth century? The ceramic rooster operates in that vein—often owned by women of my grandmother’s generation (those who were raised during the Great Depression). But what is left out in that symbol of the chicken? Seeing Sue hold a live chicken was more foreign to me than any other representation of a chicken I have seen. Few times until the last year had I seen a living chicken first hand. I only knew its likeness through images in visual culture.

Finally, the image in the center of me holding the chicken breasts completes the triptych, addressing the representation and commodification of life in our country. Seeing the chicken breasts that look nothing like the chicken itself, but which are recognizable as cultural objects in their own right points to ways that animals are objectified, commodified, processed, and packaged. But it is not just about food. The ceramic form operates similarly as a commodity, but rather than functioning as a symbol of physical health, that form represents a time of ideological simplicity. Together the three representations symbolize ways I will address life
itself in this chapter and in the research project as a whole: (1) Direct encounters with the vitality of life; (2) The commodification of thought and life through forms of assessment and accountability; (3) Idealized representations of life derived from images having little to do with reality.

Figure 22. Collaborative photograph submitted to the “Chicken Show,” 2012

I recognized that Sue’s ecosystem resonated with my dissertation interests, but I didn’t realize the extent at that time. I was more concerned about how intrusive I was being on Sue’s time and her space. As soon as she showed us the bomb shelter under her backyard, I began to put the pieces together. She did not know Ken, but her friends did. She and her husband specifically chose a mid-century modern house for its retro style. The furniture in the house is vintage, and many of the decorations are hand-made or collected objects. She participates in an urban chicken movement where she and her husband homestead in the middle of a residential area of Denton. The connections between her and Ken were exhilarating: the time periods of the construction of the sites, the link between a bomb shelter and a missile base, practices of collecting and repurposing, and the vitality between humans, land, and animals.

Making the triptych marked the beginning of our friendship. The next week at school, Sue and I spent the planning period writing our chicken theory required for submission to the chicken show:

The chicken is decorative
The chicken is production
The chicken is nostalgic
The chicken is convenient
The chicken is consumption
The chicken is Americana
The chicken is hipster
The chicken is health
The chicken is care
What is the chicken to you?

I had no idea at the time, and only realize now as I am typing, that this theory defines the complexity of the ethico-aesthetic paradigm I am attempting to trace through this dissertation.

Each participant and home reveals a way of living that appears nostalgic and at times Americana, but the dwellings are actually engaged in questioning practices of consumption and convenience to care for life through creative and often decorative production that has come to be labeled “hipster.”

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This chapter introduces thinking as a living force through the story of Sue, an elementary art teacher who practices urban homesteading and whose ethico-aesthetic frame guides her actions and choices both in the home and the classroom. How might the force of thought in our current education system exist like the life of the chicken? Isn’t the bare form of life or vitality strange and indefinable; too often packaged and institutionalized into tests, codes, and then represented in an idealized image about a time in our culture that often overlooks systemic inequality?

I spent a semester student teaching to earn all-level art teacher certification after defending my comprehensive exam. Sue was my elementary mentor teacher. In the seven weeks that I worked with her, my perspective on the potential of producing an ethical frame in the elementary art classroom shifted dramatically. Sue’s creative subjectivity infuses her teaching and her approach to life with a communal and ethical drive focused on sustainability
An inquiry into Sue’s domestic practices reveals a flow from her daily life at home, constituted by a concern for life, to her pedagogical practices embedded in sustainable systems. In this chapter, I consider how Sue’s childhood affected her current practices, how her teaching practice is influenced by her ethico-aesthetic values, and finally I examine her home as a material assemblage of her ethico-aesthetic approach to life. My affective encounters are woven through Sue’s story. Ultimately, Sue’s story asks how a nomadic engagement with the world, or thinking as art, might reveal technologies of power. Furthermore, it challenges the way neoliberal forces position life as commodity rather than immeasurable immanence, virtual potential, and unpredictable social production.

**Curating a Life**

In this section, I explore Sue’s home. I consider how she describes her childhood, where she first developed a set of ethics through everyday creative practices, fine art, and care for the environment. Here, the potential of a lived curriculum is illuminated with the vitality of thinking through material encounters, the development of an ethical frame, and the production of knowledge through affect. Through an inquiry into her self-directed ethical frame, I also engage with the potential of learning through limited resources and a lack of structure (which she refers to as freedom).

Sue grew up in a suburb of Chicago. She credits a variety of material, environmental, and subjective childhood influences to her ethic of individual collective responsibility. When she was a child, her dad would take her on vacations to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and also make trips to the Art Institute of Chicago. Together, through this exposure, she developed an understanding of beauty that resided across domains. Sue’s parents were Depression-era children. Sue’s mother engaged in daily creative practices that Sue describes as hiddenstream.
introduced this term in Chapter 2, but Sue explains how hiddenstream is not mainstream but it’s also not folk— both of those terms have been assigned to sets of recognizable practices. Sue describes hiddenstream practices as,

not generally recognized as requiring any skill in art because they were traditionally done by women, so you know how food is arranged in a plate…. It’s a neglected stream of art…. Like if I was to tell someone how I arranged bowls in color order (refer to Fig. 23). That is a sense of making art. People say, “no it’s not.” And I say that I consciously arranged it. And that I collected them from a specific era to bring into this space. (Sue, personal communication, February 17, 2013)

Figure 23. Stack of Pyrex bowls in Sue’s kitchen.

Hiddenstream has been associated with quilting and other needlework (Bain, 2000), and Congdon and Blandy (2005) describe how daily creative practices have grown in popularity among middle-class students. Blandy and Hoffman (1991) suggest,

The hiddenstream is primarily associated with women artists who quilt, stitch, do ceramics, and engage in body decoration. This work is closely linked with the pressing needs of everyday life and is produced within the domestic or home environment. The achievement of artists working in the hiddenstream… include the sophistication of forms and processes with both an aesthetic and a utilitarian purpose, the integration of art production and values with everyday life, craftspersonship, institutions such as quilting circles which reinforce community, and the recyclability of materials, among others. (p. 61)
For Sue, hiddenstream practices are much broader than the production of an aesthetic object. She explains that she uses the term to define herself as an artist. She provided an example of ways she saw hiddenstream practices as a child, when her mother would keep a string that came as part of the packaging with a roast because she saw its potential for later use. In another example, her mother wrote loving messages on napkins placed in her children’s lunch bags. These tiny gestures triggered the development of an ethic based in every moment for Sue. How can that tiny rope on the roast serve a different function later, and how can that sweet message trigger an awakening later in the day? These are the ways that creative production functions for her.

Sue’s house was built the same year as the Nike missile base. Sue explained how she and her husband took their time finding the home. They saved their money for years, lived in a shed prior, and even with his mother for a stretch. They wanted a home that was in walking distance to the library, a place where they could grow old together, and one that had character. She explains that they were privileged to be able to wait for the house that they wanted. Waiting is a form of discipline few have in our contemporary culture. It derives from valuing objects and time, not as material to be consumed, but as forms of potential.

As soon as I started our first research discussion, I began to see how Sue’s values are materialized throughout her house. When I entered the living room, she apologized for the clothes hung from the door jambs and fireplace. It was a Sunday in February. She explained that when they have to run the heater, they hang laundry to dry around the house to put moisture in the air. They hang laundry outside in the summer because the dryer makes the house too hot. These little choices show how she lives her beliefs through daily practices. The walls are paneled with knotty pine. Sue described how they were an immediate draw for her and her
husband as they were looking for a home, even while the realtor explained how the paneling might be removed. Removing real pine wood from the walls seemed absurd to her, an idea affirmed when a home inspector later told them how difficult and expensive it is to find that paneling anymore,

Inside the home, Sue’s childhood resonates through objects. Her decorative objects form a collection of gifts handed down, made, and found. The space is curated around an aesthetic made consistent because many of the objects derive from a mid-century modern style (Fig. 24 and 25), but more conceptually around stories of doing and looking. Sue describes her collecting practice as a quest. It is about choosing based on aesthetics and design as well as cost and need. Furnishing her home has been an inquiry-based process of learning and looking with the limitations of what she and her husband can afford and where to find objects from that era in a usable or salvageable condition. Aesthetics are privileged, but pleasure is derived as much from the process of looking as it is in consumption. Thus, her practices of consumption are ethically and aesthetically driven through life-affirming choices in her desire to produce less waste, married with a sincere interest in design.

*Figure 24.* Sue’s living room decorated with mid-century modern couches coffee table.
Sue pointed to a framed photograph hanging in the kitchen (Fig. 26). She acquired it from a board member of The Amarillo Museum of Art, where she interned in the late 1990s. Sue had moved to Denton for graduate school a year earlier, and she intentionally chose a small museum for her required internship because it would allow her to take on a variety of roles and the opportunity to work directly with authentic objects. The photograph showed a restaurant that she had walked past many times on her way to the library. She had admired the rounded façade of the store and was thrilled to own an image of it. As she described her experiences interning in the museum, it occurred to me that her approaches to researching, collecting, and arranging the objects in her house were her form of daily curatorial practices. Combined with the influence from her mother’s daily creative gestures, she demonstrated a care for overlooked objects and the ability to see the potential in the minutia of everyday visual, material, and interpersonal relations. Sue cared for objects beyond their commodity status. Her practices point to the power in recognizing the value and potential in the things we use daily; it is one step in developing ethical
practices of consumption. For Sue, each object in her home has a life. “I get joy from knowing it didn’t go into a land fill—you know? How can I use this?” (Sue, personal communication, April 14, 2013)

Figure 26. Framed photograph of a restaurant in Amarillo, TX.

Freedom and Responsibility

Sue’s parents divorced when she was seven. After the divorce, her mother began working long hours to support Sue and her siblings. Her absence provided Sue with more freedom than other kids in her neighborhood. I asked Sue what it meant to her to be a latch-key kid, as I had grown up under similar conditions. She pointed out that it really depends on what kids do when they are home alone. For her, being alone provided the potential to develop a set of individual values through self-determined experiences. Friends came to her house because there was less supervision. “So we had a ladder to go over the fence and we were gone all the time. We would build forts. We would pick apart milkpods … we would make things out of nature…. I think it was freedom, lack of supervision, and not having money” (Sue, personal communication April 14, 2013). Her childhood home backed up to an open field with trees and
water where she spent much of her time. The proximity of the natural space to Sue’s home produced an outlet for the girls to escape and to explore—the limitations of having no money, as she put it, enabled them to seek thing to do outside. “I mean we didn’t have the choice of putting in a DVD. We didn’t have that choice, so when you don’t have the latest everything, you have to figure something out” (Sue, personal communication. April 14, 2013).

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As Sue described her parents’ divorce and the freedom of growing up in a single-parent home, I continually reflected on my own childhood. I grew up in Plano, Texas, which for most people who are familiar with it, means an affluent, privileged, and notorious suburb. In the 1980s, it was called the “suicide capital of America,” and in the ‘90s, it received national press for the high rate of heroin overdoses. I did not grow up in an affluent household most of the time. Mom was married three times, and our income typically depended on her marital status. At times, she would work up to three jobs, and I started working at thirteen and held two jobs at a time from the age of sixteen through college. I spent a lot of time growing up with my grandparents, all of whom came from strong working class and rural backgrounds. One grandfather owned a cabinet business, and I spent many afternoons there because my grandmother kept the books and they would babysit me. He taught my mother many skills, and to this day, she does not call a repairman for anything but electrical and plumbing jobs. This DIY and working class ethic fuels my interest in the potential for improvised uses of space.

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The idea of having a choice is often taken for granted as beneficial. Choices, though, reveal an individual’s ethical frame. What do you do with the choices you are afforded? Sue’s options for organized leisure were limited as an adolescent due to a lack of financial resources.
As a result, she and her friends used the natural environment around their houses as a creative outlet. Her limited access to organized extracurricular activities encouraged a more creative and improvisational approach to play. She and her friends learned through experimentation. Because her mother worked long hours, Sue had a lack of supervision. That independence forced her to learn the circumstances of actions through socially, culturally, and environmentally engagements that were self-directed. But like any choice or freedom, it comes with the responsibility of their outcomes. Having grown up with limited supervision, I developed a personal set of ethics similarly to Sue. Essentially, you learn through your mistakes. Limited guidance can be at times painful, but it can also be an empowering stage to develop a personal ethic through direct experiences, rather than a handed-down moral code.

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As I engaged in research on the etymology of ethics and ecology, I kept coming back to ideas of home. For instance, ethics is related to ethology and the Greek root, “ethos.” The original meaning of “Ethos” is ‘accustomed place’ or ‘habitat,’ and by analogy it was quickly associated with ‘custom, habit’ (Uhlmann, 2011, p. 154). Moreover, Uhlmann connects ethics and ethology to position our current understanding of ethics as the expression of proper living in one’s habitat. For Deleuze, customs are molarized, or structurally closed. Customs and morals come from sources outside of ourselves. Ethics, on the other hand, must be determined nomadically (minute-by-minute), in relation to the immediate circumstances. So to put this in context, the term ethics is about living a certain way in one’s everyday environment—and for Deleuze and Nietzsche, an ethical frame is perpetually constructed through daily choices and actions.
Ecology stems from the Greek word, oikos, which means home. So ecology and ecosophy are essentially about the science of and the philosophy of life in one’s home, “home life or the conditions of life” (Christensen-Scheel, 2012, p. 21). Ecology is more commonly applied to the broader domain of the natural environment, but etymologically “eco” relates to house. For Guattari, an ecology (or environment) is the production of multiple forces at play forming ecological assemblages that are always in flux. So to put ethics and ecology together in this project, it is the study of one’s way of living in his or her home. This research asks what we can learn from looking at the way individuals live in their home by engaging with narratives and objects.

If we expand this further to consider the root of aesthetics, we find that the term aesthetic roots to the Greek term, αἰσθητικός (which means, “of sense perception”). The term later took on the philosophical significance as a study of beauty, but it initially related to perception. In this research, I am engaging with the potential for and ethico-aesthetic by engaging with participants in their home to examine artistic practices in the everyday. Reviewing these root terms, I see that Guattari’s ideas of an ecosophy that examines places in a constant state of production marries wonderfully with the ethico-aesthetic paradigm. Ethics and perception are produced in perpetual relation to the immediate environment. The paradigm is asking how an ongoing engagement with awakened sensory perception in our daily environments might empower an enlivened consciousness against codified rules and colonized identities.

I had no idea of the links between the roots of ethics, ecology, and aesthetics when I started the project. I simply thought that we might be able to learn something from the ways that people live in and construct creative environments. I knew it would relate to power, and I first thought of DIY as a liberating set of practices. Realizing the historic embeddedness between
ethics and ecology as a set of habits of place, specifically home is exhilarating. Considered in this way, all that we learn—our habits of mind—are rooted in our homes and play out in other places.

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As we talk about the freedom that came with her mother having to work long hours, Sue makes an important point,

But here’s the thing—we washed our clothes. No one checked our homework. If we wanted clean clothes, we washed them. If we didn’t want to get in trouble at school, we did our homework . . . I think my mother loved me very much, but I think she showed she loved me by making sure I had food, and you have to work to do that (personal communication, April 14, 2013).

Sue’s comment highlights the complexity of freedom, choice, and responsibility. Freedom, as a term, is loaded in the United States. Loud Tea Party supporters wearing American flag clothing come to mind anytime I use the word freedom. How do we grapple with that? How can we talk about a concept that can be so enabling when it has been captured and used so viciously for so many capitalist and imperialist causes? How can that freedom guide an ethical purpose, rather than falling into the dangerous territory of removing all regulations? Or removing all public funding? When discussing ideas of freedom and DIY, libertarianist and neoliberal capitalism can easily turn freedom into privatization and DIY practices turn to an individualizing process that divides collective efforts.

For Sue and her friends, freedom of minimal supervision gave them the opportunity to explore at will. Some of their options were limited by availability of resources, but through experimentation and bearing responsibility for her actions, she developed an ethical compass. If she wanted good grades and clean clothes, she would need to do it herself. For her, it was one element of the conditions that produced her ethical frame. This is not to say that through a lack
of parental guidance, all children will develop a sense of responsibility and ethics. It did for her and it did for me, but choices are driven by what we value. Sue’s liberty allowed her to engage freely in the environment she had already determined was valuable to her. Taking personal responsibility, even if out of obligation shaped her approach to life just as she explained in saying, “If we wanted clean clothes, we washed them. If we didn’t want to get in trouble at school, we did our homework.” By doing it for herself and taking individual responsibility are parts of her personal ethics. Had a set of values not been established through experiences in nature with her father or a creative reuse by her mother, she may have made different choices. This convergence of conditions resulted in the ethico-aesthetic ecology of her home today.

Freedom provides the space for an ethical dilemma. Foucault argues that power only exists where there is potential for resistance. There is no power, where there is not freedom. Surin (2011) links Foucault’s concept of a stylistics of living, or the will to live a beautiful life acknowledging an aesthetics of living, with Deleuze’s concept of one’s existence as a work of art, where thought is artistry. For both men, ethics live in the realm of choice and freedom, where each moment offers ethical potential. There is beauty in the vitality of each moment of perpetual immanence. Surin suggests, “ethics centers on assessing a way of existing while aesthetics focuses on inventing a way of existing” (p. 143.) Together, thought emerges as the driving force that empowers life as a perpetually productive force.

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Again, I think back to my teen years. I was friends with mostly skaters and stoners. One of my most memorable experiences and one of the inspirations for this project was a night when we were getting plywood to build a spine ramp in Kinchin’s back yard. The guys had drawn design plans for the ramp over a period of a month. They knew the size and the amount of
materials that would be needed. All of us lived in “Fox Boxes” just west of Central Expressway, and although most of us worked, we didn’t have money for plywood. There was a new development being built just north of Kinchin’s neighborhood that left large pallets of plywood and two-by-fours out at night. Most nights, the guys would go alone, but this night I asked to ride along in my boyfriend’s Jimmy to see what happened. We pulled in, and the guys quickly jumped out, putting in three or four sheets of plywood as fast as possible, leaving enough room for them to sit on top of it to get back to Kinchin’s house. Just as we started to pull away, a car pulled onto the street behind us. We all screamed, “go, go, go!” Just then, Beave laid his body out flat on the wood with his arms hanging out of the back, covering the license plate. It was exhilarating and frightening. Yes, it was theft, but I justified it as wood they were not going to miss, and the spine ramp was important to so many of us.

I don’t know how many nights the guys had that kind of experience to build that skate ramp, but for me, I felt like Robin Hood. We were a bunch of kids whose parents mostly ignored us, taking the initiative to build a huge ramp from scratch with no specialist or hired assistant. When it was complete, it was an important monument. Kids came from all over to skate in Kinchin’s back yard. Although at times there were drugs and alcohol there, it functioned much more as a site of athleticism, competition, the sharing of ideas, and the strengthening of friendships. Many of my skater friends have gone on to now be art teachers, musicians, artists, and fitness enthusiasts. That back yard was a site of resistance and agency that built a sense of strength for many of us who were relatively underprivileged in that community.

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Like Sue, I grew up with limited parental supervision, as did many of my friends. Where Sue would explore in the field, we would converge at someone’s house and listen to music or
skateboard. The ramp exemplifies how our values played out through our choices. None of us had the money to afford new supplies to build the ramp. We thought that the builders for a huge new development in Plano were not going to miss a few pieces of plywood and two-by-fours. The experience was absolutely empowering for me. We came together as a team, not just in the theft but in the construction. I had watched my mom and grandparents build and remodel houses for so long and I admired it. The skate ramp was an extension of those experiences for me. It was the absolute demonstration of agency. Was it responsible? I don’t know. Was it a risk worth taking? Yes. Was it ethical? For me, yes.

Ecology of the Garden

The objects inside of Sue’s home illuminate the complexity of her material aesthetic practices, which encompass traditional, folk, and hiddenstream practices, along with collecting and repurposing. I have argued that the way she values and uses material objects reveals her ethical frame. Sue’s backyard is an ecology on its own. When she and her husband bought the house, they knew that they wanted to start a family (and by that, they meant chickens, dogs, and vegetables), and for them, that meant developing an ecosystem in the backyard that could sustain itself. It is made up of a large garden and compost, three chickens and a coop, two dogs, and many square feet of space with trees, plants, and herbs. They had to transform the backyard to make it suitable for chickens, which took over a year of altering the fence and the patio, constructing a coop, and changing the carport. More than any other space I have encountered, Sue’s yard reveals her life in a potentially posthuman domain, where she sees herself as one part of a vast system of living forces. Rather than the humanist notion of the steward, to no longer position the human actor as central, other vital forces gain significance. Sue’s sense of personal
responsibility to life guides her to not attempt to control life from a humanist perspective but to promote life-affirming actions.

Before I came to Sue’s house for our first conversation, I had been thinking about the potential of objects having lives and agency. When I arrived at her house, I shared that idea and asked specifically about how the animals in her house may control her. Sue explained,

If you do it right, they do. I mean if you do it with any sense of responsibility they do. I mean because here are people who have animals that don’t control their lives and they’ve got crappy, sick, sad, lonely animals. I think it’s a choice you make to do that…. You can treat them poorly, and maybe you feel good when you treat them poorly. It depends on what you want. (personal communication, February 17, 2013).

This comment again points back to a personal sense of responsibility and an individualized ethical frame determined through choices. Sue explained that she and her husband wanted to start homesteading because

…it was the eggs and we just liked the idea of chickens walking around the backyard. And then the poop for the compost, so it was all about creating a cycle with the gardens and the compost and the chickens…. you know the whole urban chicken movement – it’s kind of easy to find that information. (personal communication, February 17, 2013).

Through shifts in her lifestyle and the materialization of a domestic ecosystem, she became part of a larger community of urban homesteaders. As I wrote in chapter 3, online and on ground communities develop around DIY approaches where knowledge is shared, and such knowledge often points to a similar ethical frame among the community.

As we continued to tour the yard, I learned that almost every designed element in the yard was from repurposed materials, from the soil to the fence, to the compost and coop. I complimented her and her husband’s ingenuity and resourcefulness. She looked back at me and said, “It’s actually a way of life.” And so this is it. It is here that she acknowledges the ethico-aesthetic style of the life she leads. Her choices are not led by a set of codes handed down to her. There is directness to her sense of responsibility, a direct link to her personal ethical frame.
We had discussed composting when I was working with her at the school, but in her
backyard, things seemed different. They seemed more real. Maybe it was because they were in
her personal space, not for institutional experimentation, but instead part of her daily life. While
I was student teaching with her, we built a pollinators garden with the fourth grade classes,
planting basil, milkweed, and zinnia to attract bees and butterflies. Sue brought the seeds we
planted from home. They were dried, and we separated them out for each class. I had never
used seeds that came from a plant before. I had only seen seeds sold in small bags. We had a
long conversation about seeds and how they grow.

As we entered the garden in her backyard, she introduced me to the winter crop she was
growing. She identified the early stems of a number of plants, including lettuce, broccoli, and
cilantro. Sue described her garlic:

These garlic bulbs, we got when we went on vacation to San Francisco. We went to go
visit Mark’s uncle in Bethelina and they’re neighbors with gardeners and they gave us
that bulb. They’re real close to Gilroy, CA which is the garlic capital. (personal
communication, February 17, 2013)

I was surprised to hear that she could just take a bulb from Gilroy and plant it in her yard. Why
weren’t we all just replanting our vegetables from the grocery store? Sue explained that they
might grow if they haven’t been treated:

Well, I’ve heard that if they’ve been treated they won’t produce. Yeah Monsanto…. If
they don’t want you to grow your own potatoes, you won’t grow another potato --- you
have to get these little starters. So I’m learning a lot every day. (personal
communication, February 17, 2013)

I was shocked. What did this mean? I had heard people talk about issues with Monsanto and
genetically modified organisms (GMOs), but I never really understood any of it. At the moment,
I realized that through this direct engagement with the garden we had discovered the control of
life itself by market-driven forces. It was knowledge that I would not have gained buying my
produce at the grocery store, or at least I would not have learned about it in such an authentic way. Engaging with the land taught her how plants grow and how the potential of life is limited, mutated, and made incapable of reproducing.

While the garden and the broader ecosystem in Sue’s back yard revealed the potential of learning differently through direct engagement, it also illuminated the way that she used her freedom for responsible and autopoetic outcomes. Most importantly, a nomadic engagement with life triggered an affective flow for me—where my shock pointed to the impact of life-denying processes imposed to control agriculture for profit and produced the desire to understand the broader implications of that type of biopolitical control. In the following section, I will examine the links between the life-denying forces in institutionalized education with those in Sue’s garden.

Normativity and Affect in the Institution

Through direct engagements with Sue’s garden and personal objects within her home, I was able to trace the development of her ethical frame and concern for the natural environment. She expressed that she felt different at times in relation to less environmentally-conscious residents and colleagues, but admitted that her beliefs and commitment to a sustainable lifestyle produced a sense of bravery in her. Her subjectivity emerges from her personal sense of self and an active engagement with vitality that is often led by a heightened perceptual awareness; even though, at times, she feels as if she is alienated in relation to the normative values of others. As we leave the privacy of her home to consider Sue’s ethico-aesthetic engagement in the institutional environment of her school, normativity and affective awareness become important concepts.
Normative values are communicated through boundaries and limits, often written as codes or rules but also embedded in other temporal or structuring forces such as time, money, and space. For Deleuze and Guattari, values and normativity are forces that manifest in assemblages. Forces can be creative and active or regulatory and reactive (Jun 2011). Jun (2011) explains that, “for Deleuze, forces are principally distinguished according to whether they are life-affirming or life-denying at the level of life itself” (p. 96). The normative values of public schools today are often directed by external forces driven by a desire for measurable outcomes. Jun (2011) argues that normativity refers to imperatives and principles constructed within sociopolitical environments that direct behavior. Examining Sue’s relationship to the normative values of her school environment illuminates the distinctive operation of active and reactive forces, which reflects how subjectivity is produced through affective relations amidst the encounter with normative values in the institutional environment.

We may consider public school’s territory constituted by disciplinary structures often produced from outside, including the following elements: strict scheduling that structures time; compartmentalized space that distributes a community by age and divides knowledge into subjects; budgets that prescribe resources in advance; storage space that determines the quantity of material output; state-mandated standards for knowledge production that structure processes to yield measurable outcomes; and hierarchized disciplines where art is positioned as superficial. Grades, test scores, and quantified measures of achievement direct daily practices. Accountability operates as a type of currency, where the value of all educational production is measured by outcome. Together these constraining forces control space, time, ideas, processes, resources, behavior, and potential. The classroom becomes one part of the stage where those structures are enacted and resisted through the actions of teachers and students. If the
aforementioned structural limitations are posited as life-denying, then the activation of life-affirming forces must take the form of resistance, difference, and even possibly chaos. How does an educator attempt to redirect or reconstruct value systems in an environment that is so externally directed?

In Sue’s classroom, I saw the potential of her teaching practices as tiny revolts to normativity in the school environment (Wild, 2011)—life-affirming processes that question the fractured and accountability-driven structure. Sue’s classroom practices operated against the larger institutional structure that is constituted by contemporary accountability standards. She focuses on the process of knowledge development itself, as opposed to privileging output. For an art teacher, this can be a risky approach, since the normative domain of art continues to rest in traditional visual aesthetic production. She and I discussed frustration about seeing colleagues’ student work frequently complimented in terms of traditional aesthetic quality, while we knew those teachers were making changes to the work rather than allowing students to do work that may not be a traditionally celebrated.

As the only art teacher in her elementary school, Sue has the luxury of working with many of her students over a six-year span. That large window of time affords Sue the ability to build and revisit ideas and methods cyclically. For Sue, a traditional aesthetic assessment of her students’ work that determines quality based on visuality and codified rules is unimportant. Instead, she is principally concerned with what happens in the process of making. Sue’s minoritarian approach can produce lines of flight (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) from the repressive state form (mandated objectives and curricular structures) because it is not driven by fractured knowledge and quantitative measures. In the space of her classroom, students are able to learn and practice outside of the test-driven culture of our contemporary school system.
For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), deterritorialization ruptures molarized practices that codify and regulate. Indeed, in her school, Sue produces difference through incremental ruptures while performing within the structural limits sufficiently to remain recognizable as part of the normalized curricular structure of public school today. For example, Sue’s classroom visually bears the signs of an accountability-driven art space, with educational objectives listed on the board, rules posted to direct behavior and consequences, and posters hung that include words and images illustrating art principles and elements. The first lesson I learned while student teaching is that in Sue’s classroom, there is a system for every task. For example, there is a bowl full of wet paper towels for clean-up, as opposed to students turning on the sink and washing their hands and tools en masse. Sue has designed highly structured distribution and collection procedures to maintain order in the room. These processes could suggest an extension of an already regimented environment, but in Sue's room, they allow space for experimentation, while keeping chaos at bay. Such constructed limitations enable students to spend the majority of class time making. The visible structure of Sue’s room allows her not only to operate effectively but also to project the appearance of working within the normative values of public school ecology. To completely abandon a given system will not effectively change it. Change must derive from incremental ruptures, wherein the ecology is altered bit-by-bit.

Looking at her curriculum at a glance, an observer might assume that Sue consciously stresses an interest in the natural environment. Nevertheless, Sue explained,

Well until I had other people in the classroom, I didn’t know I was doing that – I thought I was just teaching art. And then some student teachers said you must be an environmentalist. And I was like, oh I guess I am. (Sue, personal communication, February 17, 2013)

In this way, Sue’s focus on environmental issues reflects widespread contemporary practices in art education. Projects addressing sustainability through an interdisciplinary focus incorporating
nature are quite common (Garoian, 1998; Graham, 2007; Inwood 2003, 2008, 2010). Environmentally-conscious lessons help students develop a sense of value for life and nature through art making. Embedded in the structures of Sue’s classroom management style are lessons on awareness of responsibility for environmental sustainability. Sue reuses and recycles materials as a way of demonstrating her values through praxis, for example, she repurposes frozen dinner trays to use as paint trays; and lids from detergent, deodorant, and other products operate as stamps and stencils rather than purchasing manufactured art kits made for that purpose specifically. In this way, Sue is modeling responsible practices. As students make work with repurposed materials, they learn the potential of objects beyond their intended uses. The tools and materials speak to an ethic about the environment that is then more directly represented through projects that derive from natural systems and beings. The subjects of Sue’s projects often relate to migration, trees, birds, butterflies, gardening, insects, and plant development.

Reaching beyond art making, Sue’s approach is multi-layered, operating as both a basis of classroom teaching and a lived curriculum. Her curriculum teaches both through and about living processes, revealing the marriage of systems of life from the processes structuring the classroom, to her responsible use of resources that demonstrates reverence and respect for the earth, to her subject-matter that illustrates and constructs systems in nature that operate in and out of the school. This deeper marriage of medium and message in her art lessons moves her work beyond values to style. By weaving together method and medium through layered practices, Sue highlights the aesthetics of a pedagogical approach that is embedded in practicing her ethical frame—where values are embodied. She is teaching through nature on multiple levels (Blandy & Fenn, 2012; Garoian, 2012). The aesthetics of her approach reveal her ethical
While Sue meets the standards and mandated procedures of her profession, her colleagues are unable to comprehend the depth of her practice. I noticed her colleagues tend to generalize art education through stereotypes, such as fun and easy. The role of art education is so often trapped in representation where media, tools, and teaching are means of production. I regularly watched Sue explain to other teachers how projects related conceptually to larger natural systems. They would typically respond with a compliment about the appearance of the finished pieces, often missing the conceptual frame or interdisciplinary connections. Just as they can only understand Sue’s work as a set of representations, they comprehend her teaching style through the curricular systems and institutional values that drive that institutional ecology.

Wallin (2011) addresses this issue of an unrecognizable curriculum:

...how does one make the curriculum strange to itself? In an age dominated by the often implicit function of representational thought, this project becomes crucial not simply for contemporary curriculum theorists, but for a people who might differ from that which everyone already knows. Articulating the stakes differently, curriculum theory asks how we might go about thinking a life when our contemporary representational resources are inadequate for creation of a people different from the people in general. (pp. 299-300)

Wallin’s argument points to a number of issues for Sue: (1) Is the significance of her teaching indefinable in the institutional ecology of public education today? (2) If so, then how can she articulate its significance when it operates outside of the field of representation? (3) Is Sue, as a curricular being, so different that delineating the difference is beyond the codified educational terms currently available?

During my first conversation with Sue regarding my research, we walked through her garden. The following passages from our first interview reveal the space that Sue occupies in her school:
C: Do you ever hear from your students about how much they’ve learned? One of the big things I said in my reflection on your class was how vast the knowledge base is that you’re bringing in.

S: I will tell you that we had a book fair and one of the kids came running up to me. He told me that his mom said he could have one book and he got a field guide. It was called, “My first field guide to birds.” And that was one of the 2nd graders – after we did the migration projects. And then we did another one – the migration birds of Denton – our Winter residents. And now we’re finishing that up and we’ll see the robins are coming back – so our spring residents are coming back. So now they’ve seen the whole cycle.

C: Do the science teachers ever relay what students have said back to you?

S: They have no idea what I do in my classroom. Nobody has any idea. They’re giving out faculty awards for integrating interdisciplinary elements…

...oh and here’s arugula – it’s kind of nutty

... and anyway, they’re giving out this award and I’m sitting there next to my new student teacher. She’s like, ‘oh so you just didn’t get one this year?’ And I’m like, ‘They didn’t give me one. They never do. They don’t know what I do in my classroom.’ And they don’t – they have no idea.

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The final comment in this conversation points to the emphasis for the rest of this chapter. Projects related to birds, flowers, butterflies, landscapes, and other nature-inspired subjects operate simply on a level of representation for one who is unaware of her ethico-aesthetic approach. The pedagogical significance of her style is the process of learning through—it is the choices and actions in the process of making. This is not to dismiss students’ work. Moments of completion or false closure mark points of arrival in the process. Perpetual change is inevitable,
but movement without stops to look back or see difference may become dizzying and lost. Completed art pieces in a process-focused classroom bring awareness to development of skill, changes in style, or the emergence of new ideas. Their finitude or false closure derived from completing a project acts as a signpost to new directions. Privileging process allows students to take pride in effort and incremental successes without assigning a detrimental significance to any individual piece.

The conversation above points to the production of subjectivity for Sue and her students as well. While she does not put great faith in the type of awards she describes in the story, she clearly felt some amount of frustration over the lack of awareness of her peers. I would argue that it is not simply that they do not remain in her classroom, but that she is actually operating outside of institutional norms. While her teaching is visibly interdisciplinary, even that description is inadequate.

Becoming Strange

During the same visit, I asked what she feels she sacrifices for living a life that is driven largely by a care for the environment. She told me that sometimes she is concerned that teachers and neighbors consider her weird. Sue noted, “you are othered for living this life. That’s okay. That comes down again to a sense of bravery or self-esteem. Because in a sense, being brave or willing to fail is about self-esteem” (Sue, personal communication, February 17, 2013). She was referring to her willingness to do things like overtly collect other teachers’ used trays from frozen lunches to use as paint trays, to talk openly about her opinions about inequality in the school system, and her frequent attempts at teaching and learning approaches with uncertain outcomes. Most importantly, her comment reveals the affective force of Sue’s resistance to normative values. To feel othered in her school and community reveals the life-denying force of
normativity. At the same time, she is aware that her ethical frame is a choice, and to live an ethico-aesthetic life is brave. Simultaneously, the institutional environment produces a subject in flux—both different and resilient. Her resilience illustrates a Deluzian concept wherein,

…it is a question of finding possibilities of life which ‘go beyond knowledge’ and enable a ‘resistance to power’ – that is, finding ways to constitute life in a ‘sufficiently artistic way’ (Surin, 2011, p. 148).

Sue goes beyond knowledge in the sense that privileging knowledge alone can be based in a model of consumption and reproduction. Sue, instead, demonstrates an artistic life through her teaching, where each choice and each encounter points to something broader. Her influence through pedagogy resists power because it is too complex to simply consume and regurgitate, taking form elsewhere unpredictably.

As Sue and I later discussed the potential of changing society toward more life-affirming practices, she explained that it has to start with valuing what we have and what we are. If the institutional value system is based on grades—or more broadly—outcomes alone, then that is where energy will flow. Until life itself is valued by the system and its participants, practices aimed at sustainability only operate on a superficial level. The question, though, is how to produce a set of values. What is valued in the educational environment and how can values be developed that transcend that space? Can art education become a pedagogical style that contributes to the production of an ethical subjectivity? In the following narrative, consider what is being produced by our outcomes-driven institutional school environment. By structuring flows through strictly planned curriculum, where are other messages seeping in? Where does the fragmenting and codifying of vitality produce unexpected rhizomatic off-shoots?

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As I thought about affect and normative values in elementary schools, I recalled one of the most awakening experiences I had as a student teacher. Mentor teachers are given one day off where their mentee runs the classroom alone. Unbeknownst to me, my day alone would be the day of the annual fundraising rally. There had been some mention that the schedules would be altered slightly to allow each grade a time to see the sales presentation. First period would end early, and the presentation would go through all of second period. My second period class was in the middle of a big project, but they would spend their one hour of art for that week in the cafeteria instead. As the announcements came on to alert us to move the students to the cafeteria, I noticed that it was primarily the specials teachers moving and monitoring the students. Second period was the planning period for many of the subject areas, so they went back to their offices.

In the cafeteria, loud music played through a pair of speakers, as if the students were not already riled up enough. Images of toys, amusement parks, and beach scenes flashed on a screen at the front of the cafeteria. An administrator stepped up to the microphone,

Okay, let’s calm down. We all know it’s a big day that you all look forward to. As you know, we are going to be starting our annual fundraiser. Each year we are able to buy new computers and supplies with the money you and your families are able to earn together. You help our school community to get things we would not be able to get otherwise. I know that many of you get excited about the prizes that you may be able to win, but I want you to know how important your contribution is to our entire school. Each week, we will be keeping track to see whose classroom is raising the most money, so let’s start it off strong this year. Let’s give a big applause for our visitor—you all see
him year after year, and he is going to tell you about the great new items you can sell and the prizes you may win.

_The music started blasting again as the kids roared with applause. They had clearly seen the man before. I looked around; I was disturbed by the nearly frothing mouths of kids I had just seen falling asleep in my classroom._

_The man quieted down the room, and introduced himself. Having been in sales for four years, I knew what a sales pitch sounded like, and I was shocked to hear terms such as net, gross, yield increases, products, and incentives. He was pitching this to a group of eight to ten-year-olds. Was it not strange to the other adults in the room? He introduced the products that the students would be fortunate enough to sell: pies, cookies, candles, gift wrap, and dried soup packets. Did it not seem weird to be talking to children about how to sell or have their parents sell fourteen-dollar cookie dough? What did this have to do with elementary school? Why were they taken out of art, music, and P.E. to have this presentation? Then he began to provide detailed instructions on how to sell the items._

Now, we know it’s never a good idea to go alone to strangers’ houses to sell these items, right? A better idea might be to have your parents take the envelope to work or church, or ask relatives. Your school will receive a percentage of everything that you sell. And if your parents or relatives don’t want to buy from the catalog, they can just give a money donation. As I said, your school will get portion of all of the revenue earned.

_Wait. What? The school only gets a portion of the earnings, even if people just donate money without buying the company’s products? Does this not seem strange? Why on earth would that company get to keep any part of a direct monetary donation? Why are these students selling overpriced cookie dough and pies for a corporation? Isn’t this child labor or something? How
is this more important than art? What percentage does the school get? Is there no other way to raise money?

Next, the music began blasting again. The kids started to cheer and put their hands up as images of a Hummer limo and plastic toys flashed on the screen. The man began again,

Yes, that’s right, you all know what you could win this year: the Hummer limo ride.

The students roared with cheers again. He began to show the “prize incentives.”

Students could win a colorful eraser for selling one $14 item. The eraser might cost fifty cents at the grocery store. They could also win a small stuffed animal pillow (that would cost maybe ten dollars at the store) plus the eraser and two other small plastic one-dollar-value toys, if they could sell eleven items. Eleven items that cost fourteen dollars on average would amount to 151 dollars worth of useless products that students and their parents would have spent time and money selling. For that, they are awarded thirteen dollars of useless products in return, and then the school gets some fraction of the earnings. How much profit is that fundraising corporation making on this venture? Does this not seem inequitable and wasteful? Finally, the grand prize is a ride in a Hummer limo with pizza. For that, they must sell approximately seventy-five items. That is over one thousand dollars worth of products. Not to mention the blatant advertising and the production of value for yet another disgustingly wasteful commodity: the Hummer.

The students were bouncing off the walls looking at all of the possible prizes. They could not hear that he was saying the school would only get a fraction of the earnings, and they probably wouldn’t have cared.

This event more than any I witnessed illuminated the ways that students’ values are produced and reified in our culture, and how the neoliberal shift in public school funding has
brought corporatization into our schools. But what did it really mean? Why do schools have to do this? Consider the hours a family would spend to earn a thousand dollars for that company, and the value that those students placed on those execrable plastic toys that may last a week. What was the school teaching the students? This is more important than your specials classes? This is how valuable your time is? This is okay to invite this corporation into the school to pawn you out and sell their useless wares so that we can earn some small fraction, even if your family donates money directly and does not want the products? But that is what happens. No one else seemed at all affected by it.

Why do the government and our society in general so undervalue our education that corporations are allowed to infiltrate schools in this way? Why are we so blind and lazy? It already happens through the marketing of products through curriculum and supplies, but to line students up as corporate hacks as early as elementary school is shocking. I am in no way blaming one school or school system. There existed a strong community of families and teachers who were working together in many ways to strengthen the school. This is a nationwide problem. Forcing schools to go it alone allows profitable forces to fill in the gaps. It is the result of the neoliberal corporatization of the country as a whole.

As I watched, I thought about the garden outside that we had built with the fourth graders to explore migration and pollination. They were so excited to be out there working with the soil. What if instead, the school developed a large working garden where they sold off produce for funding? I saw how successful the turnout was for all of their school festivals—people would help. What if teachers and families came together as a community to spend the time that might be spent selling cookie dough to instead produce meaningful objects to be used in schools, bartered for needed school supplies, or sold to the larger community as a whole?
corporate funding process seems more convenient. Allow a third party to manage it and take its cut. Encourage unhealthy foods and useless objects. Take time away from learning meaningful skills to teach kids how to consume junk.

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I included the experiences in Sue’s classroom to consider how normative values operate in our current public school ecology. Through her social practices, she demonstrated how her ethics flow into her teaching. Her concern for and insecurity about being different in relation to her community, both residential and professional, points to the affective force that the normative conditions of our neoliberal and consumer-driven culture have created. At the same time, the students’ extreme excitement about the rupturing of that system by the fundraising event reveals another kind of affective force emerging from the current institutional structure. The force of life does not stop, but rather, like the rhizome, it shoots in another often unanticipated direction. By fragmenting knowledge and institutionalizing behavior, the energy of the students’ lives may go into unanticipated directions, producing unexpected outcomes.

Reclaiming Potential

The fact is that the two kinds of science have different modes of formalization and State science continually imposes its form of sovereignty on the inventions of nomad science. State science retains of nomad science only what it can appropriate; it turns the rest into a set of strictly limited formulas without any real scientific status, or else simply represses or bans it. It is as if the ‘savants’ of nomad science were caught between a rock and a hard place, between the war machine that nourishes and inspires them and the State that imposes upon them an order of reason (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 362).

I open this final section with this quote by Deleuze and Guattari because my work with Sue revealed the limiting formulas of State science, which here functions as neoliberal forces attempting to codify and control life. Throughout this chapter on Sue, life is a vital force that takes the form of thinking as well as vegetation, but it is captured and structured to produce a
profitable and measurable yield. Further, in relation to the above quote, I would position Sue as the “savant,” negotiating her way through attempts at nomadic education up against the structuring force of the State science in her school and her garden.

Sue’s story engages with the structuring of vitality. At her school, she teaches through an immeasurable, process-driven approach, but I would argue that any talk of measuring learning outcomes is purely ideological. The idea that learning should be measured is a constructed value system, produced as a way to codify and regulate the power of knowledge. Teaching and learning can be forces of liberation and resistance as well as hate and oppression. Knowledge development is a truly nomad science, and processes of assessment are, in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms, state formulas. Designing a system that limits what might be taught is simply a tactic to limit what might also be learned or known. Systems of measurement have become normalized, almost naturalized within institutional education settings. The affects produced in the form of guilt, anxiety, or awareness of difference point to strength.

On a deeper level and in a broader social relevance, we should consider how State formulas imposed on education are affecting life. To engage with this, I will return to the idea of thinking as a vital force – thinking as life itself. Braidotti (2011) argues, “An idea is an active state of very high intensity, which opens up hitherto unsuspected possibilities of life and action. Thinking carries the affirmative power of life to a higher degree” (p. 282). Considered this way, we see the vital force of thought. It is easier to see life in the effect on a seed’s inability to regenerate, as I learned in Sue’s garden, but I would argue systems of accountability in schools and genetic modification of organisms are tactically very similar. Doyle (1997) explains, “Biology’s project was, in some sense, to make the invisibility of life visible or at least articulable” (p. 113). Doyle examines how the invisibility and force of life were articulated into
the genetic code. Genetics are discussed as fact, rather than as a system designed in part to describe vitality. It is unquestioned and even stands as a system of proof in a court of law. Belief in that system is also a belief in a code that was designed by researchers. The genetic code is a way of ordering and structuring, literally codifying life. The rhetoric of DNA has become naturalized, but it is a science based on the organization of life. As such, scientists at multinational agricultural corporations have found a way to control it for the sake of profit. They are controlling a natural force to limit its potential as a free-flowing, life-giving force.

If we then look at thinking in the same way, we can see that practices associated with accountability function in a very similarly. Unlike the seed, the profit-driven industry built around assessment is controlling thought as a living force. Testing cycles, countable outcomes, ARD (admission, review, and dismissal) processes, and AYP (adequate yearly progress) figures have become the DNA of the public school system in the US. These practices code the structure and life of public education. They limit the possibility of existing outside of that system. Where can new knowledge emerge in a closed system? As Wallin (2011) argues,

Born of opposition and negation, the curriculum-as-plan halts the lines of movement between virtual (unthought) and actual, severing itself from the embryonic field of relations herein dubbed the curriculum. In this way, the curriculum-as-plan is synonymous with the lauded institutional ideals of predictability, organization, and prescription (p. 294).

The curriculum-as-plan is structurally linked to the current outcomes-driven institutional domain, wherein, like the genetically modified seed, the potential of the yet unknown has been disconnected from the “embryonic field” of potential. It begs the question: Is the force of public education actually to encourage the population to not think?
If the desired outcome of education is already articulated through measurement devices, then the ability to think outside of those measurements is discouraged through normalizing forces. Colebrook (2008) suggests,

… that towards which thought ought to be led, was responsible for a politics of normalization. We no longer question what our life ought to become, so much as aim to know, discover, manage, and communicate the facts of data of life (p. 36).

She is describing the process of not-thinking, where life is already produced and simply needs to be ordered. In my experience with the fundraising rally, the idea of not thinking was evident. No one in the room seemed to recognize any kind of ethical dilemma. The school needs resources by any means possible. Let us not ask or think about what is actually being taught, practiced, and reified in that scenario.

The fundraising rally also points to what is actually being produced: affect. While the seed could be genetically modified to not reproduce and hence end life after its life cycle, the vital force of thought is simply redirected in the educational institutional environment. The life-denying force of assessment culture does not kill life, but redirects that force. The children were ecstatic in the consumption-driven environment of the cafeteria, operating outside of the classroom structure, even if driven by comparable goals. A common affective outcome of assessment culture is anxiety, fear, and nervousness. Outcomes-driven data has become the valued commodity in the school ecology. It produces a desire that is unfortunately often out of individual control. We are all part of this system. It is not simply students who suffer from this. Teachers, principals, and other administrators must be part of it to keep their jobs.

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Six months after I worked with Sue, I took the all-level art certification test as my last requirement to earn teacher certification for the state of Texas. The art test for all-level
certification in Texas is only offered twice per year. I had taken the online practice tests and I figured that graduate and undergraduate degrees in Art History, plus the previous four years of Art Education doctoral work mixed with studio courses should be adequate preparation for the test. It is available for educators from all subject areas if they desire art certification.

The test was scheduled for a Thursday and would not be offered again for six months. The registration confirmation repeatedly warned that no applicants would be able to take the test if they arrived less than thirty minutes before it was to start. Mine was scheduled for noon. I live sixty miles away from the testing center. It is next to the intersection of two major highways—both of which are frequently congested. I left at ten to give myself plenty of time. Traffic was backed up from all four directions. My shoulders were getting tense and I had to turn off the radio as I drove there because I could feel myself getting anxious. The building was situated awkwardly in relation to the street. I had to go past it a block and come back around, and visitors were directed to a garage above it. I was agitated by the time I parked and took the elevator down to the testing center.

I opened the door to the office building where the test was offered. There were rows of seats directly in front of me and a desk to the far right of the room. Some people were sitting and writing on papers attached to clipboards, some were milling around the desk, and the woman sitting there was on the phone. There were no instructions posted and no clear line formed. I walked toward the desk to what seemed to be a group of people waiting for the clipboard. The woman hung up the phone and addressed the woman at the front of the group. The woman gave her what looked like an ID card and sat down. I got out my ID and looked at the desk to see if I could find the clipboard. The next woman in line was taken to a back room,
and then a woman handed in forms. As I reached the front of the line, the woman looked at me as if I should have something to give her.

“Do you have your forms?”

“No, I wasn’t really sure what I am supposed to do. Can you give me the forms?”

“If you don’t let me get through these people who are already here, you are not ever going to get back to take your test. Please have a seat.”

“But how do I get the forms? Am I supposed to fill out a form?”

“I will call you. Please have a seat.”

“But you don’t even know who I am.”

She looked past to me to the woman behind me in line – “Are you ready? Thank you.”

I walked to one of the chairs and sat down. I felt frustrated and even more anxious. I was told that if I arrived after 11:30, I could not take the test. It was 11:27, and she did not know who I was to account for me being there. Another woman emerged from the back room. She stood behind the desk, and loudly said, “You will need to put ALL of your belongings in a locker. There are keys in the locker. Remove all outer clothing, any jewelry, your cell phone, and all bags and purses.” I still wasn’t sure exactly what I might need to fill out the forms, so I held onto my bags. I looked down at my hand and realized I had written, “avocado, diapers, tp” to remind myself to pick up groceries. I quickly walked back to the bathroom, and scrubbed the ink from my hands.

I returned to my seat, and a series of names were called and people walked to the back room. At that point, the lady behind the desk asked for all 12:00 test-takers who didn’t have a form to walk up. I got the clipboard and returned to my seat. Two ladies had begun talking in the seat next to me. One had rescheduled and had to pay an extra $15. I had paid $74 to take
the test. The other said that she had to get a sub to come up and take her test. They began to
read the rules listed at the top of the page aloud, and I acknowledged that I was reading them
too. We giggled about the number of rules and their language that sounded so similar to what
they had to repeatedly tell their own students during standardized tests. Once again, the woman
behind said, “You will need to put ALL of your belongings in a locker. There are keys in the
locker. Remove all outer clothing, any jewelry, your cell phone, and all bags and purses.” We
all grinned at each other.

At that moment, one of the women who had been called to the back a few minutes earlier
walked back out and approached the woman at the desk. She seemed sarcastically amused. She
was a large woman, probably close to six foot and heavy. She was wearing a cotton fitness outfit
with a matching coat and pants. She had a white t-shirt under the thin coat, but she did not seem
to feel comfortable removing the coat in public.

“I have been told I will have to remove this. Will I be given a gown?”
The woman at the desk replied, “You will need to lock it in a locker.”

I began to laugh uncomfortably at the absurdity of making grown women remove their
clothes against their will. The other two women were watching the scene with me. The woman
was gracious enough to take it in stride for our benefit, but we all knew that this was ridiculous.
Just then, a man walked in front of us. He, too, had been sent back out to put something in his
locker. One of the women next to me said to him, “You will need to remove your shoes.” He
looked at her surprised, and we all laughed out loud. We assured him that we were only kidding,
but he got the joke. The woman behind the desk stared out at the three of us, and we looked
down to continue filling out our forms. The woman two seats over said, “Did you look at
number 6?” Number 6 stated that any disruptive behavior would be grounds for dismissal. We did not speak to each other again.

A little while later (after 12:00), I was called to the back. I was directed to another seat. There I had to confirm my identity with a man sitting at a computer. Then I had to move to another set of seats. The next process was the metal detector. Once those in front of me were processed, I had to lift my arms out to the side and lift my pant legs for the administrator to check me for any metal objects I may bring into the test. Then we had to sit at the computer and take fingerprints of each of my fingers. I repeatedly placed my fingers in the wrong spot on the pad, so we had to do a number of them multiple times. This was the last step of my signing in process, and now it was time to take the test.

Inside the testing room, a bank of computers was separated by cubicles. There were multiple cameras on every wall. The proctor said that I would need a book for the test eventually and to raise my hand at that time. When she saw my hand, she would come back in and find out which color I had been assigned. Within a few minutes of starting the test, I needed the book. I put my hand up, but only the ends of my fingers could be seen above the cubicle dividers. I stood up to make myself more visible and became extremely worried that the cameras may capture me in a way that it appears I was looking at other computers. She retrieved the book, and I proceeded with the test. It took me over thirty minutes to calm my nerves enough to focus on the content of the exam.

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As this story illustrates, the ecology of the testing center limited my potential of thinking about the content of the test. I felt intense anxiety about taking the test because of the amount of weight it carries professionally. Then, the ecology of the testing center with physical, mental,
and environmental structures of control produced an oppressed subjectivity where I felt imprisoned and afraid. I am aware of these systems, and that was a single experience. What kind of effects does that culture have on students who are forced to encounter that annually and to be told that it is more significant than all of the other time that they spend in school? Wallin (2013) addresses the idea of the institution making patients ill in relation to Guattari’s work at La Borde, suggesting the need for a transversal approach to institutional ecologies where the fracturing roles, practices, and outcomes that all-too-often constitute those environments are seen horizontally rather than through a vertical hierarchy.

In our final meeting, Sue explained the primary aspect she would change about schooling today. She argued that it is a business with an increasing number of third parties profiting, from the companies that construct the tests and accompanying policies and procedures to the remediation of students who perform poorly on them. She described the ways that teachers are forced to take on more and more related to testing and that it progressively removes any real teaching. I asked how we might change the system and how learning outside of the institution might change processes within it. She told me that one of her students argued that everything has already been invented, and this is truly it. Our schools engender the belief that everything is already out there, and large companies profit off of affirming and reproducing that belief. The life-affirming force of thought is transformed into a fear of not knowing rather than the wonder of thinking anew.

As I look back on my experiences of realizing technologies of control, I see that our assessment-based school environment operates so differently than that of learning through the encounter in Sue’s garden. Both offered the possibility of recognizing molarizing forces, but one was through reactive fear and the other was through a generative questioning.
Social production is controlled by outcome-driven forces that are motivated largely by profit. Learning is no longer about process but outcome. It is short-sighted and detrimental. In this environment the flux of knowledge production is commodified and codified. My goal is to show that the same power flows throughout multiple life forces — none of it is truly separate and we as humans, educators, and artists must see that we have to act in all areas of our lives because knowledge and learning make a living organism, like agriculture.

Sue’s emphasis on the interdependence of life forces revealed the constricting power of for-profit technologies in schools and on the land. In both domains, control is enacted to yield a measurable outcome that can be manipulated for profit. Through my work with Sue, I was able to see ways that a neoliberal control of life takes form. This chapter ultimately illuminates, then, how social production is a life force, how knowledge and creative production are controlled by neoliberal and profit-driven forces, and how we may yet activate the potential for envisioning life as a work of art. To engage with knowledge as vitality, we must consider how its force is limited by a system constituted by a belief in imposed accountability and measurable assessment—the codification of life that attempts to control the possibility of seeing and learning beyond what is already known to produce the as-of-yet-unknown.
I am overwhelmed, disheartened, and I have begun to wonder what is the point of any of this? I saw my old advisor last week, who hates me. Seeing her reminded me that it is going to be hard to find the kind of job I want in this field. She was always sure to tell me that, and now she really has it in for me. It reminded me that academia is as much about interpersonal relationships as any of the teaching and research—I came to that realization a little late in the game.

I’m struggling with my teaching as well. My students just want the degree. I get it, and I know that is just how it works by your senior year as an undergrad, but it makes me wonder: what I am I teaching them really? Does any of this really matter? Does everyone just see education as a hoop to get to the job or whatever comes next?

I stopped working on the dissertation. I decided I should submit a paper for a call on place. I mean that really is the core of my work. It’s what has led me to all of the things that I love. But the paper is no good. I am trying to say too many things and I’m ultimately saying nothing. I always do this. I see a thousand connections, but I don’t go deep enough with any of them.

I had plans to go to Amanda’s new house. She offered to make me brunch, but I am too far behind. There just didn’t seem to be time, so I sent her a text and asked if we could reschedule.
I need the day off—completely free. No sick kids, no teaching, no errands—just my work, my writing... oh but what about the job applications and the conference next month, and the funding applications. This is my mind—day after day.

Amanda responded, “That’s ok. I’ll miss ya but I’m also feeling behind with weekend chores and work.”

I drove the kids to school. The poor things—the drive was miserable. I was miserable. But as I drove away from Rose’s school, I realized how foolish I was being. I have never spent time with Amanda as a friend. It would be an honor and really fun to hang out and I was wallowing in self-pity.

I sent her another text apologizing, hoping she didn’t think I was crazy, and asking if we could hang out after all. Hearing that I might be missed was all it took. It mattered. This wasn’t a checklist. Relationships matter.

I drove up the path to Amanda’s new house. I had been there before to pick up my share of vegetables from the community supported agriculture (CSA) program. Typically, there are volunteers, friends, or the other farm staff there. Today, she was home alone. I went into the kitchen, and she was warming butternut squash soup and cornbread that she made the day before. What was I thinking? Why would I have missed this? We took our bowls outside under the trees on a park bench in the lawn. I shared my frustrations about life, and she told me about how different it was to now own her own place. She talked about her husband’s entrepreneurial plans, and his challenges finding funding. We talked about teaching again and marriage.

She told me she needed to dismantle some greenhouses, so I offered to help. We drove to a nearby field, where five huge greenhouse frames stood. They were composed of rows of steel beam arches fixed into pegs in the ground. The church that owned the land had offered them to
a number of local groups. Amanda needed help dismantling two of them, and her farm apprentice would be out soon. My job was to remove a series of rusted bolts from a bar that ran down the center of arched poles. It was relatively dangerous, as I had to stand at the top of a ten foot ladder and repeatedly hold a flathead screwdriver in my left hand above my head and the bar, while using the drill to unscrew a bolt from the bar with my right hand. She did not hesitate to let me jump right in, and I was eager to do it.

Up to that point, I had developed a relationship with Amanda through the dissertation. I also joined her CSA and Ben has attended her Young Farmers classes. Those were forms of reciprocity for her generous involvement. I mean I had wanted to join a CSA and her classes are extremely valuable. Still, though, there has always been a reason for our friendship, mediated by her as research participant or me as customer or client. The research seemed to structure the relationship.

But the work on the greenhouses—outside in a field, as a friend—that was different. It is really how I have wanted to help. I think I wanted her to see that I was not some bullshit academic, who is so buried in books and theory. During the dissertation interviews, we had hours of talks about a DIY ethic and the manual labor required to be a farmer. I wanted her to see me in that light.

I got all the bolts out, and the next step was dismantling the whole thing. I was there for four hours. It was a big task. I felt strong and proud. All of that swirling in my mind from the morning had stopped. This felt like real work. This felt like doing something that mattered.

Three weeks earlier I had outlined the chapter on Amanda, but I stopped before writing and became distracted with all of my other impeding deadlines.
This day brought me back. I was reminded again how important these relationships have become. I left the farm that day ready to start again. The work we do in the university must relate to the world outside of it. We must create direct connections with whatever aspect of the world we think we are teaching about. That is the only way it means anything. Education in any institution is by its nature one step removed. It is always representing something else. I had become lost in the representation. I was spinning in a circle, looking for purpose, speculating about ideas that began to feel like they had no bearing on the world. That day, they became relevant again.

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This chapter introduces Amanda, a young artist and farmer, who owns Cardo’s Farm Project (CFP). Amanda’s story is linked to both Ken and Sue materially, practically, geographically, and ideologically. I will map my path getting to know Amanda as it further illustrates the potential of nomadic inquiry and affective awakening. By describing Amanda’s path to becoming an artist then a farmer, the chapter may illuminate potential directions for linking theory and pedagogy in art education. The chapter continues my cartography with critical ruptures related to power relations and inequality that changed my perception. The crux of this chapter is a question of direct relations and fundamental knowledge, both embedded in an engagement with the environment. Amanda’s story reveals the power of direct and ethical relations through encounter, engagement, and exchange. This concept ties back to Deleuze’s theory of the nomad, Guattari’s ethico-aesthetic paradigm, and their multiple combined works. The potential for direct relations is really the potential for living nomadically—living life.
I will start by explaining how I learned of CFP and approached Amanda to work with me on the dissertation. We then trace Amanda’s varied forms of education, from the inspiration she drew from her grandmother’s history, to her institutional education in high school and college, and then to apprenticeships on working farms. Amanda’s story, a beautifully layered performance of an ethical past, materializes as an affirmation of future potential. We will then look at Cardo’s farm as a place, meet Cardo, and consider how life there illustrates an ethical engagement with life, ideas of sacrifice, and systems of exchange. It is a story of hope, sacrifice, and possibility. This chapter considers contemporary art practices that echo Amanda’s work. In the narrative reflection that opened this chapter, I discussed getting lost and finding my way back through a direct encounter with Amanda as a friend. My relationship with her, like those with Ken and Sue, have blossomed and evolved through the dissertation research. *This work has changed me.*

**Finding Cardo’s Farm Project**

Amanda created CFP in 2010 on land that was owned and operated as Cardo’s Sprout Farm. Amanda, who graduated with a degree in painting and drawing earlier that year, started the Farm Project with another farmer, Daniel. They met as apprentices at Common Ground Farm in Beacon, NY. The mission statement for the farm explains:

Cardo’s Farm Project builds community through agriculture by growing healthy food in harmony with the natural environment, offering farm-based educational opportunities, and using our farm for the personal restoration of youth and adults (Cardo’s Farm Project, 2013)

The site acts as a working farm, residence, and educational center. As the mission statement explains, Amanda is interested in the restorative, pedagogical, and community-building potential of environmentally conscious agricultural work. In other words, she sees farming as a collective, educational, and subjectivity-producing approach to life and the world.
As early as 2011, I remember noticing flyers advertising events and workshops at Cardo’s Farm hanging in local coffee shops, natural food stores, and the Art Building on campus. I was intrigued by the idea of it because while it was a farm, the rhetoric of its publicity sounded very similar to my interests in community-based art education and social justice. As I was writing chapter 3 of the dissertation in 2013, I found a flyer about CFP that I had placed in a folder labeled DIY two years earlier—long before I met Amanda or even knew what I might write about. Finding the flyer produced a strange feeling of affirmation, a fated relationship—a kind of immanence.

While I was student teaching with Sue, I discussed my ideas for the dissertation. One of Sue’s previous student teachers, Katie, was an artist and avid environmentalist, who volunteered with CFP. I was surprised and excited by the connection, but also felt a sense of nervous intimidation—as if they surely had more interesting things going on and I might appear like a poser. At the time I knew very little about the farm, and I knew nothing about Amanda. There are myriad news stories, blogs, and other online posts about the Project. I quickly learned that it was started as an experiment by a young artist who had recently graduated from my university, and that her goal was sustainable local gardening linked to education. I saw how the site may represent an affirmative future to my historical critique; embedded in place, DIY practices of ethical materiality, art making, and the desire for another kind of education. Once I started thinking about contacting her, I quickly learned that a number of my friends knew her. Amanda happily agreed to have me out to the farm as a way of giving back to the University. I was excited and anxious as I drove to the 20 miles out to Cardo’s Farm.
It was Thursday, and I was on my way to pick up my weekly CSA share of vegetables at Amanda’s newly-purchased farm house. I had known that Amanda wanted to move off of Cardo’s land, mostly to be closer to town and to feel that she had a little more freedom. While Cardo had been extremely generous and rarely said no, a move would mean a new form of independence. Cardo’s land was about 20 miles away from the center of Denton and being closer to town could draw more families for educational programs as well as school tours. She might also see her friends more often.

Hearing she had bought the old farm house on Mingo brought on the feeling I had experienced so often with her – a kind of déjà vu. I drove by that old dilapidated farm house every day on the way to school and had considered pulling off to photograph it on a number of occasions. It was like a relic from another time, but it had unfortunately fallen deep into disrepair. The house was constructed in the late 1800s, and it sits along a busy street about two miles from the Denton town square. It was a perfect choice, and it came with two acres to rebuild the farm again and have room for chickens and sheep.

I first came to the house to help her move from Cardo’s land soon after she bought it. The floors and walls were rotted in many places, but it still had a charm—it felt like a home, a working home. When I would visit at Cardo’s for our interviews, we would sit outside or in her trailer; this was a big move for her. She was about to get married, and so it was a next step – a real home to build a farm and a family of her own.

The day I came for my vegetable pick up was the first time I’d been up to the house since moving day. Men were there putting on new siding and working on the landscaping in preparation for the wedding. She was standing outside waiting for CSA members to arrive to
pick up their weekly vegetables. As always, Amanda greeted me with a huge smile and warm hug. She said, “Come in. I want to show you something.”

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Amanda grew up in a suburb in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. She described enjoying its open and rural environment, prior to the community experiencing a burst in development and affluence. Her father is a homebuilder, and she repeatedly acknowledged having a privileged upbringing. At the same time, watching him develop a business inspired confidence in her when she considered starting the Farm Project. Amanda explained that her parents recognized early that she had an interest and talent in drawing and other art making practices. Her father would draw with her as a child, and they encouraged her to pursue an education in art in grade school and even go on to major in painting and drawing in college.

Her parents both grew up as children of farmers in the rural outskirts of Denton. While Amanda credits her parents with support and encouragement, her grandmother’s influence seemed to shape both the subject matter and ethical drive for Amanda’s art as well as her shift to farming. Her grandmother was a seamstress, and she taught her granddaughter to sew at an early age. Together they would crochet and make quilts. Her grandmother bought her a sewing machine when she was young, and Amanda spent long periods of time working by herself to produce objects.

Well, I remember making things for my animals, likes hats for my beanie babies and blankets for my dolls. I think I made some mittens for my rabbit because it was cold outside (laughing). Yeah, they didn’t stay on him. I remember that. I was like, darn it why don’t they stay on! (Amanda, personal communication, April 5, 2013).

The kind of joyful play expressed in Amanda’s description of her childhood sewing practice is characteristic of her larger approach to life and work today. There is an air of humility,
playfulness, experimentation, and determination that runs through her approaches to all forms of material production.

Women’s Narratives

While I would argue that any ethical or material practice is developed through the layering of innumerable and often unconscious sources and experiences, Amanda focused her burgeoning art practice on the inspiration she gained from rural female narratives. Her mother and grandmother told her “little narratives and love stories” (Amanda, personal communication, February 19, 2013) about growing up on the farm. As a young art student, Amanda’s work dealt with what it might mean “to be a farmer and have a life that was so different and to be a woman who was working physically as hard as the man” (personal communication, February 19, 2013).

Amanda began reading memoirs from the 1930s, 40s, and 50s written by farm wives to broaden her understanding of that daily reality. Women’s narratives affected Amanda in a way comparable to Tamboukou’s (2008) study where,

narratives carry traces of genealogical events, discontinuities and ruptures, throwing light to the microphysics of power and desire, the minutiae of the subtle and open process that binds subjects and their social milieus together. (p. 361)

Amanda was not as inspired by the identity of women farmers, but instead, by the everyday processes that constitute the life of the woman farmer. Her interest in the daily practices of early farm wives derived in part from an interest in the domestic space of farm houses. As Jackson (2001) explains in a performative historiography of Hull House, “…an understanding of place entails an understanding of its spaces and … a history of the practices they entailed” (p. 19). Working farms are assemblages of a variety of overlapping living relations. Each space of a farm is produced through the activities that constitute it.
Amanda’s grandmother still lives in the farm house of those stories. The tangibility of being in the house has strengthened her interest in this broader history. The impact of her grandmother’s influence derives largely from learning through direct engagement and teaching through practice. Her engagement with the farm house is both material and representational. Her grandmother drew a map of the land and its spaces that served as inspiration for and actually appeared in Amanda’s work as a practicing artist (Fig. 27).

Figure 27. Grandmother’s map drawing with other drawings attached to a bulletin board.

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I took the photograph above (Fig. 27) during my first visit to the farm. It was cold and windy, and we ended up finishing the interview in Amanda’s trailer. She was in the process of moving into a larger trailer on the land because her boyfriend was moving out to the farm. Most of her decorations were packed up. A bulletin board was lying on a couch with photographs, her grandmother’s drawing, and Amanda’s artwork overlapping each other (Fig. 28).
Figure 28. Bulletin with drawings, photographs, and multimedia artworks attached.

At the time, I photographed each document on the bulletin board, but I could not understand the depth of their significance until months after. I have added images of the map, photographs (Fig. 29), and mixed media piece here, but they will appear again later, in another context. As I came to know Amanda, flashes of being in that trailer came to mind along with vague memories of those images on her bulletin board. Initially I could only read them through their similarity to my own grandmother’s old photographs. For me, they illustrate the way that representation is initially abstract and disconnected, until a material encounter puts its symbolism to work.

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Visual and narrative representations of a previous time and place in part produced Amanda’s desire to become a farmer. Her education derived from the repetition of some of her grandmother’s domestic practices such as sewing and gardening, while her performative interpretation revitalizes these traditional skills into a contemporary context. Even if her interest in the lives of farm wives might appear nostalgic, I would argue instead that it draws on
Deleuze’s (2004) idea of nomadic thought. Specifically, Deleuze argues that the way to truly understand Nietzsche’s impact is to ask a young person today what they discover in the latter’s writing. They will find something not discovered before as they are reading it within the context of a new set of lived conditions, similar to Amanda revisiting the writing and social practices of farmer wives. Amanda’s desire to become a farmer was produced in part by the stories from another era, but her interest is rooted in the contemporary conditions of our time, not an attempt to revert to a prior epoch. Nomadic thought is a living force that operates outside of representation—embedded in the doing and becoming of life. It is not a matter of reproduction and repetition in a mimetic sense, but instead an influence of the force of those women’s lives. Her interest lies in memoirs of doing, rather than histories of being.

Figure 29. Amanda holding a photograph from the interior of her grandmother’s farmhouse.

Fundamental Skills

Individual responsibility is another important characteristic of farm life for Amanda. We discussed how both of our grandparents grew up with a large number of siblings, where each
member of a family had a role. Collective engagement by all members of the family was critical to the operation of a farm. Her interest is rooted in a belief in the power of responsibility. As she described,

[My grandma] had a real role – she was a kid and her siblings were kids but they had a real contribution to the existence of their families. And I don’t think they were resentful at all. Like she talks about doing the work and being so excited they could go out and swim in the river that afternoon. And before school you milk the cow and then you come home and do whatever chore you have to do. I think that would help me appreciate what it means to be here and to be part of the world. (Personal communication, April 5, 2013).

In this quote, we hear Amanda’s focus on engaging with the world, where awareness is derived from doing. With a life engaged in the direct production of food and resources came purpose as well as the joyful reward of leisure. Direct relations with the land and materiality can produce a respect for simple objects and tasks as well as difference and change.

These ideas of communalism are also rooted in a belief in fundamental skills. Like Ken and Sue, I asked Amanda if she felt like the practices she described from her grandmother’s life or her own could be characterized as DIY. Amanda explained,

I just wanted so badly to have the simplified version – I guess it was a kind of romanticism, but these foundational or fundamental skills – all of it – all of the DIY skills, crafting, sewing, weaving, growing food, building, cooking – I just really wanted to know those things – for me it meant some kind of simplification – like a simpler form of living (personal communication, April 5, 2013).

For Amanda, collective processes of coming together through essential and direct practices are the root of subsistence and survival.

As we discussed learning fundamental skills in Amanda’s trailer, I noticed a spinning wheel (Fig. 30), but I was not sure of its purpose. Juxtaposed against the prefabricated walls the trailer, the wooden apparatus seemed both a living being and a relic simultaneously. I asked her what it was, and the concept of fundamental skills was instantly clear.
As Amanda was constructing pieces for her installation work that addressed life on the farm and stories she had heard, she repeatedly asked her grandmother for hand-spun yarn. Finally, her grandmother introduced her to a woman who taught her to spin her own yarn from animal hair. She used it to produce string installations (Fig. 31) that would represent the crop rows from her grandmother’s drawn map. These flows and returns of memory, narrative, materiality, practice, and repetition all embedded in desire and production provide insight to an ethical pedagogy based on time, respect, and direct engagement.
Art and Education but not Art Education

Women’s narratives and an interest in fundamental skills fueled Amanda’s concentration on craft and agricultural knowledge, but her institutional education in public school and the university have equally influenced her desire to become an educator, artist, and farmer. Amanda was inspired by a nurturing art teacher, who helped her develop confidence about her drawing skills. As she thought about going to college, she saw Ms. Wilson as a model for future potential. She considered art education a subject that was about usable skills that were physical and productive—information that could be applied.

Amanda decided to pursued art education and studio courses in painting and drawing at the university. After one art education course, she decided not to continue a traditional certification route. As she explains,

And then I dropped the art education. Because I, well, I took one class, and I was like, ‘these people are going to educate children about art? We’re not even making art.’ They don’t know anything about art. It didn’t make any sense to me. (Amanda, personal communication, February 19, 2013)
As I heard Amanda say this, I wondered what would have turned off someone who genuinely cared about making art and had a sincere desire to educate. What is art education training?

I considered my own experience earning certification in courses on classroom management, lesson development, behaviors, and stages. I found the courses very interesting because while I had years of education in art history and art making, the idea of constructing an ordered classroom and curriculum was absolutely foreign. Education courses are subjects based in the representation and reconstruction of the real world. In education coursework, students are always thinking about a simulated reality. Art education courses often have no art making in them. They are based in structuring behaviors, where humans and experiences are generalized into procedures and data. Perhaps that was the problem. Again it comes back to issues of representation, where direct engagement with the world becomes fractured and mediated by codes and rules.

Amanda continued pursuing a degree in painting and drawing, abandoning a formal art education degree. Annette Lawrence, a multimedia artist and studio art professor became her mentor. Her influence is visible in Amanda’s pieces. Lawrence’s work explores issues of time, process, and autobiography through an emphasis on space, place, and materiality often mixing fibers and drawing. Amanda appreciated Lawrence’s no-nonsense advice that she would “need to get her shit together” (Amanda, personal communication, April 5, 2013) to make it as a practicing artist. Lawrence calls Amanda, “…an inspiration. She is willing to do what has to be done. She tries and keeps working at something the way that an artist has to” (Personal communication, January 14, 2014).
Becoming Farmer

This section maps Amanda’s path through her final year of college and the beginning of her life as a working farmer. Amanda had taken an interest in farm-based education, and she interned at Hidden Villa, an educational farm in California, the summer before her last year of school. When she returned to Denton, she began an internship assisting Cardo with a sprout farm operation west of Denton, which is the site that would become CFP a year later. The summer after graduation, she pursued an apprenticeship at Common Ground Farm outside of Beacon, New York. Her first-hand farming experiences working with other artists on the land through a social justice lens bled into the culmination of her art degree, and set her on the path to becoming the farmer, artist, and educator that she is today.

Hidden Villa

To learn about farm-based education, Amanda took an internship at an educational farm outside of San Jose, California. “Hidden Villa is a nonprofit educational organization that uses its organic farm, wilderness, and community to teach and provide opportunities to learn about the environment and social justice” (http://www.hiddenvilla.org). Hidden Villa invited school and community groups out to engage in learning experiences through direct contact with animals and agriculture. Its approach is rooted in farm-based education (FBE). FBE is,

a form of experiential, interdisciplinary education that connects people to the environment, their community, and the role of agriculture in our lives. Farm-based education promotes land stewardship, the value of meaningful work, and supports the local food systems that sustain us. (http://www.farmbasededucation.org)

This focus on direct engagement with the land, experiential and interdisciplinary learning was critical to Amanda. She explained that the embodied learning and focus on problem-solving builds confidence in kids. By being able to see a direct connection between themselves and food or plants grown in the ground or to work closely with animals teaches kids a sense of
responsibility and place. Just as Amanda was drawn to the stories of her grandmother’s large family where each sibling played a role in the family’s well-being, FBE can instill a sense of purpose in students.

This type of education does not just take place at farms. We can see similar experiences in urban and school-based gardens. Students are able to take ownership over something and nurture its growth.

I think kids are really good at picking up on where they are in the world and in a system whenever they are asked to be the caretaker of the animal or the plant. And then they know that this is my responsibility to care for this and then they are working next to each other and they are trying to figure it out and how to do and how to use the tools – like all of this confidence building. (Amanda, personal communication, April 5, 2013)

The sense of belonging and responsibility are important for Amanda. When kids attend her young farmers classes, she has to spend time helping students understand the difference in expectations on the farm from those in a traditional classroom. She feels that when children are given little opportunity to take responsibility in a classroom, particularly with experiences dealing directly with living organisms.

Hidden Villa has an explicit focus on social justice as well. In FBE, a consideration of social justice is enacted through the experience of being on the land together and in teaching about what it means to take only what you need and build consideration for the larger global community through a collective responsibility. The founder of Hidden Villa started the first multi-racial summer camp in 1944 with the idea that children playing outside together might be able to forget the socially constructed differences at least temporarily. The Duvenecks, who had purchased Hidden Villa in 1924, had an ongoing mission of using the land to advance social justice. In addition to starting the first multiracial summer camp, they “sheltered refugees fleeing from the Nazis, assisted Japanese-American families returning from internment camps, and
hosted groups for social and educational reform.” Later the family “opened their home to the United Farm Workers movement in the 1960s and provided a safe space for Cesar Chavez to organize California’s first farm workers strike” (http://www.hiddenvilla.org/about-us/history/the-duvenecks). Social justice is woven into farm-based education as people come together to care for the environment and for each other through direct engagement and personal responsibility. Amanda highlighted the kind of camaraderie that develops among those who are working together to build a local garden or a large farm. It is a kind of camaraderie that children and adults alike often lack in today’s fractured society.

**Meeting Cardo and Finishing School**

When Amanda returned to Denton for her last year of school, she visited Cardo’s Sprout Farm. She had other friends who had volunteered out there and thought it might be a good place to continue learning about farming in town. At the time, she was taking four studio classes and living a common college lifestyle of late nights and a busy social life. She would work on the farm Wednesday and Sunday mornings.

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*Cardo is Ken’s best friend. He started growing sprouts in his apartment in the mid-1970s. He was a school teacher at the time. In the 1980s, Cardo bought the land west of Denton to expand his sprout operation. The business grew rapidly and he stopped teaching to become a sprout farmer full time. He was selling to large grocery chains and juicers.*

*In the late-1990s, federal regulations categorize sprouts as a potentially hazardous food. The regulations included introducing chemicals to his production that he felt were not safe. He had been using organic practices before that term was used to label specific types of food production. He felt that the new regulations put in place for sprout farmers to make them safe*
and organic had just the opposite. Regulations required that he bleach his seeds and use other chemicals with which he was not comfortable. He decided not to participate, and to instead cut back his operation to just sunflowered greens and wheat grass because they are technically not considered sprouts. Cardo returned to the classroom to serve as a special education teacher until he retired in 2012.

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During her final year of school, Amanda was growing and delivering sprouts for Cardo while pulling together her final work for her BFA show. Her internship in California the previous summer revealed to her the potential for teaching and learning through work on the farm. There she saw a new domain for teaching. Amanda’s engagement with the land began to emerge in her work that was already rooted in a history of women farmers. She described how the community of artists at school fuelled an innate desire to make art during that period.

So it just kind of evolved out of a practice from where I was drawing fields to where I was working in the fields. And then it was, like I would take vegetables that I was growing here and put them in my artwork. And then eventually it was like – a lot of it was time – I was working from sun-up to sun-down, but I have always thought of this like it was kind of like it was a big performance of the work that I had been making on paper for so long. It felt that way because it was kind of self-centered – like I was making these artworks and it was all kind of the same thing for me, and then I started going through the motions of becoming a farmer that I had been making this art about because I felt like I kind of idolized it. (Amanda, personal communication, April 19, 2013)

The work in Amada’s senior show wove together her interests in women’s histories, a lifetime of developing skills in craft and making, memories of experience on her grandma’s farm, the visual inspiration of her grandmother’s hand-drawn map, and her recent embodied knowledge of farm work. She was becoming the thing of her memories and of other’s memoires, in part from the same passion that drove her art work—a desire to make, teach, and learn.
Common Ground

After graduation, Amanda moved to Common Ground Farm, outside of Beacon, NY for six months. Like Hidden Villa, the farm provides educational programming for all ages and it emphasizes food justice as part of its mission. Possibly because of its proximity to New York City and only a few miles from the Dia: Beacon, there is a large artists presence between volunteers, workers, and CSA members at Hidden Villa.

I asked Amanda why there seems to be such a strong overlap between artists and the young farmers movement. Having attended conferences and coming to know the farmers community, she explained that many young farmers are either the artist or the scientist type. She sees similarities between farming and art making in a sensitivity to connect and exchange ideas, and in using your hands and mind to problem solve. For a young artist, farming can be much more rewarding than administrative or managerial jobs. Furthermore, Amanda stresses the potential for change that can come from agricultural work—change that might take the form of a week’s vegetables, developing a community supported agriculture program, or a summer camp that introduces kids to the roots of much of their food.

During her apprenticeship at Common Ground, Cathy Lebowitz was the artist in residence on the farm. Lebowitz is an editor for *Art in America*. She introduced Amanda to a number of artists who would visit the farm and they would attend shows in the city together. Her background as an artist opened doors to expand and become part of the larger community involved with the New York farm.

At the same time, Simon Draper was spending time there as he was working on his *Habitat for Artists* series. The project involved building six-foot by six-foot sheds made from recycled materials for local artists around the Hudson Valley to use as a studio temporarily.
Draper was interested in the connection between habitat and creativity or the artistic process. Amanda explained that Draper wanted to also take artists out of their traditional studios and put them out in the community or in the outdoors. "‘As an artist, I wanted to become more conscious of what I'm working with.... What is the essential aspect of creativity?’ he asked. ‘The shed is also a metaphor for immediacy,’ said Draper. "It's basic carpentry. It's made of inexpensive materials, it's not air tight" (Howard, 2009, n.p.). Draper is also considering the reality of New York studio spaces, their cost, and the generative impact that artists often have in neighborhoods—ultimately resulting in artists having to relocate. Draper’s interest in the root of creativity and the influence of space has an eerie resonance with my research. As I looked into Draper’s work after my interview with Amanda, the connections were uncanny and exciting. Why are these questions of space, creativity, and material engagement linked to farming, nature, and education right now?

After finishing her apprenticeship at Common Ground, Amanda apprenticed with Draper. She took testimonies of the artists who were occupying the spaces as part of her work with him, again blurring the lines between art, anthropology, education, design, and science. “I remember whenever I came home from New York, I was like, I’m an artist, and I just didn’t know. I am an artist and am I a farmer and I’m a teacher.” (Amanda, personal communication, April 5, 2013).

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The first time I met Amanda was a cold day in February. I had scheduled our first interview through e-mail correspondence. I had no idea what to expect from her or Cardo’s farm. Unlike the other participants, we had no previous discussions or introduction in person. I had not even seen photographs online. We sat outside for about an hour talking, fed the
chickens and collected their eggs, and ended up going into her trailer because we had gotten so
cold.

When we started the interview, I could sense that she was telling me the narrative that she had told other media representatives. In the years since starting the farm, a number of newspaper, television, and blog reporters had interviewed her. While the talk was engaging, I could feel that it was surface. After collecting the eggs, spending time talking in her trailer (Fig. 41), and opening up to share some of my interests, fears, and hopes, the conversation shifted. She shared with me that her boyfriend was moving out to the farm the following weekend, her nervousness about living together in that space, and her dreams of being married. Something had changed over the course of the interview. I felt a friendship developing.

As I left that day, I drove away on the dirt road that led to the farm and parked the car in front of the entrance to the farm (Fig 32). I began sobbing—not the kind of tearing up one might do at a wedding—but sobbing. It was unexplainable. Until that day, I would grow so frustrated trying to explain my project to people. The threads seemed to have coincidental overlaps and quirky similarities, but no one was able to really understand what I was doing, including myself.
Meeting Amanda was like finding the last puzzle piece that allows the full picture to finally emerge. But, it wasn’t about the project specifically. The experience revealed a beauty, joy, and potential in the everyday and in life itself. That meeting with her was an affirmation that I was on the right path the whole time. As her story unfolded about growing up in the suburbs, drawing a deep inspiration from her grandmother, pursuing art education based on her experience with an art teacher, learning from a social justice farm, meeting Cardo, and then doing the work in New York—each step pulled together all of the other stories including my own. She bound together the disparate assemblage. For me, it was an experience of absolute beauty. She had no idea how I was affected by our conversation. My perception of that moment is beyond language—it was an aesthetic experience based in coming to know someone and learning to believe in my intuition. I realized that all of the elements of this project were connected from the beginning.
Developing the Farm Project

At this point, I think it could be easy to categorize Amanda’s experience as one based in privilege, and in many ways, she would agree. The following section traces the development of Cardo’s Farm Project. While her privileged upbringing afforded a certain amount of security, her willingness to sacrifice the comforts of that privilege, a social life, and commit the time required to build a working farm moves her practice out of a safe experiment and into an ethical approach to life.

Amanda returned to Denton motivated to expand Cardo’s Farm from a sprout farm into a local working and educational farm. She felt some reluctance about moving back onto a farm, after having just lived in a shack in New York for the previous six months. A co-farmer, Dan, that she met in California a year before was looking for a place to work for the winter. Dan had a degree in agriculture, and he had never been in a position to run a farm operation. Both were excited about the potential to develop Cardo’s Farm Program—Dan’s focus was vegetable production, while Amanda’s was education.

Amanda’s experience building the farm project highlights the complexity of developing ethical business practices that rely on and are responsible to a community and the environment. Returning to Guattari’s ecosophical frame, it is important to consider how the farm emerges from an intersection of the social, environmental, and subjective. Amanda quickly realized that she was running a business and must learn how to manage it as such by teaching herself accounting and inventory software and honing her negotiation skills. The success of the farm is largely dependent on the Denton community, and considering how Amanda mobilized and respected the community may illuminate broader approaches to collective organizing.
While the Farm Project has been successful, Amanda was honest about sacrifices she felt she had to make to maintain its integrity. Like Ken and Sue, many her sacrifices relate to giving up comforts that come with convenience and consumption. Those choices were fueled by her vision for the future of the project, as we discussed potential for institutional collaboration, food justice projects in the Denton community, and goals for her personal life. Taken together, I hope this section points to potential and practicality. While Amanda was able to start the Farm because of her privileged background, she has continually operated it through ethical practices based on a determined will for the good of the community and environment often to the detriment of her own material comfort. In the end, the project may illustrate the potential an ethico-aesthetic paradigm, where collectivism, moderation, and direct exchange become critical characteristics.

Community-Building

Initially Dan moved out to the farm and Amanda was teaching Montessori school and working on the farm in the afternoons. Both thought they might try to build a small crop for a season and sell to local restaurants, unsure if they would maintain the farm with any permanence. During their first winter, volunteers signed on, and they both recognized the farm had more potential than they initially thought. Amanda moved out there and lived in the small (approximately four foot by four foot inside) dome structure that Cardo built (Fig. 33). Cardo is long-time friends with the Rainbow Trail and Whitehawk communities that built the ferrocement houses that Ken lived in. Amanda lived in the dome for over a year.
Amanda explained that she and Dan realized quickly how much they had to learn. Both had experience on large farms, but neither had directing, coordinating, or designing experience. They had developed a committed group of volunteers, and they were selling out of their produce, but it still was not enough to move forward or expand. They were barely making enough money to live. The first year, they experimented with a variety of ideas. She put on a makeshift summer camp and was surprised at the large turnout. The camps were full and the kids were excited. She felt that the summer camp sessions were extremely successful. They held adult workshops on gardening and farming, where she realized the difference in she and Dan’s teaching styles. Seeing his more lecture-based approach gave her the confidence to realize her belief in education through hands-on experiential learning.

That first summer, though, was a test. The temperature rose to over one hundred degrees for sixty days that summer. By the end of it, they were committed to seeing the Farm Project grow. Amanda sought the advice of a friend who had recently developed the Denton
Community Market, which is a farmer’s and artisan market held on weekends. Her friend encouraged her to create a Kickstarter campaign (http://www.kickstarter.com) to raise money for the farm. Kickstarter is a crowd funding program, where project developers tried to raise funding through community donations. The fundraising program is designated for creative projects specifically: “Our categories are Art, Comics, Dance, Design, Fashion, Film, Food, Games, Music, Photography, Publishing, Technology, and Theater.” (http://www.kickstarter.com/help/guidelines). Creators maintain 100% ownership of the project, unlike some crowd sourcing programs that require owners to operate on more of a corporate model with shareholders. The catch with Kickstarter is that developers set a desired amount and a deadline. If they do not receive 100% of the requested amount by the deadline, all of the money is returned to donators. While Amazon collects 5% of the capital raised, the fundraising mechanism is closer to direct funding than approaches I witnessed in public schools, for instance. Using Kickstarter as a resource illustrates ways that young farmers are not simply escaping or reverting to some nostalgic way of living. Rather, they are choosing elements of a former way of life as well as drawing on contemporary technology as a kind of mash-up of past and present technology. Without the network and the administrative tools that Amazon provided, the fundraiser would have been much less efficient and probably had a far more limited geographical reach.

Amanda initially planned to ask for $1000, modestly thinking about the essentials. Her friend pushed her to see how much the Denton community would support the farm, and Amanda ultimately set the goal at $15,000. To draw attention to the fundraising drive, they threw a festival at the farm, and the campaign was a success. With the capital in place, they renovated the barn to make it a more functional education center and community kitchen (Figs. 34-37),
expanded the growing space to another plot of land, put in irrigation, and started their first CSA. The capital campaign allowed them to develop a business model that could function as a more self-sustaining system.

*Figure 34.* Outside of barn at Cardo’s farm in Ponder.

*Figure 35.* Chalkboard inside renovated education center at Cardo’s farm in Ponder.
Even with the capital campaign that raised money through community donations, Amanda was only able to keep the farm going because it was based in a material form of communalism. Cardo rented the land to her and Dan. With the land also came all of his equipment, barns, and fences. That kind of infrastructure would have cost far more than the cost of rent to start up. His history in Denton with decades of volunteers helping with his sprout operation and his ties to the generational community of which Ken is a part provided an
immediate familiarity for Amanda as she developed the project. These aspects are critical to her success and could be a fatal flaw for many other start-up businesses. Coming in as part of a well-developed community and building on a name that was already associated with a set of values gave her project a legitimacy and recognition that can take decades to develop. At the same time, the Denton community recognized and welcomed Amanda’s tenacity and integrity.

Collectivism

Outside of the broader Denton community, life on the farm was its own living system that relied on sharing, moderation, respect, and a collective responsibility. Amanda shared the land with Dan and then later with another farm manager named Marie. They shared an outdoor solar shower. They buy food staples in bulk for the farm based on a strict shared budget, and they eat all meals together because the cost of each member to eat individually would be too high to manage with the resources they earn from produce. She explained that the cooking also operates on a rotation,

Well, yeah, and it’s like you work your ass off every day and then to cook every night, it just gets really hard, I remember last summer before we had a system like this. Then it was just me and Dan, and Dan didn’t cook very much so I was really just cooking for myself, and I pretty much lived off fried egg sandwiches. (Amanda, personal communication, April 5, 2013)

I have seen other groups living communally at college cooperative housing complexes. Typically they come from a collective set of values, willing to take what you need, but recognizing the benefits of living in moderation.

When I asked what has changed most for her about living out on the farm, she struggled to find a specific moment or differentiated aspects.

There’s just so much. It’s kind of blurry with the management and running – it’s all changed so much – all the sudden I became an adult. I’ve learned a lot from living with all these people and from working with Daniel in a partnership like that… negotiating … The living has really intertwined with making this whole thing work. You know, like
there’s chores, I have to go feed the chickens and a couple mornings a week make
breakfast for everybody, and we have to figure out how to make it work and I am
responsible for that. Marie was my best friend and now I am her supervisor and that can
be weird at times… Dan and I had a lot of power struggles – he helped me found the
farm, but I have legal ownership over the farm, so when you don’t see things the same,
who gets to decide? (Amanda, personal communication, April 5, 2013)

So while communalism and collective responsibility can produce a more ethically-driven life, it
can often be the negotiating and sacrifice that teaches us the most. If we begin to see the world
as entirely interconnected, how does that impact our daily choices? Interpersonal relationships
are not easy. People often use the phrase, “fences make good neighbors” from a poem by Robert
Frost. The individualization produced from material spatial divides can create fractures and
separation that keep us looking out for only ourselves, ignoring oppression, and limiting the
potential for seeing that we are truly all in this together.

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We walked past the barn, where Amanda introduced me to a man and woman who were
stacking wood. It was time to feed the chickens. I had been around chickens at Sue’s house, but
even there, I was reluctant to touch one. As we approached the large chicken pen, three ducks
waddled away toward Cardo’s house (Fig. 38).

![Ducks walking away as we entered chicken pin.](image)

Figure 38. Ducks walking away as we entered chicken pin.
The energy of the chickens clucking and running around inside the pin made me nervous. I had no idea what to do with chickens. Amanda grabbed a bucket with the feed in. The chickens excitedly looked on as we entered the fence (Fig. 39).

![Figure 39. Chickens inside of pin at Cardo’s farm in Ponder.](image)

Should I close the gate?

“No, there are some stragglers,” she replied.

Do I just throw it out randomly?

“Well, there’s little troughs. There you go. They’re going to follow you like crazy.”

Just dump it? With my hand?

“There you go. That’s good.”

Amanda made my concern with looking stupid or feeling like I should not ask questions go away. We left the pin, and she said we needed to get the eggs. Again, I had no idea what to do. My first exposure to freshly laid eggs was at Sue’s house, but I didn’t pick them out myself. We had to reach inside of these stacked brown crates (Fig. 40). I have an aversion to reaching into dark spaces, so I felt myself getting nervous again.
Amanda pulled out a blue egg, which again, I had seen for the first time at Sue’s house. I asked why they don’t put blue ones in when you buy eggs at the grocery store. She explained, “Oh, they don’t raise that kind of chicken because they aren’t high production. There are very specific – like two breeds that all of those eggs come from. The commercial producers, like, produce an egg every day. These produce, like, every other day or every third day.”

Just as I had learned about treated seeds by being in Sue’s garden, this experience collecting eggs and feeding chickens opened up an entirely new set of questions about farming and agricultural practices that I would not have been able to ask otherwise. The questions emerged from direct engagement with the nature.

We are not going to think unless we are forced to go where the forces which give food for thought are, where the forces that make thought something active and affirmative are made use of. (Deleuze, 1962/1983, p. 110)

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Although Amanda is wholly committed to the Project, she was also forthright about her fatigue with living outside and often without hot water. When she lived in the small dome, there was no indoor restroom facility and no hot water. She would start a fire to use the shower and it was still not in a walled structure. The kitchen in their barn is the only kitchen on the land, so they share it with Cardo and any of his guests as well.

That being said, Amanda clarified that she lives that life because she truly enjoys it. She enjoys working the land. It is important to her that the educational programming exists in the Denton community to offer experiences to learn the way she feels people learned in past generations. She admits that she still enjoys shopping,

But, I don’t know. I seek balance. I can still recognize parts of myself, like I still enjoy shopping for clothes — a lot — and you know that’s consumerism. Where were the clothes made? The things that a lot of conscious people are thinking about, and I’m like, ‘oh, I don’t want to think about that, I just want to buy this cute outfit’ (laughter). But then at the same time, I’m making a big effort to grow the food and eat the food. But also I will eat food if it’s not organic. I will eat factory farmed meat — I also don’t mind that. I don’t like a lot of it. But I do realize after being a farmer, how hard it is to feed people and that’s how they’re feeding our country. (Amanda, personal communication, April 5, 2013)

Like Sue and Ken, Amanda is pragmatic. She recognizes that she still desires and enjoys certain kinds of consumption, even as she is aware of their potential detrimental effects. She is also aware of the necessity for some types of industrialized food production, even though its practices are often unethical. This consciousness gives her daily choices an honesty and integrity that derives from a person who sees the whole picture and is not operating through blind consensus.

She explained that many days, she would like to just sit down and relax at the end of the day, but the trailer she was living in during the interview didn’t have any spaces like that. It had only a bed and a desk. She said, “Sometimes I am just like, ‘When, when can I have a normal
house? Turn on the faucet and have hot water came out” (Amanda, personal communication, April 5, 2013).

*Figure 41.* Exterior of trailer Amanda lived in during first visit.

Again, she admits that she grew up very comfortably, so I asked why she and her boyfriend do not rent a house away from the farm. She explained that she used to stay at his house three days a week, and she felt too disconnected from the farm, concerned about whether the chickens were safe or fed on time. In addition to that, her income from the farm is not enough to cover rent and separate food every day for an extended amount of time.

In the end, she explained that she is comfortable in her job security. She admits that she does not make a lot of money, but she is not concerned about being wealthy. She would like some amount of financial security, and she recognized how dependent her situation was on Cardo at the time. She had been planning a way to move off the farm and rebuild independently in town, but without the infrastructure that Cardo’s land provided, she knew it would be tough.
Looking to the Future

These final paragraphs introduce ideas for the future that Amanda and I brainstormed at our last interview. It also follows her to her new home, and reveals my experience of visually connecting the past and future through Amanda’s art work and my photographs. As I conclude this chapter, I am aware of the ongoing nature of these relationships and the fallacy of research that attempts to place parenthesis around life. As with Ken and Sue, the end of my final formal interview with Amanda was a discussion about what I had found and what questions had emerged in the research up to that point. I wanted each person to have an opportunity to hear my thoughts and respond, or more importantly, for us to generate ideas together.

Our conversation turned to thinking through how she planned to expand the farm, and what she might do if it does not work out. Her measure of the farm’s success or viability is that it provides her and her employees a living wage. She knows that classroom teaching could be a possibility, but she sees it as a sacrifice because she would not be able to work outside in the same way. To expand the farm, she had a number of ideas. One was to purchase property in Denton and another was to work with the City of Denton out of an educational facility at a nature reserve. As we talked through ideas, I developed a broader understanding of the limitations and potential of small-scale farming and independent educational programming.

Labels and Ethics

Through our conversation, I learned about the realities of organic and locally grown produce sales. As we talked about sustainable practices and organic farming, Amanda spoke with disdain about a local organic grocer. As she described, “he’s a peddler in town who hides under fancy words like organic, sustainability, and community” (Amanda, personal communication, April 5, 2013). Essentially, he is using industry terminology for a disingenuous
practice. He does not grow anything himself. He drives to a number of local farms and buys the most visually appealing produce wholesale.

It’s so hard for us to compete with because he can drive all over and take out the stuff that looks bad, and we’ve worked our asses off and we’re next to his glorious stand with our little bruised vegetables…. I just realized how many people are buying his stuff because of the words – sustainable and organic – we don’t have any of those words. I refuse. You can talk about our growing practices, but I’m not interested in being associated with Monsanto and sustainability. It’s a load of shit. But he’s totally capitalizing on it. (Amanda, personal communication, April 5, 2013).

Amanda explained that wholesale distribution that relies on the middle man kills small farms because they do not get market value for their produce. Without the middle man distributor, farmers get market value for their food. In addition, when you buy directly from farmers, you may also have a better understanding of what goes into growing it.

I would never have known about these unfair market practices. I thought that the local distributor was good because he was “local.” She pointed out how people like me think they are doing the right thing because he uses misleading labels. It affirmed, again, the power of direct engagements, encounters, and exchanges. The conversation also revealed how her commitment to working with fundamental processes runs through every aspect of her life. Considering the challenges of marketing and wholesale competition, she had begun to see that basing the farm’s viability on the sale of produce was not a viable plan, so her focus was to expand the educational side.

Institutional Potential

She recognized that any type of institutional collaboration involves negotiation, and she was concerned about what kind of pedagogical compromises may be required. She had attempted a partnership with the Department of Sustainability at the University of North Texas, but the bureaucratic processes dragged on and eventually the partnership dissolved. She is also
wary of the kind of limited control big partnerships can bring regarding approvals and deadlines, as she experienced with the sustainability project.

She had previous experiences working with Denton ISD and a grant-funded educational program called Communities in Schools. The school programs bring large groups of students out in buses, and Amanda and her staff provide tours of the farm. She charges four dollars a child, so in the two hour visit, she is able to earn the same as weeks of growing produce and selling at the community market. She also realized that in those two hours, she was able to expose an exponentially larger number of people to the possibility of local farms than her normal group of folks that shop at the organic grocery store.

Amanda was thrilled to move beyond what she considered the border of her common customers, who are typically upper-middle-class and educated into more at-risk students and low income populations. Expanding her work to broader populations goes back to her interest in food justice. She sees the farm as a leveling of classes and ethnicities in our culture, but also how food is wasted, commodified, and industrialized. Thinking about what it means to feed people who cannot afford to buy food introduces much broader issues about education and whether delivering kale and rhubarb to low-income families is even beneficial if they do not know what to do with it. Eating healthy food often costs more than industrialized food and it can take time to cook. These are some of the challenges that food justice efforts are facing. It is not as simple as giving out free vegetables. Amanda sees ways that after-school programs on a farm, where students are paid with the food they have grown, could be one positive approach that is educational, service-oriented, and purpose-driven.

Amanda has also made efforts to go into local schools as a collaborator. She worked with a local high school, helping them revitalize their school’s green house that had housed the
Four-H Club’s pigs for a decade. The plan was to work with high school students on an extracurricular project to build a garden in the greenhouse. They were not even able to move beyond cleaning out the greenhouse because the students had too many other obligations with sports, work, and other extracurricular activities. We discussed how sports and band might earn them a scholarship, but gardening and horticulture were not valued the same.

Amanda realized that to get into the schools, she would have to write a curriculum that addressed the standards by which they measure value directly. Her challenge was to work with the standards in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) to develop a curriculum that she could demonstrate would improve their test scores. While we both agreed that a testing culture is killing our school system, we also acknowledge that working within the constraints of the system might be necessary to grow her farm and change public school as it is. Like Ken and Sue, this form of tactical subjectivity might make an impact. If we can develop a document that looks and functions in the way that corporate testing frameworks operate, but results in students developing a broader understanding of the world through direct engagements with nature, then that is what it takes.

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Since our last interview, Amanda bought a farm house in Denton (Fig. 42) that was built in the 1890’s. She married her boyfriend in front of the house. She is rebuilding the farm on that land.
I started talking about the first day I went to pick up vegetables there. She invited me in because she wanted to show me something. As we moved through the living room and kitchen, back to her office space, I saw the vision that Amanda had dreamed about—a place to sit down and a cozy kitchen with hot water. She said, “I never got to show you any of this stuff in the trailer because everything was packed up. This is my grandmother’s drawing of her farm.” (Fig. 43)
As I read the words on each of the buildings, I could see Amanda’s farm so clearly: garage, barn, hen house, pasture, and wagon. Across the top her grandmother had labeled the plots for the crops: potatoes, peas, watermelon, corn, peanuts, sorghum. Her grandmother’s handwriting was exactly like my grandmother’s. Looking at the small map drawn on notebook paper was a flashback to my childhood with Gran planning upcoming changes to the house and then a strange awareness of my place in Amanda’s home—a home built at the turn of the century as a farm house.

Next she showed me a drawing she made of her grandmother’s house (Fig. 44). And a large multimedia piece that incorporated drawings and paintings inspired by the house (Fig. 45).
Figure 45. Approximately 6’ x 4’ multimedia piece inspired by grandmother’s farm.

Figure 46. Detail of house in multimedia piece inspired by grandmother’s farm.
Again, a flood of emotions came over me. She made this work five years earlier, based on a drawing her grandmother made and childhood experiences at her grandmother’s house. We were standing in a house that she just bought as a fulfillment of a dream she talked about with me four months earlier. Her new house where these were hung evoked images of the paintings (refer to Fig. 42 & Fig. 46). Amanda is a farmer who makes paintings about women farmers.

Figure 47. Detail of shelf with jars in multimedia piece inspired by grandmother’s farm.

I looked closely at the details on the six-foot tall piece, and I noticed a painting of Mason jars in the center (Fig. 47). I remembered a photograph I had taken the first time I was at Cardo’s farm in Ponder.

Figure 48. Photograph of jars on a shelf taken in kitchen of farm house in Ponder.
I did not know what the layers upon layers of experience, learning, and performative awareness meant. Was this representation, performance, immanence? I did not know how to process what I was seeing. The feeling came over me again that I was becoming aware of the potential of the everyday, drawing inspiring connections in a way that may be found among limitless sources when we become interested and engage directly with people, land, and life.
CHAPTER 7
ART EDUCATION AS COLLECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

The rhizome is all together different, a map and not a tracing. Make a map, not a tracing… What distinguishes the map from a tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious closed in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields. It fosters connections between field, he removal of blockages on bodies without organs… It can be drawn on a wall, conceived as a work of art, constructed as a political action or as a mediation. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12)

I am not, of course, talking about mere physical beauty—the new beauty can only be a beauty of situation… nothing really new can be expected until the masses in action awaken to the conditions that are imposed on them in all domains of life, and to the practical means of changing them. (Debord, 1955/2006a, p. 11)

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As I begin this final chapter for the fifth time, I find that nomadic inquiry has done its work on me. My ideas continue to creep forward, drawing new connections and finding new paths. Unlike a methodological approach that sets out a course with delineated boundaries, nomadic inquiry engages the potential of thought to push us out into an open field of creativity, where we emerge anew through perpetual becomings. For Deleuze and Guattari, thought deterritorializes to produce the smooth space of the nomad, but that open terrain is never the answer. The process of becoming-other requires that we also reterritorialize through temporary closures that bring thought into form.

I must stop here and bring my transversal connections into form, knowing that this is only a brief layover in a lifetime of lines of flight. Like any work of art, this dissertation is the byproduct of an ongoing process of curiosity, experimentation, and production. As I pull together our four stories, I hope that this project may reveal the potential of life, itself, as a work of art.

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Taking Flight

I began this research with a curiosity about what the homes of creative people might be able to teach us. I believed that our daily social practices are the true indicators of what we believe and the kind of people we are in the world. By engaging with people in their homes, I thought I might be able to understand how a home becomes a node through which subjectivity is produced.

My project developed organically after I met Ken at missile base. My relationship with Ken started a path where I began to identify a network of people in the Denton community. They all engaged in creative practices that seemed to be grounded in an ethical responsibility to the earth and other living forms. I initially labeled their practices DIY because none of the participants made a living as a professional artists and many of the practices in which I was interested, such as gardening, farming, craft, and decorating would not traditionally be labeled as art. I also recognized potential for the field of art education in participants’ descriptions of learning independently and through community engagement. I planned to visit their homes two times to conduct semi-formal interviews that would be part of home tours. I hoped the visits would allow me to view their homes as creative assemblages, and to consider objects within them as byproducts of lifetimes of experiences. I planned to structure the dissertation through narratives: mine and theirs, where a timeline could develop across their lives as well as the shifting terrain of our work together. Like Tamboukou’s (2008) work with female art educators, my work would see participants and their homes as “machinic assemblages” brought to life through narratives. Like mine, Tamboukou’s research traced the events of her participants’ lives to consider “the formation of women artists as nomadic subjects” (Tamboukou, 2008, p. 372). Tamboukou (2008) explains,
If, as Deleuze has argued, it is only in narratives that events can leave their marks, tracing events and following lines of nomadic becomings by way of narratives is a new, rich, and undoubtedly contested area in the field of gender and education yet to be explored. (pp. 372-73)

While St. Pierre (1997a) uses nomadic inquiry to draw attention to the researcher as much as the participants, Tamboukou draws on nomadic subjectivity and Deleuzo-Guattarian theories to engage with the fluid space of territories and subjectivities. As I engaged with Ken, Sue, and Amanda, I thought I might be able to identify the creative potential of becoming nomad through stories of people’s everyday lives. I could not anticipate, though, the myriad directions the research might go.

My research questions evolved through the research. I questioned how spaces might function as ecosophical assemblages, considering how subjectivity is produced through a nomadic engagement with participants in domestic, public, and institutional spaces. By considering issues of ethics in each participant’s social and material practices, I considered how an ethico-aesthetic paradigm might have implication for the field of art education. Each question relies on the other, so while I attempt to address them individually, understand in advance that the way I invoke an ethico-aesthetic paradigm relies on nomadic thinking within spatial assemblages.

Temporary Layover

I formally started the research in January of 2012. Almost immediately, narratives traveled across time, traversing a century of land development and social practices. While I expected to hear interesting stories about creative practices and inspiration gleaned from participants’ formal and informal education, I did not expect to develop deep and meaningful relationships with each person. I did not anticipate becoming emotionally connected with each person or seeing my childhood so differently as a result of learning their stories. My experience
has strengthened my passion for research into people’s everyday lives, my desire to produce change and hope through education that has no spatial boundaries, and my awareness of a powerful aesthetics of engagement.

Each home became a site of production, resistance, creativity, education, performativity, and a do-it-yourself ethic. The stories from the sites represent an embodied and reflexive journey through the performative practices of artist, researcher, educator, community-member, and tourist through the lens of a culturally constructed subjectivity that emerged through the process of coming to know differently. I have tried to present themes and practices that repeatedly emerged through my process as threads that weave the sites together. In order to weave the myriad threads into a useful form, I focus findings and conclusions primarily on data and literature introduced to this point.

The three previous chapters flowed through space and time. The stories, themes, practices, and relationships folded in on each other as I got deeper into the process. Similarities across sites, such as livestock, agricultural practices, and art making, allowed me to recognize differences between each participant’s approach and intention. So as I address each research question, I will consider broad themes that have potential for art education as well as broad social and cultural practices in the everyday. I will look back at my initial inquiry into the concept of DIY and address ways that established concerns in art education about creativity, interpretation, community, visual culture, arts-based research, and broader issues concerning environmentalism.

The following sections are structured through the research questions. To answer question one, I consider how nomadic thought, or openness to the potential of knowing differently through engagement, was the basis of my inquiry but could also be recognized in participants’
artistic practices. By taking an interest in their lives, participants were also able to recognize how they practiced a style of living based on self-determined ethical frames and responsibilities to life. I shifted nomadic inquiry from a methodology to a broader approach to the everyday that is critical and affirmative, awake and affected.

The second question considers the potential of using an ecosophic approach to spatial assemblages. The approach promoted an awareness of how social relations are structured. This empowering frame recognizes the subjective potential of restructuring vectors of social, mental, and physical force to affect change. To answer question two, I focus on the power of direct engagements, encounters, and exchanges in four spaces: domestic, institutional, community, and public. By focusing on direct engagements, I consider the potential of eliminating mediating structures to affect ethical approaches to learning, consumption, and developing community relations.

The third question addresses everyday possibilities for an ethico-aesthetic paradigm. I briefly examine Guattari’s concept in relation to a history of ethic/aesthetic philosophies, but more importantly, I identify possibilities that emerged through my engagements with spaces, people, and objects in the everyday. Ultimately I realized that Foucault’s (1984/1990) ideas about life as a work of art and Ranciere’s (2010) ideas about dissensus could be equally argued and valid in this research. While I spend time examining Guattari’s work, this section is more of an opening on to future research than a definitive answer.

Finally, my research in domestic spaces deepened my interest in Socially Engaged Art (Helguera, 2011; Kester, 2011; Thompson, 2012) and its potential in art education. I consider how my work is positioned in relation to contemporary art practices to consider implications for the field of art education. The conclusion proposes a collective and dissensual approach to
teaching, where ideas of an ethico-aesthetic life may take our field into new pedagogical territories. We may see the potential for art education’s role in cultivating a sensibility based in thinking, process, and potential across disciplines. In the end, I position all spaces as sights of pedagogical potential, where we may become learning participants and collaborative investigators through direct engagements as aesthetic experiences. Ultimately, life becomes an engagement with the world with limitless creative and pedagogical potential when thought itself is considered an aesthetic form.

Nomadic Thinking and Affect

The first research question asked, *How might nomadic or activated thinking generate new ways of seeing the everyday through a focus on affect?* I have used the *concept* of the nomad as a method, a metaphor, and a path through my research process. Bal (2002) argues for the use of the concept as a method of analysis in the humanities to eliminate the binary structure associated with traditional or disciplinary approaches. The metaphor of traveling illustrates how I form concepts from bridges, paths, joints, and zones that connect, traverse, wind, and expand over time by focusing and decentralizing simultaneously. My role as nomad functioned in the way that Bal describes, where I built a bridge between the three homes. As outsider, I nomadically entered new territories, and I was in a perpetual state of becoming-other in relation to participants’ histories, practices, and ideas. Bal borrows Deleuze and Guattari’s metaphor of rhizomatic development to describe a state of *becoming*, as opposed to a linear conceptual progression. As such, she illustrates how concepts neither begin nor end; they co-mingle, even fuse, and then diverge.

Nomadism functions conceptually in a number of ways in Deleuzian theory. For instance, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe a nomadic weapon as
active, engendering, and traversing; associated with potential, free action, affect, projection, speed, and becoming (a performative and embodied domain). I like to think that my presence operated in this way, but rather than focusing on the violent connotation of a weapon, my force as affirmative presence may have produced an affective relation with participants, where they saw their life differently. As nomadic weapon, my inquiry may have disrupted the structure of participants’ ways of seeing themselves, potentially recognizing new significance to their individual experiences and daily practices.

In terms of ethnographic inquiry, St. Pierre (1997a) similarly uses a nomadic approach to engage with the production of subjectivity through individual social practices. Like St. Pierre (1997a), I was “interested in how women construct their subjectivities within the limits and possibilities of the cultural practices that are available to them” (p. 365). Her nomadic inquiry into the women of her hometown has been a touchstone in many ways. Over the last two years, I would forget about her work and discover it anew, finding comfort in her similar struggle with the messiness of nomadic ethnography and the ethical dilemmas of representing a life. Like me, she was not only interested in the production of subjectivity, but also in the ways that people “create themselves as ethical subjects of their actions” (St. Pierre, 1997a, p. 365). Her work on an ethics of existence drew from Foucault’s care of the self, while mine addresses a comparable theory from Guattari (1992/1995), namely, the ethico-aesthetic paradigm. In the end, I have realized that my desire to stick so closely with Deleuze’s and Guattari’s theories misses the point. The potential of nomadism is not to develop an allegiance to any singular method or practice.

Nomadic inquiry is, instead, about activated living and thinking that is relational and embodied. As a methodological approach, nomadic inquiry was at times problematic because it
is so fluid. My desire for openness introduced chaos at a number of points in the process.
Finding a way to order that chaos allowed me to see both connections and differences more
clearly, as the process required time, repetition, and a willingness to continue inquiring. As a
way of structuring the potential of nomadic inquiry in my research, I have divided the answer to
question one into a series of sections: activated thinking, engaging affect, memory and eternal
return, and performativity and nomadic becoming.

Activated Thinking

The initial way that I used nomadic thinking in this project was through activated
thinking that traversed space. The dissertation started from my curiosity about bomb shelters.
Deleuze and Guattari (1994) describe how art awakens us and teaches us to feel. I was engaged
in a photography project that had heightened my alertness to the unfamiliar in my local
environment. The visual appearance of shelters in the ground triggered a curiosity in me about
how shelters came into being and types of cultural conditions that would produce the desire in
suburban homeowners for a underground barrack. An artistic practice produced a new
awareness of forms, and an activated curiosity pushed me to ask questions and eventually find
the missile base.

From the outset, I developed the inquiry process nomadically. As I trespassed on Ken’s
property to photograph the site, I was driven by a curiosity and an awareness of difference
through similarity. How could a space that looked so similar to a school building actually be a
military base? Reflections such as those allowed me to recognize ways that critical theory, such
as Foucault’s (1978a) analysis in Discipline and Punish of military, prison, and schooling exist
in the world.
I developed the group of research participants through a networked process. My cycle of developing a topic and recruiting a group of participants was entirely based on curiosity, conversations, and building relationships. It made for a very messy process, but it was true to the nomadic form. There was no distinct method beyond direct engagements and embodied encounters. Through months of my building relationships, knowledge emerged. Without the structure of an established and well-mapped methodology, I had to find threads as they emerged. I had a set of questions related to DIY practices, and while they ordered the chaos to a certain degree, I repeatedly learned that a simplified representation of critical and creative practices was painfully inadequate.

Each participant seemed similarly motivated by a kind of nomadic learning embedded in active thought. Ken repeatedly talked about moments of awakening through curiosity and experimentation. The use of cement was a motif in Ken’s life. He credited working with his father to pour cement to create a patio as a child. Self-sufficiency and the convenience of the medium reappeared in conceptual and material ways throughout his life. As a traveler in Mexico, he was drawn to the stonework at Aztec ceremonial sites. When he moved to Rainbow Trail, he saw the potential to use cement to construct an entire home, and as he bought and embellished the missile base, it was the cement structure and the potential for ceremonial spaces that drew him to the base. By following the cement theme, we see how a process of subjectification emerged in places and practice for Ken.

For Sue, I recognize a similar learning process that included curiosity, experimentation, and nature. She described the freedom of having little supervision because of her mother’s long work hours working, along with living so close to an open field. Her father helped her develop a passion for nature by traveling to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan as a child, but an ongoing
curiosity and desire to engage has propelled her since. As she showed me around her home and
garden, most of the plants were parts of a story of learning through trying, failing, and inquiry.
Again, by tracing the plants as pedagogical nodes, I was able to understand how subjectivity was
produced for Sue through her material practices.

Amanda’s story is possibly the most nomadic in the sense that the objects that have taken
form throughout her life, from art to agriculture, come from curiosity, material investigation,
time, and becoming. Annette Lawrence told me that she encouraged Amanda’s interest in
farming because farming and art making are essentially the same process: you work for a very
long time to develop a skill, you plant seeds, and some grow, you try to figure out why others did
not, and you get better. You learn along the way.

In all of these stories, including my own, the processes of coming to know required a
passionate interest, a willingness to keep learning, and the time to allow knowledge to develop. I
had no idea where I was going or exactly what I was looking for. I knew that I had a deep
interest in these people, in their lifestyle, their ethical frames, and I knew that my interest was
focused on how their lifestyles were related to creativity and education. By traveling their lives
nomadically, I was able to see the messiness in my history of knowledge development and see
connections across time, land, cultures, and practices that were completely unexpected.

Deleuze’s lifelong project was essentially to understand how thought works. This was a large
part of what I ended up trying to come to terms with as I mapped this project of coming to know.

A thought’s logic isn’t a stable rational system…. A thought’s logic is like a wind
blowing on us, a series of gusts and jolts. You think you’ve got to port, but then find
yourself thrown back out onto the open sea. (Deleuze, 1990, p. 94)
Engaging Affect

The second significant element of nomadic inquiry is affect. Art extracts affect according to Deleuze and Guattari, where “the power of art lies in its capacity to produce blocs of sensation” (Hillier, 2011, p. 873). Outside of thinking through art specifically, though, “affect generates involuntary engagement, in turn initiating a state of deep reflection” (Bassnett, 2009 on Deleuze and affect, p. 244). My use of nomadic inquiry stresses affect in its openness to direct engagement and embodied knowing that goes beyond codified knowledge of language and discipline. Rather than simply addressing shock or surprise, a focus on affect privileges the process of and performativity of engaging difference and recognizing change. Moments of affect can often point to ruptures in knowing, and by consciously addressing them they can trigger reflection on what may have been unconsciously assumed prior. Deleuze (1990) considers how the affective regime was critical to Foucault’s thought development, explaining that “As with all great thinkers, his thought always developed through crises and abrupt shifts that were the mark of its creativity” (p. 83). This description of great thinkers points to the importance of affect in creativity. Moments of crises can often emerge from affective responses to life. Affect produces activated thinking, but affective encounters tend to happen beyond language and produce a kind of data that is challenging to capture or explain in traditional research methods (St. Pierre, 1997a). The affective elements of my research was probably the most personal. The moments of affect were often the passages written in italics, as I would feel a deep sense of joy, frustration, surprise, or have emotions that went beyond a singular description.

In describing his relationship with Foucault, Deleuze (1990) explains, “It’s easier to remember a gesture or a laugh than a date” (p. 83). There are a number of passages in the research that I describe as affective data because they fit the kind of knowledge that Deleuze
describes in the previous passage. For instance, in Chapter 2, I describe a moment when Ken looked back at me after playfully flicking a grasshopper toward me the first time I visited the missile base. While I can describe that experience in words, the emotion and the shift in my perspective of him from that experience still elicit tears and a feeling in my stomach because I was overcome with a sense of compassion. More importantly, those are experiences that only emerge from direct engagement.

My initial experiences at Ken’s are some of the most vibrant, in terms of the feeling of nervousness, exhilaration, and awe. My nervousness not only came from being in a new place, but also from my initial perception of Ken as strange or weird. When I initially told friends about meeting Ken, I often described how odd he seemed. As I became aware of my prejudice, I questioned how I read him as strange. Was it that he was willing to live in a missile base? Was it his voice’s slow cadence, his hand that shook as a result of nerve damage, or possibly his willingness to invite a stranger on to his land? How did these aspects register as difference? Tolia-Kelly (2006) argues that Deleuze’s approach to affect is universalizing in its assumption of an “essentialist identity” that does not question ways that “collectivities are differently capable of affecting and being affected because of their access to social/geopolitical power” (p. 215). Tolia-Kelly’s concern for a universalizing or essentialist potential of Deleuze’s work is not lost on me. I have often questioned how the use of a nomadic frame might imply a colorblind approach that ignores difference. Instead, I feel that Deleuze celebrates difference as a form of becoming. Even while Ken was similar to myself ethnically, he became individualized by differences. Although Ken is a white male (unlike the differences in race and ethnicity to which Tolia-Kelly referred), my affective response to Ken’s difference may have been embedded in a normative cultural frame, where he did not fit the healthy, employed, suburban white male. While I agree
with Tolia-Kelly that the use of affect as a reflexive concept should be troubled to address uses of power and political geographies, in my experiences, affective awareness often became an index for breaks or shifts in my way of thinking.

In relation to Sue, two experiences produced important affective ruptures: the fundraising event and learning about the treatment of seeds. Together, these experiences redirected my thought about the way that vitality is directed as a result of capitalism. It is hard to describe what happened. I felt a sense of disgust that emerged from an activated awareness and criticality. I was in a room with many teachers during that fundraising event, and none of them looked bothered by the experience. And the same ignorance and seeming lack of desire to understand complains about capitalism’s ill effects could be applied to genetically-modified organism (GMO), such the seeds in Sue’s garden. While there is an activist movement against GMO’s, many people neither know nor care about biopolitics. These were both deeply critical moments in the research, and they produced new lines of thought and a new ways of understanding globalization and the depth of capitalism’s force to structure the possibilities of social life.

Deleuze and Guattari (1972/1983) argue that “capitalism is without a doubt the universal of every society” (p. 270) in its ability to restructure its force indefinitely to alienate, territorialize, and enslave. In the institutionalized education environment, capitalism took hold in the traditional sense of supply and demand, where the school community needed capital and resources. More importantly, though, I witnessed the production of desire in the children as they heard about the possible rewards in that fundraising rally. Producing desire is a way of determining and constructing values. By taking students out of their “special” subjects, such as music, art, and physical education, to spend the time producing a desire to consume, the educational values of the school were demonstrated and reified in the students’ affective
responses. School administrators demonstrated which classes they felt could be sacrificed by taking kids out of them, and students’ screams and cheers demonstrated that the information being presented was emotionally significant.

Nomadic thinking does not necessarily function *a priori*, Sue provided a kind of scaffolding for my critical perspective as a mentor in the classroom and as a critical thinker more broadly. Much of our relationship was based in intellectual discussions about the world and we both operate from a critical paradigm. My work with her strengthened the force of my prior perspectives on consumption, neoliberalism, and accountability because of the nature of our relationship. She dwells in a space of intellectual inquiry on a daily basis, so the time with her engendered these kinds of awakenings. O’Sullivan (2010) explains that “affect names the intensive quality of life. The risings and fallings, the movement, from one state of being to another, the *becomings*” (p. 198). Sue is keenly aware of an affective engagement with the world and is able to utilize that force in her practice as an educator.

Finally, the experiences with Amanda reside more in the terrain of the indescribable. As a narrative process, Amanda’s story operates as the denouement of the three-part narrative. Again, my relationship with Amanda was entirely situated in the research initially. By the time that I started working with her, I had developed a certain amount of comfort with the dissertation, and I had developed an awareness of the process as a form of performative art. Perhaps I was able to allow myself to feel more, perhaps it was because my work with her was often a relief from feelings overburdened and it tended to involve more manual labor. There were two deeply emotional reflective narratives in Amanda’s chapter: one was the moment I was leaving her farm after the initial interview and the second was the day we were working on the greenhouses. In both experiences, working with Amanda and having sincere and meaningful
conversations that took place while we were working on the farm shifted my emotional state. I was overcome with a sense of love and joy, but those descriptions are inadequate. I would describe them as aesthetic experiences that escape linguistic descriptions. Both experiences illustrated the importance of direct engagements for me. While a certain amount of historical or processual data was gained during those visits, deeply personal and reflective moments were authentic and aesthetic experiences in the research process.

The most significant moments for me in the research emerged from direct encounters that produced an affective response in me. As an educator, this is critical. Not only can I not describe exactly how I felt, but each time was entirely situated in place and time. I could not reproduce the experiences, but the points of rupture were also the sites that produced subjectivity. I recognize the vagueness of the analysis of affect. Genosko (1998) explains, “the problem of openness and non-centered systems harkens back to the aesthetic experiments in music and sculpture of the 1960s …. openness has been, in this non-traditional tradition, tied to ambiguity” (p. 96) He goes on to explain, though, that this kind of ambiguity also cultivates movement, rewrites hierarchies, and undermines established routes (Genosko, 1998).

There would be no way to assess aesthetic experiences without looking at where they led as a result. This is one of the most significant aspects of this research project. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) argue that art teaches us to feel, and I view my affected moments as aesthetic experiences. How do we produce sites of nomadic art education where these kinds of experiences are valued? jagodzinski (2008) suggests that it requires a relocation of subjectivity as the site/sight/cite of creative becoming to introduce a new self-reflexivity in visual education…. Site here must be understood not as a specific physical location, but a site of nomadic singularity that harbors a life—nomadic in the sense that it is nowhere and everywhere. (p. 156)
In jagodzinski’s proposal, we hear a shift to an aesthetic pedagogy that transcends any individual pedagogical site to one that is subjective and nomadically singular—an approach to life itself. I will address or propose an ethico-aesthetic approach to art education that will engage a history of “authentic” and nomadic education at the end of this chapter. For now, I think it important to simply acknowledge the importance of direct engagements and encounters for their affective potential. Affect may wake us from a consumption-driven slumber. Affect may bring us back to life.

Memory and Double Articulation

Finally, the third theme related to nomadic inquiry is memory. I specifically asked participants about their educational backgrounds. As they shared stories about their histories, each person related those stories to objects in his or her home. Objects typically illustrated or symbolized some aspect of their knowledge development, whether it was an educational experience or a memory of coming to know self or the world differently. As I looked back at the relationships between objects and memory, I found that Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) ideas about double articulation allowed me to think about the ways that material forms operated through form and expressions. Participants’ objects, narratives, and current social practices express aspects of the past, and participants choose to repeat aspects of their histories through actions in their everyday. Considering their choices helped me see how we might look at other histories to find their power, choosing to express the affirmative force of our memories.

In terms of my research, I questioned material elements in form of spaces, objects, and histories. Engaging with participants’ lives and environments nomadically allowed me to think about them relationally. In other words, I did not look for a truth or a concise history of the spaces, objects, and histories, but attempted to see how those material elements were alive in that
moment. To inquire into an object’s significance, one approach might be to research the object’s history and identify the cultural conditions from which it emerged. To understand an object’s meaning and purpose, I could examine its material form, the medium from which it is constructed, and how that form was relevant at the time the object was produced. Engaging with forms, such as Ken’s home and the repurposed agricultural objects that adorn its walls helped me understand how a form relates to its purpose, and how that purpose can shift through practices of adaptive reuse. “All force is appropriation, domination, exploitation of a quantity of reality. Even perception, in its diverse aspects, is the expression of forces which appropriate nature” (Deleuze, 1962/1983, p. 3). Deleuze is describing Nietzsche’s argument for the death of god, where there is no singular truth but, rather, forces that express in each moment. This is important to understanding how each participant’s choices reveal the multiple ways that objects and histories can be rearticulated or used differently in a different time. For example, Sue gave new force or life to objects, such as repurposing wood to construct her fence, or building a compost pile as an ongoing regeneration of organisms.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) describe the concept of the double articulation with regard to substance/form and content/expression dichotomies. Ultimately, the latter term (form and expression) in each set relates to how matter operates, how it is structured, and what it does. This active engagement with matter exceeds interpretation aimed at coding through a static analysis of an object’s substance and content. The more active approach is less about what the object is and instead asking what it does. The latter approach resists the desire to close its meaning through coding and representation. To use the concept of double articulation with individuals’ histories is more abstract. Deleuze (1962/1983) explains, “There is no event, no phenomena, word or thought that does not have a multiple sense. A thing is sometimes this
sometimes that, sometimes something more complicated—depending on the forces (the gods) which take possession of it” (p. 4). The significance of this multiple nature of events is critical as I consider the potential of a nomadic being and his or her past. I often feel a sense of naiveté when talking about nomadic theory because it can sound as though I am able to be entirely open at any given time, free of cultural baggage, or historical constructions. I disagree with that idea. Rather, the stories in this research exemplify ways that participants took possession of the events of their lives or cultural histories and made them affirmative forces. By examining how the force of their histories work in their current circumstances, their memories can be viewed similarly to material culture where a history is appropriated and expressed in a new way.

For Deleuze, repetition is always difference. When an action is repeated, it is taking place in another time. Its conditions are different. Past ideas, call them memories or knowledge, are applied in a new context each day. Repetition could be considered a conceptual form of appropriation, comparable to the material examples given. By looking at ways that participants’ pasts take form today and considering how those histories are expressed in their current lives, the concept of the double articulation allowed me to see the active and affirmative potential of memory.

Each of the three participants drew from the empowering aspects of their histories. Ken explicitly states that he bought the missile base because it had a solid structure. While that seems to be a purely materialist concern, if I look more closely, I see that conceptually the base fulfills the type of communal environment that Ken hoped to recreate, but put to a different end. The rooms on the base that were constructed for large groups of men, such as the recreation space outside and the mess hall, were made for a type of communal living. Ken appropriates the communal potential of the structures and puts them to work in a new context through the
collective effort of his friends. Rather than regimented schedules based on man-made order, Ken bases events there on annual solstices and personal events. He has not abandoned the history of the place, but used certain characteristics of it for a community-driven force based on a love for nature and a communal collectivism.

Furthermore, Sue credits her parents’ ethical frame for her concern for the environment and consciousness of the value of objects. She explained that her parents derived that ethic in part from growing up during the Great Depression. Rather than choosing to consider lack as the force from which to draw energy, Sue uses an ethic produced from rationing and limited resources to respect objects and live moderately, with an awareness of the danger of overconsumption. I do not mean to argue that every person internalized experiences in the same way. Sue acknowledges that her father has adopted an entirely different relationship with consumption and objects. She explained that his practices of consumption could be described as hoarding, and that he explicitly voices a desire to never be poor again. Sue celebrates frugality, while her father resents that period of his life. This difference illustrates how the way we play with forces is often a choice. Moreover, Sue grew up a child of divorce and was often left without supervision because her mother was working many hours to support the family. She finds strength in stories of freedom and self-reliance; where many people bemoan a childhood of negligence or lack of resources. Finding strength in our histories is a way of nomadically and affirmatively appropriating the force of our historical baggage.

Amanda developed an interest in the lives of women farmers in part from her relationship with her grandmother. Although we can find a wealth of oppressive and misogynist practices toward women in rural areas during the 1930s, rather than focus on this past, Amanda has drawn strength from the empowering aspects of women’s lives, women who, she explained, worked as
physically hard as the men. Like Deleuze argued for Nietzsche, if I want to know the strength of
a history, I must ask how it is alive today to see the form that history has taken. When I drive
past Amanda’s house and see her working on the land, I see a woman farmer and I see strength.

_Performativity as Nomadic Becoming_

As I look at histories in an attempt to reconstruct them, to reveal the invisible histories
inside of the oft-used stories of our culture, I put them into play today in an affirmative way. By
looking at how each participant negotiated their past in an affirmative way, I began to consider
ways that social reconstruction works in education and critical theory. I questioned the stories
that were omitted, ignored, and made silent to promote one history that often speaks to a
hegemonic ideology. The participants reconfigured their limits and the potentially oppressive
aspects of their pasts to produce affirmative futures. I considered how affirmative aspects of
other histories might be enacted to put knowledge to work. The _double articulation_ here asserts
what form of active expression may be chosen to compose our future. This mode of expression
brings me to performance and performativity. The _how_ of our history’s effect is embedded in the
performative nature of each participant’s life. To conclude this section, I discuss performativity
as a concept because of its relation to the fluid and processual nature of nomadism. The concept
is critical to my ideas on the potential of art education that will be addressed at the end of the
chapter.

In each of the examples above, participants’ values or the aspects of history they choose
to emphasize is recognizable in the ways that they play out in their day-to-day lives. A person
might look at the objects they own, the stories they recount, or the relationships in their life to
assess what they value. For Sue, the laundry hung around her house to save energy took us to a
story of doing her own laundry at a young age because her mother was gone all the time. It was
not a story of neglect, but instead, of an empowering approach to active responsibility. The idea of performativity brings us back to *how*, not what or why her history is playing out today?

Jackson (2001) explains that, “Performance analysis incorporates critical theories of social interaction, of the relationship between space and subjectivity, of human behavior as signifying practice, and of the material and embodied basis of identity formation” (pp. 8-9). Bal’s (2002) positions performativity outside of a representational structure. She rejects the disciplinary divide between performance and performativity, specifically between art history (performance) and cultural studies (performativity). Performance suggests the enactment of something that already existed, “the unique execution of an act” (p. 166). While performativity is “an aspect of a word that does what it says.” Bal links this difference but ultimate inseparability with memory, and cites/sites “giving voice” as “the act where performance and performativity interact without merging.” Bal (2001) describes memory not as a theoretical concept, but a common and frequently used word. She locates memory’s power in time, as it “concerns the past and happens in the present” (p. 183). This is how we make sense of the world, or develop an identity or values. Our understanding of the world in part relies on how it has been constructed through memory.

Garoian (1999) argues that performativity “represents the performance of subjectivity, a means by which students can attain political agency as they learn to critique dominant cultural paradigms from the perspective of personal memories and cultural histories” (p. 8). This became particularly important for Amanda. Her art work drew from an interest in her grandmother’s narrative and those of other women farmers. The art objects represented the spaces of her memory as well as imagined and photographed sites from literature and her grandmother. As Amanda became a farmer, shifting her subject position from a place of representing a life to
living it, I see how the core of ethics that she pulled from those histories was able to flow between material engagements in the everyday. In her choice to become a farmer, the performance of her subjectivity became tangible.

If performance is the execution of something which already exists or was previously created, it becomes that which is recognizable – the plane that resists the instability of complete othering. Performativity becomes the site of agency, where the exotic, the challenge, a new voice can be heard, but only effective in its relation to but difference from that which already existed. This draws me back again to Deleuze and Nietzsche. The performance is the execution, but performativity is the way in which it is performed—in its expression, recognizable in its similarity (adhering to certain social conventions) and difference (in its immediacy).

Bal (2002) illustrates this idea through the complex relationship and overlapping use of voice, words, diction, language, utterance, and iterability. These terms could be substituted for one another or confused at times, but their individuality helps differentiate performance and performativity. I have used the term voice as a form of agency, an empowering realization of one’s significance, but it is also simply a noun that is necessary in forms of oral communication. Language can serve a similarly benign function, as well as utterance and iterability, the action of speaking and one’s ability to say or understand certain words. Iterability functions through memory, we can only understand words based on our previous experience with them or at least some form of the word or context in which it was used. Iterability exists in the performance. The speaker must reenact some part of a previously enacted performance for the viewer to understand what they are seeing or hearing, in terms of iterability. Utterance begins to bridge performance and performativity. An utterance can simply be the act of speaking or the way in which power derives from the act. I begin to see the effect and affect potential.
For this research, this distinction between performance and performativity is crucial to considering how participants and on a broader scale, how learners, perform their past as a means of voice as agency. Subjectivity is found in the performative style, where performance is the act that develops meaning through performativity. To employ agricultural methods as a way of being more environmentally conscious is a performative act, and to become a farmer based is something else. They may come from a similar sentiment, but the ways that the ethic is being performed will have a different impact. Even as Amanda becomes a farmer, she chooses specific types of practices and carries them out with a constant consciousness of the local and global impacts of her actions. She could alternatively run a large, corporate farm. Becoming a farmer is only part of her story: the more significant aspects of her story are how she becomes farmer in her ethical approach to the everyday.

As a performative force of resistance, one must understand how power is performed in the world, be it through consumption, discourse, acts of self-loathing, or exclusion. In pedagogical resistance theory, a learner must understand the power relations at play to effectively resist. Garoian (1999) explains, “Whereas the performance of subjectivity can re-position and emancipate students from hegemonic discourses and practices, it also distinguishes and establishes [those discourses and practices] in centralized positions of power” (p. 8). Agents must operate on a plane that already exists to have a recognizable but differentiated voice. Students/academics/individuals must first understand the hegemonic system, and then must recognize their significance deeply enough in a specific discipline or environment to locate themselves in the discourse. Once they identify their positionality, performativity as subjectivity allows a manipulation of that recognizable performance to become the site of voice and agency. Subjectivity is derived from applying force or resistance to an established discourse. So agency
and subjectivity are produced from the distinctive performativity of words, language, diction, and utterance delivered inside of a repetitive performance.

For all of the participants, they drew insecurities from their difference and a feeling of outsider status or alienation. At the same time, their differences are their strengths. Their ethics are played out through daily choices, and that becomes the performativity of their resistance to neoliberalist capitalism. They all understand how the system works, but by choosing to simplify, question, think, take their time, and often do it on their own by choice, they are resisting a system that pushes many people to buy, rush, consume, and become blind.

I weave the narratives in each chapter together through events across time recounting interactions, spaces, and subjectivity, often through an investigation of material objects that signify a participant’s process of identity formation. My presence triggered forces of awareness, like a light on aspects of their lives at times very visible and others more deeply buried. This is the force of the nomad: approaching as stranger to potentially affect new relations of subjectivity (Wallin, 2010).

Nomadic Inquiry’s Potential

Nomadic inquiry became a way of being in the research process, but through the process I realized that it was a way of becoming in the world. I have simplified it to four elements that fold together: activated thinking, engaging affect, memory and eternal return, and performativity. At its core, my nomadic approach was about privileging process, being awake to how we are engaging in the world. That awakened state is nomadic as we recognize our singularity within the collective. This is not to privilege individuality, but rather to ask how our actions, choices, and positionality in society are conditioned and relational. We may seek the conditions from which our subjectivity emerges.
Nomadic engagement is important in a neoliberal society where capitalism orders all aspects of life, including bodies, environments, relationships, education, time, and life itself. It is a force beyond singular or individual actions, a way of ordering the world and the normative condition of our era. Neoliberal capitalism commodifies and privatizes all aspects of life. To do this, life forces must exist as representations or spectacles. Debord (1967/1977) argues,

In societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life is presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation…. The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images.” (Debord, 1967/1977, p. 2)

Deleuze and Guattari were profoundly influenced by Debord and the Situationists International. If we think practically about how we understand success, beauty, and even the quality of our memories, they are often mediated by a commodified version of life.

The nomad exists in direct relation to this kind of order or what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to as the molar or royal science. The nomad exists in the molecular, as process, time, and affect. Engaging the world as nomad reveals our potential to recognize conditions that have become normalized, coded, and captured. In many ways, it echoes Debord’s concept of the derive. Debord (1957/2006b) explains,

A rough experimentation toward a new mode of behavior has already been made with what we have termed the derive: the practice of a passional journey out of the ordinary through a rapid changing of ambiences…. This striving for playful creativity must be extended to all forms of human relationships…. The role played by a passive or merely bit-playing ‘public’ must constantly diminish, while that played by those who cannot be called actors, but rather, in a new sense of the term, ‘livers,’ must steadily increase. (pp. 40-41).

The way to resist the spectacle ways that we are always outside of systems, it asks us to ask how conditions produce out way of understanding—to playfully become “livers.” To live is to become nomad.
I have re-introduced the Situationists International into the work after not having mentioned them since Chapter 3 because I pull together these historical threads in art and cultural politics with contemporary art practices in a proposition for a socially engaged art education at the end of this chapter. This dissertation operates to reveal the empowering potential of the concepts of Deleuze and Guattari and the Situationists International in an increasingly privatized global environment.

Ecological Assemblages and the Production of Subjectivity

Without a change in mentalities, without entry into a post-media era, there can be no enduring hold over the environment. Yet, without modifications to the social and material environment, there can be no change in mentalities. Here, we are in the presence of a circle that leads me to postulate the necessity of founding an "ecosophy" that would link environmental ecology to social ecology and to mental ecology… Social and moral progress is inseparable from the collective and individual practices that advance it. (Guattari, 1996b, pp. 294-296)

My second research question deals with the potential for spaces as subjectivity-producing assemblages, asking, how might an ecosophical lens that examines spaces as assemblages of social, mental, and environmental factors in flux produce new ways of understanding subjectivity? To answer my second question, I analyze the material, affective, and social vectors that assembled across domestic, intuitional, community, and public spaces to consider how subjectivity was produced in each. The guiding theme for this answer is to eliminate mediating forces that fracture direct engagements.

As I answered this question, I found that spatial assemblages open up myriad possibilities for analysis because they invite consideration of social, cultural, material, historical, and embodied forces. Like Tamboukou (2008) and St. Pierre (1997a) who focused on gender and power specifically, I could focus on identity construction. I have decided that I would prefer to address possibilities of valuing life differently. For this reason, I focus this answer on the power
of direct relations with living and non-living beings in an effort to affect an ethical approach to life. This approach addresses practices of consumption, teaching and learning, community building, and engagements with the earth. Through an examination of direct engagements, I address ways that art educators have promoted and enacted a critical pedagogies of consumption, place-based and ecology-focused pedagogy, and community-based pedagogies. This work takes us into specific practices in the natural environment and considers the potential of shifting humanist values to a broader appreciation for human and non-human actors, which I would argue were at play in each of my research sites.

Guattari (1996a) argues that change must happen in the everyday. Broad social shifts have to start with individual changes in day-to-day social relations that produce and are produced by a change in the mental ecology, specifically to one’s ethical frame. Change happens through individual action or praxis across all domains. I cannot simply try to change the school setting and expect domestic life to follow suit, rather tiny revolts must happen at home, in public, across institutions, and within localized communities. By identifying where subjectivity was produced for my participants, I may be able to identify spaces for empowering creative production that may serve a broader collective, ethical, and equitable purpose to address all forms of life.

I structure this section through types of space: domestic, institutional, community, and public. In each, I analyze how direct engagements with the environmental, social, and mental vectors assembled in each site to produce subjectivity, considering my experiences with participants as well as the spaces introduced through their narratives. Examining how space is produced through social relations may highlight new futures for the varied domains of the field of art education.
To answer the second question, I also link the participants’ social practices back to the literature in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 traced the concept of DIY from the domestic space embedded in consumption and production into institutions, communities, and the public at large. Similarly, the three participant’s homes reveal ways that consumption and production point to their ethical frame. We may see potential for a tactical resistance and possibilities for incremental changes by considering how each participant has and is currently negotiating institutional structures. Each person is also active in a larger community of makers. In the final part of this section, I consider how community and public engagements operate differently for the participants and how that relates to contemporary shifts in art education.

**Producing a Home**

The home is a material and affective space, shaped by everyday practices, lived experiences, social relations, memories and emotions…. As a space of belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, desire and fear, the home is invested with meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships that lie at the heart of human life. (Blunt, 2005, pp. 505-506)

Participants’ homes were the initial setting for the project, but each home flowed into other spaces, such as a garden, school, farm, community market, and locations from another time through narratives, histories, and embodied engagements. Each space also became the performative setting for research as a form of participatory culture (Blandy, 2011), embodied engagements as transversal social practices, and intersubjective exchanges based in material investigation.

Domestic spaces can operate on a level that is very private. I was interested in looking at domestic spaces because they have the potential to illicit a complex story of how a person lives and what they believe. Consumer goods may point to desire and necessity, while artifacts on display illustrate our histories and a constructed identity. Objects have lives, and I hoped that
looking at what people choose to keep and show may have great pedagogical potential. As stated in Chapter 3, objects may reveal “consumption as both an expressive and performative act” (Sandlin & McLaren, 2010, p. 6). Furthermore, taking an interest in how a person’s domestic space is produced can provide information on his or her common material and social practices. Finally, I hoped that spending time over multiple visits talking in a domestic space might produce a more personal relationship between me and participants.

While practices of consumption seem to be private acts that exist mentally or maybe even environmentally, I argue that consumption is a significant social practice. Object purchased, food consumed, and natural resources utilized have broad and layered impacts to living beings across the globe. Awareness of ethical social responsibility in consumption can function as “new micropolitical and microsocial practices” (Guattari, 1989/2000, p. 51) toward a new consciousness. All three of the residential sites drew significance from historical material practices, whether architectural, artistic, or organic.

Each house was built at least fifty years ago and the three participants used and collected objects from specific periods of America history that functioned symbolically to speak to the respective owner’s ethical and aesthetic ideology. As a social act, I am arguing than none engage in a kind of blind conspicuous consumption, but instead in practices of consumption that value time, quality, and aesthetics. In each home, I found that practices of consumption were based in a direct and conscious engagement with knowledge production. What I mean by this is that few of the homes were filled with objects purchased whole as a means of filling space or constructing an identity based on broad social norms. While I am aware that I directed participants to meaningful objects and architectural elements, looking through their homes, the
production of the entire structure was meaningful. They all had a relationship with objects based on use-value.

Here I am speaking on a very broad level. I did not observe their purchases of food or daily hygiene items; rather I was observing how significant structures and aesthetic objects revealed conscious consumption. More importantly, each person discussed objects in relation to their direct use or ways that objects held historic or educative potential in their current life. Rather than assembling objects to impress or meet a set of values determined outside of him or herself, all three were led by a personal ethic of responsible and meaningful consumption.

Ken’s land is deeply tied to his subjectivity at this point in his life. For him, the space is a work of art and he is the artist, so my visits were like being at a gallery in that regard. Because I was always doing research while I was there, the conversations inevitable turned to the history and possible future of the land. Ken’s practices in consumption and repurposing operate on large and small scale, all through direct creative production, meaningful community encounters or direct exchanges of labor. The land itself is a repurposed object. As I covered at length in Chapter 4, repurposing the missile base resonates with larger historical and contemporary practices of adaptive repurposing, where structures that point to outdated military and manufacturing processes are being repurposed into creative and residential sites. Alterations to the materials have deeply affected his subjectivity. For Ken, the property is a manifestation of his past intellectual interest in archeology and anthropology. The physical work of cleaning it out, collecting all of the artifacts to adorn the walls, and then constructing new elements is an artistic act for Ken.

Sue and her husband specifically chose their house because of its mid-century modern style, where its design operates as a kind of cultural capital. My argument is not that the desire
to own and care for objects or an interest in styles is bad. Rather, I am asking how one uses and
values objects as a practice of consumption. For Sue and her husband, the home was an
investment in a lifetime of developing the ecosystem in the backyard, a style that represented
quality in design, and a structure that was sound and authentic. Real wood paneling, a large back
yard, walking distance to the library and town square, and the bomb shelter in the back yard were
physical details that appealed to the way they saw the house and the kind of lifestyle they hoped
to cultivate. Each of these elements points to an interest in knowledge production, an interest in
authentic materials, and a responsibility to the environment.

Like Ken, Sue’s collection of decorative features, such as lamps, couches, and coffee
tables act as a source of knowledge production. The practice of searching physically and online
for mid-century modern objects is a form of research and a long-term challenge for Sue. The
objects are not simply about acquisition, but the process of finding and repairing furniture and
artifacts produce subjectivity in Sue and her husband. I remember her excitement at finding two
small tables in excellent condition for ten dollars each. They were a remarkable find and fit
wonderfully with the rest of her collection. Her respect for the potential of objects produces an
approach to consumption that is thoughtful, illustrating ways the social behaviors based on
material objects can produce subjectivity as a conscious approach to the world.

Finally, Amanda’s practices of consumption are based in sacrifice and time. Amanda’s
background afforded her the opportunity to intern in California and apprentice in New York.
She openly admits that she comes from a privileged background that has allowed her to move
into farming and take the risks necessary to start Cardo’s Farm Project. When she started the
project, she was living in Denton in a furnished residence with hot water. To better serve the
farm, Amanda moved into the small cement dome on Cardo’s land. She lived the next two years
sleeping on the ground with no hot water because she felt irresponsible leaving the farm every day. She happily admits that she would like to go shopping and buy nice clothes; it is not that the desire doesn’t exist. But to take responsibility for the farm without accruing debt, she chooses to live within her means. She bought a used trailer during her second year on the farm (Fig. 41), which gave her great pride. Amanda does not buy beyond necessity and what she can afford, producing subjectivity by taking responsibility for the farm and the animals.

While the idea of social practices may bring to mind interpersonal relations among communities, it is important to understand how practices of consumption operate on the level of the social to reflect and affect mental and material ecologies. Practices of consumption sustain modes of exploitation, degradation, and inequality. Ken, Sue, and Amanda are afforded the choice to be selective and wasteful if they desired. For instance, when Ken explained how he repaired the old plumbing on the missile base with the help of his friends, I asked if he could not afford to hire someone. He explained that he would rather spend his money on something else. By making choices to repurpose, respect the environment, and live simply, consumption functions as a *micropolitical and microsocial practice* against neoliberal capitalism.

Responsible approaches to consumption point back to issues brought up in Chapter 3 related to DIY practices. For each participant, he or she chooses to personally take care of many tasks that could be outsourced. There are plenty of alternatives to gardening and farming. Purchasing produce at the supermarket would take far less time. Ken could find a home that was more comfortable than sleeping in a cement bunker, and Amanda did not have to sleep on the ground in a cement dome for two years. Each participant is choosing to live a life that would be seen as time-consuming and uncomfortable for many people in our contemporary consumption-based American culture. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) notes that “DIY has the capacity to be reborn
as a humanizing activity that has the potential to create an alternate temporal experience, or ‘flow’ that counters the overwhelming sense of time pressure currently experienced by many” (p. 104). For all three, their engagements with cultivating a garden, caring for animals, and producing creative work through long-term investments and practice shifted their respect and value for living and non-living things.

At the same time, each person felt alienated within our society to a certain degree. So even though domestic spaces are deeply personal; normative values of society affected his or sense of self in relation to society at large. For Ken, ideas about his possible strangeness were evident as he would talk about people flying over the land and looking down at him confused by the space. He also talked about standing atop the hill and looking down at future development around his land, describing how children would look up at him and tell their parents that the strange man was outside again.

Ken’s land has affected his subjectivity in other ways as well. While the space works as an intriguing social transformation from a military to community focus, the history of the land produced an anxious obsession in Ken. He was initially interested in it because it represented a contemporary version of ancient ceremonial spaces, such as the ruins in Chichenitza and Stonehenge. Since living there, Ken has become obsessed with the possibility of underground tunnels that lead from his land into a large channel of tunnels nationwide. Each time I see Ken, our conversations culminate in discussions about where he is digging. He has shown me aerial maps from the 1950s and we have driven around to look at places he believes are entryways into the tunnels. Ken’s engagement with his land has produced subjectivity in a number of ways. They range from a pride in the production of the space as a work of art, alienation in awareness of difference from societal norms, and an obsessive anxiety born from the material history of the
land. The ecological assemblage of the home is not one thing, but many vectors of power that shift and flow.

Finally, as I entered their homes as a researcher and eventually as friend, my presence became a physical, social and subjective force shifting the ecology of each place. My curiosity about their lives produced a kind of spotlight on each element of their house and a new awareness of their constructed histories. My questions probed their ways of making sense of their past, their priorities, and their subjective selves. I recognized these shifts in subtle apologies from both women, at times about the condition of their homes whether they were messy or if objects that might have illuminated details of a story were packed away. Ken would directly tell me to turn off my recorder for many parts of our conversations. The recording device as a tool for surveillance was too present when it was running. Once I turned off the recorder, his tone and body language shifted, and he became visibly more comfortable, make jokes, and look directly at me. My role as researcher produced a heightened awareness of their lives and homes as narrative constructions. More importantly, for me, by the end of the research, we became collaborators generating ideas about their social practices together through dialogues about the larger cultural implications of their social practices. A different kind of subjectivity was produced between the two kinds of encounters (, I hope: that of teacher-informant-subject versus that of teacher-artist-participant.

*Institutional Ruptures*

To answer question two in relation to institutional spaces as an ecosophic assemblage in the research, I consider how Amanda and Sue negotiated institutional education as a student and teach respectively. For both, the institution existed as a set of structures that produce a tactical subjectivity. Guattari was concerned with ways that the institutional context itself—
psychoanalytic or pedagogical—mediated a collective life (Genosko, 2009). There are a number of ways that the institutional context mediates a collective life that include: artificial time constraints, hierarchal social structures, divided spaces, and coded behaviors. My stated problem when I started this research was a concern for the many ways that neoliberal capitalism ubiquitously mediates structural and social relations and the production of subjectivity. As I explored in Chapter 5 on Sue, neoliberal forms of capitalism and contemporary institutional education are deeply intertwined. Just as neoliberalism influenced the current practice of schools inviting corporate fundraisers in to have children sell items for school funding, it also shaped Amanda’s disinterest in what she observed in the art education class. I address how both participants have negotiated neoliberal institutional limitations to produce a form of tactical subjectivity embedded in direct relations.

In Chapter 5, I explored ways that Sue’s environmentally responsible approach to living is infused in her curricular approach to teaching. By focusing her curriculum on a variety of aspects related to environmental concerns and subjects from nature, Sue aimed to increase the value that students place on nature and the environment. By modeling environmentally responsible practices with her materials and supplies in addition to physically engaging students in natural environments around their school, she engaged in what Garoian (1998) describes as an “ecological pedagogy” that may “elicit a cultural and educational discourse that can affect environmental consciousness and responsibility in the art room” (p. 245). This approach ruptures some of the artificiality of the institutional environment that privileges knowledge consumption as fractured, representational, and accountability-driven by opening the pedagogical space to larger environment and revealing ways those natural temporal phenomena
such as bird migration and seasonal changes occur very differently that human-constructed time constraints.

Moreover, this school year, Sue has decided to experiment with a different curricular approach to further resist neoliberal structures such as assessment and accountability. Sue has tried to produce the classroom as “temporary heterotopia-like space where normality is dispensed with for a while” (Wild, 2011, p. 430). To do this, Sue has adopted the “Teaching for Artistic Behavior” (TAB) (http://teachingforartisticbehavior.org/) approach for third- through fifth-grade students. This choice-based approach shifts teacher from leader into facilitator, where stations of creativity encourage students to performatively engage in an open artistic process independently. This shift alters the curriculum completely, where lessons are no longer open and closed practices to produce objects from a set of instructions and designated media. Rather students explore an idea through direct experimentation within a community of other experimenters. TAB is entirely focused on process and engagement. Teachers move around speaking with students transversally to exchange ideas and problem-solve, rather than to hierarchically assess for accuracy. This curricular approach resists current normative values of institutionalized schooling to evoke the spirit of a DIY approach within the institution, encouraging the art classroom to become a site of inquiry, developing an appreciation for the potential of random objects as aesthetically viable, and eliciting unpredictable outcomes.

I will return briefly to Amanda’s decision not to pursue a degree in art education after taking the foundations course for the major. She explained that her disinterest with the course was its lack of direct engagement with art making. For her, the teacher training model based entirely in representation is always a step removed from material engagement and did not feel like art at all. As an artist, she felt that this training model killed any of the force of the art
Rather than encouraging active inquirers, its focus was order, structuring, and coding. While I now see representation as the domain of teacher training—Amanda made me realize that if art teachers are trained to teach art in a space devoid of artistic practice, then it is unrealistic to expect them to produce a classroom space that is based in artistic vitality. The fracturing of teaching pedagogy from the practice of art making further illuminates the deep divide between the aesthetic force that produces a passion for art’s vitality and the space of institutionalized education.

*Community as Collective Consciousness*

The third space I want to explore is the space of the community. The majority of the research was focused on domestic spaces, but Ken’s domestic space is defined by his community membership. I addressed Ken’s relation to community and ways that it encouraged the restructuring of the military base, so I will only deal with it briefly here. Sue’s story took me into an institutional learning space, and Amanda’s home is much more public. Considering Ken’s house as community-based ecological assemblage may also highlight ways of thinking about community-based art education.

As discussed at length in Chapter 4, Ken envisioned the missile base a new place to bring his community of friends. Since living there, his interest in decorating the spaces, the openness of the land, and the various parts left from the base and its function as a storage site for Denton ISD triggered a desire to construct assemblages of scraps. To facilitate the steel assemblages, Ken learned how to weld.

Out of necessity, Ken has also learned how to install plumbing and electrical elements, and this organic and need-based approach was initially experienced with his father laying a cement porch. Ken’s living curriculum (Aoki, 2005) was not only need-based, but problem-
based and collective. His ethic of communal teaching and learning was grounded in home-building when he lived with the community at Rainbow Trail. Now that he lives alone on the base, the same ethic remains. It is grounded in an affirmative belief in communal knowledge. The base was essentially a blank slab of cement when he moved there. By introducing creative practices and through a desire for community events, Ken has produced a space that is active and communal. As I met his friends over the course of four parties, I realized that they see it a community space. Many of his friends felt a kind of ownership over certain areas of the land because they had helped Ken construct, adorn, or repair those areas. Some friends told stories of watching Ken’s process of changing the land, while others directly participated in long-term projects that required equipment or transportation. By being there over time, they felt like they were part of the space, even if they did not talk about their role in any specific task.

The communal space has produced a collective subjectivity for many of Ken’s friends because it is the stage for groups working together, its development has highlighted the need for individuated knowledge brought together for a pluralistic effort, in a non-hierarchical setting. We can see these kinds of efforts in community gardens, some church settings, and broad community clean-up efforts. I think that this kind of community-based learning that encourages resourcefulness, creativity, and communal efforts could be more common in schools as well. Much of the love for Ken’s land is based in a division of responsibility. Schools might be different if students were given more trust and responsibility over the school as an ecological assemblage. If students felt that they had ownership over the conditions of the space itself through transversal relations with teachers and administration, other fractured learning spaces might also shift in their curricular vitality. Guattari attempted this kind of shift in his work at La Borde, where all members of the clinic (staff, doctors, and patients) were assigned tasks on a
rolling schedule to produce “the structural redefinition of everyone’s role in the institution” (Genosko, 2009, p. 56) toward a transversal collective.

While Ken’s house reveals potential for collective community efforts, it also highlights some of the limitations of community-based learning. Ken’s land is located outside of town and encloses by a barbed-wire fence. While the land comes alive with community engagement, the community is rarely engaged with the larger public. I would argue that many individualized communities are similarly alienated from the larger public in the sense that membership in a designated community can create a kind of hermetic space alienating those outside of the group. For example, many churches are thriving communities built on generosity and collective efforts with other members, but their unified ideology might also limit communication with the public at large.

I also began to recognize the parties at Ken’s house as a kind of performance art, particularly in terms of relational aesthetics. Bourriard (2002) and relational aesthetics were introduced in Chapter 3 as, “the realm of human interactions and its social context” (p. 14). This perspective on contemporary art shifts the focus from the aesthetic object to the aesthetic action or event—a shift to the performative potential of social interactions. Relational aesthetics has been critiqued because it was seen to have little effect on the public at large because the locus of most relational performances remained in the gallery or institutional setting. This parallels my realization about a possible limitation of community-based efforts if they are closed to a larger public dialogue.

Public Participation

While members of Ken’s community are local leaders, own small businesses, and teach in public school, the group dialogue that happens within the setting of his house seems to stay
there. As a way of opening a dialogue to communities at large, VCAE and CBAE have become woven together to mirror public activism in the art world through what Green (1999) calls new genre public art education. I addressed this at length in Chapter 3, but I see Amanda’s effort with Cardo’s Farm Project as a kind of new genre public art education. As I explained in Chapter 3, Green promotes social-based pedagogy through constructive projects with the use of critical thinking strategies in community-based art education that work with and in the community to develop problem-solving skills that are socially relevant and merge art and life. While Amanda’s educational work at her current residence and at Cardo’s Farm is not operating in a public space, it is open to the public where kids work both agriculturally and creatively to develop critical thinking skills about processes of production, natural resources, and the roots of material goods. For children, such as my son, subjectivity is produced through a direct engagement with the land, where the fruits of their labor are realized as plants grow and eggs hatch over multiple visits. This approach produces an assemblage that is rooted in the environment through transversal engagements between educators, students, animals, and the land.

Furthermore, Amanda’s Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program can be viewed as another performative public intervention in inequitable capitalist practices. As a member of this program, I would drive to Amanda’s house one time per week to pick up a load of vegetables. I was paying my money directly to her to produce a direct exchange that intervenes in the capitalist drive for surplus. The exchange also becomes personal, local, and embodied. If we view processes of consumption as political acts, then my choice to buy directly from Amanda is a community-building act in opposition to neoliberal privatization that views all objects and relations as potential profit. My act of consumption shifts to a focus on
communication, interpersonal relations, and local investment. At the same time, her house becomes a site of dissensus, where tiny private choices that impact the larger public are taking place.

Aspects of all three participants’ houses can be viewed in this way. While I focused primarily on the community aspect of Ken’s land, his choice to plant one hundred Live Oak trees was a private act with public implications. Ken exploited regulatory policies as way of protecting his land from capitalist development. I don’t think that Ken is against development outright, rather, he dislikes the idea of developers outside of a community building groups of homes that destroy the natural landscape for profit. So while the trees are planted on private property, he is working for a population yet to come. Sue’s efforts are comparable. Her goal is to essentially do no harm by making as little of a “footprint” as possible. All of these choices come down to an ethical drive. As I have stated repeatedly, each of my participants have a choice to live and consume differently. They make choices to engage in practices that are more time-consuming and less convenient as a result of the ways that they value earth and their ethical frame toward life.

By engaging the sights as assemblages, we can see that human engagements with the environment are always in a state of becoming. Social, mental, and material interactions produce the force of a place. This type of analysis of place and space invites an awareness of what forces are structuring a place, and how we might change those structures for a more equitable life through everyday dissensual awareness. As Guattari (1996b) argues,

Ecosophic democracy would not give itself up to the facility for consensual agreement: it will invest itself in a dissensual metamodelization. With it responsibility emerges from the self in order to pass to the other…. Refusing the status of current media, combined with a search for new social interactivities, for an institutional creativity and an enrichment of values, would already constitute an important step on the way to a remaking of social practices. (p. 272)
Living as a Work of Art

What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life? (Foucault, 1984/1991, p. 350)

My final research question asked: How might the ethico-aesthetic paradigm and the concept of life as a work of art have potential for the field of art education and its practices? I have engaged Deleuze’s and Guattari’s ideas on ethics and aesthetics through their individual and combined writing throughout the dissertations. But as I stated in the introduction to this chapter, this area has introduced more questions than answers. I opened this section with a quote by Foucault because I think that quote speaks to the potential I see for life as a form of art better than any other single statement, particularly in relation to this research. I focused my third question on Deleuze and Guattari, but the concept of an aesthetics of living and ethical engagement is one I plan to study and develop significantly in the future. The final section of this chapter lays out its potential for art education and its practices.

I recognize direct connections between the ethico-aesthetic paradigm and a DIY ethic. I introduced a DIY ethic in Chapters 3 and 5. As I explained in Chapter 3, the ethical difference between DIY as practice and DIY as lifestyle (or ethic) is based in choice rather than action alone or necessity. It relates to Foucault’s theory of power, where power only exists where there is choice. If one has no choice, but to just get by, their actions can not necessarily be viewed as political. On the other hand, if there is, for instance, a cheaper, faster, more convenient option but maybe it supports oppressive or unjust practices (such as many products made by children in Chinese factories), but an individual chooses differently based on an ethical belief, then we may call this a political act. As I explained in Chapter 3, Mattson (2001) argued that the most
effective programs for change have come from local movements that worked through collective efforts based on individual ethical actions against the apathy and deadening effects of mass media and corporate consumerist culture. I am arguing that in many ways the DIY ethic embodies the aims of the ethico-aesthetic paradigm. It is an active, creative, and political aesthetic aimed at dissensual modes of expression through ethical choices in the everyday.

Differentiating a DIY ethic from DIY practices requires examining the desire that motivates practitioners. DIY practices can further a neoliberal agenda through a promotion of the separatist individual or they can fight powers that fracture, heirarchize, code, and capture. As I looked at each residential site whose occupants seem to ascribe to a DIY ethic, I realized that choice becomes a sort of pivot point for determining or even considering an ethical dimension. A DIY ethic and the ethico-aesthetic paradigm require an affirmative engagement with life that asks how actions might affect other life. To question the term artist or a formal aesthetics misses the point. Both of those concepts refer back to an object-oriented, identity-based focus on art as object-production by an individual who ascribes to a specific role. That is not my interest in this project or research. I am not interested in the formal quality of art objects here, but instead the relational and ethical quality of a lifestyle, and the individual as a critical participant in society.

While I have focused on Guattari’s concept, I could have easily used Ranciere’s (2012) philosophy of *dissensus* instead or Foucault’s (1984/1990, 1984/1991) theories on a stylistics of living to develop this idea of an active and ethical aesthetics of life. All three philosophers are speaking to a politics in praxis—an active and engaged approach to choices. Ranciere’s work is more clearly written than some of Guattari’s because he is calling for public action through activated awareness, with less emphasis on the psychoanalytic realm. Christensen-Scheel (2012) describes Ranciere’s approach as ecosophic and ethic-aesthetic as well. He explains,
Art does not have to be made up by a specific set of practices or questions: it may be as wide-ranging as ‘praxis’ or a ‘project’ related to a broad conception of aesthetics and history. Aesthetics is here understood in the broadest meaning of the term as encompassing whatever concerns the senses.” (Christensen-Scheel, 2012, p. 31)

This kind of aesthetic approach could be located most often in my reactions and ways I came to shift understanding through the research.

As I came to know Amanda, my interpersonal engagements with her were deeply affective, as I explained in Chapter Six. Her positive outlook and remarkably warm and compassionate personality were inspiring. But in addition to the intersubjective shifts that happened through discourse, my engagement with her land produced aesthetic affect. Her farm represented a site of resistance to industrialized farming practices as a way to teach daily methods of farming and making that enact an ethic of liberation from neoliberal capitalism. I looked at products at the grocery store differently as a result of my work with her. Her farm helped me see how a shift in cultural values is performed through the ways we spend our time, money, energy, and knowledge.

The experiences in Sue’s garden and in building small gardens at her elementary school were deeply aesthetic experiences. They were tactile, visual, and I thought about the beauty of a symbiotic relationship between humans and the natural environment. At the same time, both experiences were ethico-political, activating the force of thought as an aesthetic experience. I was able to recognize limits produced from industrialized agriculture that I had never seen before. In this way, the aesthetic engagement was profoundly creative. Jagodzinski (2009) describes,

the force of the artistic event is its ability to change, rupture, and transform a system of set relations—the dynamics of being and unfolding as judged along ethical grounds. This double force of art is the process of art-ing, written as a gerund to indicate art and its education to be transitive, transitional, and temporal; that is, manifesting ‘time out of joint’ in its performative affect of becoming. (p. 345)
If a traditional formal aesthetics engages with the ways art allows us to see beauty as a
transcendental force, then couldn’t this approach to aesthetics grounded in the “dynamics of
being” and the “performative affect of becoming” describe my engagements with natural spaces
through farming as aesthetic experiences. The life of the garden becomes an art that can teach us
about a more ethical way of living.

My research processes became ethico-aesthetic engagements teaching me about another
way to live. As I listened to the participants’ stories, I began to realize how we might exist
differently together. Because I was engaged with an alertness driven by my desire to learn, the
houses became sites of dissensus because I saw how I could act individually to engage the world
with the recognition that animals, humans, insects, land, nature, and objects are all in this
together. So as I became aesthetically attuned through nomadic inquiry, I have continually
considered how I could work with students to become “dissenting/creative” participants in the
world. As O’Sullivan (2007) asks,

Where are the dissenting/creative subjects of today? And how are they being produced?
In both cases, I would argue, the answer must involve a serious consideration of the role
of the academy, of art, and of the aesthetic dimension in general, in the production of
subjectivity. (p. 5)

I finish this dissertation with a collective and dissensual vision of art education.

Producing an Ethico-Aesthetic Art Education

In my final interview with Amanda, we strategized about ways to get into schools and
change educational programming, and I laid out my idea for the potential of the art classroom:

What I want to propose at the end of the dissertation is that one viable way is that the art
room in the public school model could unite an entire school – like if the art room
became a communal workshop. Where it was less about labeled interdisciplinary
learning that still acknowledges splintered subjects, and instead about ways that you
realize how everything is already integrated. It would be about a creative process – not
about creativity as expressiveness, I mean I don’t mind that – Ben loves to draw and stuff.
and there’s a place for that, but I think there’s a much more important role that the art classroom could have. (C. Coats, April 5, 2013)

The plan is essentially a transversal workshop working directly to affirmatively forge new paths. There would be no way to standardize a form of measurement or a set curriculum, no method for predict its outcomes in advance or to quantitatively measure its successes. This approach is local and anti-disciplinary. My plan engages the ideas from Debord and Deleuze and Guattari that opened this chapter, where art making becomes an activated tracing of potential, an experimentation with the world that erases false disciplinary boundaries. Its beauty lies in developing skills through relational and practical action addressing conditions in the everyday using creativity, research, practice, play, and problem-solving. Formal art skills and personal expression become ways to think out and express potential. jagodzinski (2007) proposes a “studium” approach to the art classroom in his call for art education to fight privatization using water as an example (p. 354). He urges educators to draw from the work and ideas of eco-artists to create projects that build ethical and political relationships with the environment while countering the force of designer capitalism. As I thought about jagodzinski’s call to resist the privatization of water, I thought about our current high-stakes model as the privatization of thought, where it is increasingly codified, commodified, packaged as tests, manuals, and corporate interventions. The art classroom as workshop might diminish the structures that facilitate coding. A transversal approach among teachers, students, and staff could produce new alliances that resist hierarchizing structures.

I am not proposing an entirely new art education, but a variation that draws from a history of social reconstruction in education (Efland, 1990). To appreciate this option, I must first embrace an art practice that no longer privileges objecthood and representation; opening up to the aesthetic potential of life itself. That shift focuses on processual learning through active
engagements with the world and a devaluing of hierarchical intellectualism. In other words, it levels the playing fields of time, interpretation, and ability to know. Each participant (students/teachers/public) becomes perpetual teacher and learner in all domains, and creatures and environments become open fields of existence produced through forces in flux. To learn in this way, inquiry operates as an aesthetic practice of “an experimentation in contact with the real” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 12) and across territories.

The following sections illustrate my vision for students, teachers, and educational spaces in my hope for an ethico-aesthetic art education. I frame each section through an example or situational prompt based on the art classroom as collective art workshop model. In this example, students learn through inquiry, and the prompt that would guide this example is: “How do public and private funding produce differences between local neighborhoods?” To demonstrate how I would like to see art education, I describe illustrate how this inquiry might unfold, considering socially-engaged contemporary artists and educational literature about anarchist pedagogy, Deleuzian educational models, and teacher training.

Building a Community of Inquirers with an Experimental Spirit

It is rather ‘Life’ itself that constitutes its own immanent ethics. An ethical approach is, in this way, essentially pragmatic . . . . It rejects the search for moral consensus and the construction of transcendent values, and it conceives of society as experiment rather than contract: a community of inquirers with an experimental spirit . . . . ethics is a form of affirmation and evaluation. Such an ethics applies the acceptance that the world is, as Deleuze puts it, neither true nor real, but ‘living.’ To affirm is to evaluate life in order to set free what lives. Rather than weighing down life with the burden of higher values, it seeks to make life light and active, and to create new values. (Marks, 2010, p. 88)

Ken, Sue, and Amanda had a learning process driven by curiosity and inquiry. As I sat in Amanda’s small trailer during my first visit, and stared at her spinning wheel (Fig. 30), I thought it was a beautiful object and I recognized it as something to do with fibers, but I did not know its exact purpose. When she told me that it was used to spin yarn or thread and that it was given to
her by her grandmother to make thread rather than buying it, I began to see how we can construct spaces of ongoing and limitless inquiry. Amanda’s interest in sewing led her to eventually find out how thread was made, and then to make it herself. That desire to trace the conditions from which practices and objects emerge is one critical element of this workshop approach. Amanda believes in the importance of fundamental skills as a way of teaching. She wanted to know how to make her own clothes and the core of how fibers and textile processes developed. Her curiosity is profoundly empowering. She now has the choice to produce her own clothing out of desire or necessity. Furthermore, her engagement with the land, agriculture, animals, and creative production has allowed her to understand natural and man-made systems of production. Like the description of Deleuze’s concept of ethics, Amanda is engaging the world as it is. Her curiosity allows her to recognize exploitative capitalist systems and to teach herself ways of operating outside of those systems through experimental production.

I apply Amanda’s fundamental skills model to my stated prompt, the art workshop becomes a combination of “free-choice learning” (Falk & Dierking, 2002) guided by “constraints that enable” (Castro, 2007). By engaging through an inquiry into the conditions of a local community, students can choose to focus on elements that relate to their lives. For example, this project might begin with a photography project, where students photograph their neighborhood or a number of local neighborhoods and then engage in a visual analysis to consider difference. Through an embodied and visual investigation, students may identify differential characteristics about which they are interested. For instance, one student might question the conditions of roads or sidewalks, another might notice the difference in housing quality or perhaps that one neighborhood is occupied by individually-owned homes while another is primarily or apartments
or public housing. Students may question the number or type of available grocery stores, or the condition of commercial shops in the varying neighborhoods.

Depending on their varied interests, students could research histories of their community, interview local residents and leaders, investigate ordinances related to city planning, all of which would help them understand how public funding is linked to the material, social, and cultural aspects that make up communities. There are limitless directions that this research could lead, but as formal creative learning, students could practice drawing the specific areas of their community, planning new alternatives by building models, or conceptualizing public arts or gardening programs. Engaging students as a community of inquirers opens limitless potential for powerful and meaningful learning based on free-choice, direct engagement, affirmation, evaluation, and authentic curiosity.

Inquiry-based approach are not new (Pinar, 1975). Teachers working for social justice, service-focused, and anarchist pedagogies (Haworth, 2012) employ approaches to merge institutional education with that of communities and the public. The Situationists International encouraged self-emancipation through direct engagement in the everyday (Debord, 1967/1977). In future research, I will take seriously the call for anarchist pedagogy, looking for inspiration for groups such as Situationists International.

Engaging Nomadic Teachers

This section examines perspectives on teacher training through nomadic, and inquiry-based learning. hooks (1994) explains,

Pedagogy is not simply about the social construction of knowledge, value, and experiences, it is also a performative practice embodied in the lived interactions among educators, audiences, texts, and institutional formations. Pedagogy, at its best, implies that learning takes place across a spectrum of social practices and settings in society. (p. 197)
hooks’s quote is critical to this project aligning a democratic approach to teaching that takes form in the embodied experiences of social life, recognized through the performativity of difference and awareness. Transformation, voice, democratic, global citizen, and identity reappear in many studies on teacher education for social justice. The guiding assumption is that teachers reproduce their beliefs in the classroom, so shifting their perception is critical to changing the system (Giroux, 2004/2006; Grant & Sleeter, 1989; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Maguire & Lenihan, 2010; McLaren, 2006; Ramalho & Beyerbach, 2009). Kumashiro (2004) considers ways established teacher-training processes embody and reify systems of oppression by limiting new possibilities; where anti-oppressive teaching is about always being in a state of becoming. It requires problematization and “troubling knowledge” through a push and pull of desire and resistance (Kumashiro, 2004, pp. 111-112). He argues against any foundations to teacher education, as they assume a standardization of lived experience and the everyday. More importantly, and as I am arguing is the crux of intellectual nomadicism (Pryer, 2004), focusing on established knowledge limits the potential of realizing the unknown. Introducing pedagogical processes as a fractured set of knowledges that exist apart from the everyday parallels anti-oppressive teaching as a system of inequality separate from us, seeking to create change from outside or above it. Inquiry-based approaches can limit pedagogical hierarchies and reveal complex conditions that produce and maintain inequality through participatory investigations (Sleeter, 1995).

I think back to Amanda’s experience taking her first art education course. She engages with inquiry as an ongoing practice of individualized learning outside of the institution, so I can only imagine how different her experience might have been if she encountered a program that instead embraced a more nomadic approach to teaching through inquiry. Wallin (2008) explains
the pedagogical significance of nomadism, “…to create a pedagogical life freed from a priori habits of thought” (p. 318). Amanda might have embraced the links between her public, private, and institutional lives. Sleeter (1995) suggests incorporating inquiry or investigations on actual situations in the community or even in the news to reveal the complex conditions that produce and maintain inequality. My experiences in the garden operated this way. Through direct engagement, I was able to draw connections between oppressive practices across domains based in the privatization of life. This type of learning stands in stark contrast to handing down a set of pedagogical processes to be performed in the classroom.

Wallin (2008) describes the benefit of inquiry-based learning as “an engagement with life that does not prescribe in advance either rote answers or instrumental approaches to curriculum” (p. 312). He beautifully characterizes inquiry as a relationship with the world, with an inherent risk of the unknown. If employed as inquiry, even the repetition of a curriculum can evoke unexpected knowledge, comparable to looking for the unfamiliar within my community produced new ways of understanding the familiar. “As we inquire, even the most familiar places become different in lieu of new understandings, perspectives, and changes in relationship with the landscape” (Wallin, 2008, p. 318). By employing an inquiry-based approach to my prompt that questions how funding impacts neighborhoods, I can see the potential of exploring the present to consider new futures. “The emphasis is not on what is, but also what might be brought forth. It comes to be a participation in a recursively elaborative process of opening up new spaces of possibility by exploring current spaces” (Davis, 2005, p. 87).

At the core of this approach, though, has to be an engaged participant—teacher as “committed intellectual” (Fischman & Haas, 2009, p. 571). The teacher has to desire knowledge and change, and he or she must be willing to relinquish the hierarchical frame that historically
positions teacher above student. To “actively intervene in the world order in ways that have the potential to transform the world” (Fischman & Haas, 2009, p. 572), the educator must become equal partners with all of their larger community. When the teacher becomes committed intellectual,

it is not enough to understand how the multiple forms of exploitation are affecting their students, their families and communities; they are committed to reflectively act in their classroom (and beyond) as one of the focal points to transform the world. (Fischman & Haas, 2009, p. 571)

The final part of the engaged educator is to recognize and develop the strength of students, colleagues, and the broader community as a team of collaborators. Lucero (2011) beautifully describes the subjectivity of this kind of educator:

I get excited about my opportunities to teach because as an artist I’m interested in what kind of “making” my students and I will collaborate on as we attempt to learn and collaboratively construct our learning as a conceptual art project over time. Constructing the learning is not located in a building, or with a specific population for me. It is simply about beginning a conversation where everyone’s contributions are worth looking at, even to the extent where they are put on display as artworks. My interest in the classroom practice is focused on the situationality of how the class—including myself—performs the classroom. How do we come together to make something, while retaining our individual integrity? (p. 245)

This broad, collective, committed, and inquiry-based approach liberates teachers to continue to become part of a community of inquirers with an experimental spirit.

Rupturing Public/Private/Community/Institutional Boundaries

In Chapter 3, I used Jeppesen’s (2011) work on CrimethInc. to engage with contemporary forms of anarchist and anti-capitalist resistance. The group recognized the potential for broad collective action through multifaceted cultural production that is online, free, participatory, and international. CrimethInc. builds on past DIY movements to resist neoliberal capitalist production directly, rather than producing an alternative life as a mode of escape. To effectively engage in teaching that addresses social conditions, we also have to recognize the false
boundaries of the institution through myriad educational resources and modes of social engagement available. While Amanda has used resources such as the internet and Kickstarter to promote CFP, none of my experiences in the research engaged in the broad potential of digital technology-based resources.

My research does highlight nomadism’s potential for art teacher education, and also ways that false boundaries of school, home, community, and public spaces can be and already are transposed. Working across spaces produces new ways of being in the everyday, building connections across communities and shifting our habits of mind (Dewey, 1916/2007). As stated earlier, Wallin (2008) describes the potential in traveling terrain differently, “as an ethical force against conceptual complacency and the organizing powers of logos” (p. 318). While Braidotti (2011) explains that nomadic theory,

This nomadic vision of the subject as a time continuum and a collective assemblage implies a double commitment, on the one hand, to processes of change and, on the other, to a strong ethics of ecosophical sense of community – of ‘our’ being in this together (pp. 209-210).

When we tear down boundaries that divide physical spaces, we also diminish the identities that are built into them, revealing ways that we are all in this together. As a teacher, I talk with my students about the place I live and engage in discussions about my students’ neighborhoods. Through this dialogue, the walls of the school become porous. Outside of the school, I am a mother and a daughter, a friend, and a consumer. In the school, I am considered teacher. When my students hear about me as mother and consumer, they recognize connections to their lives. Now the public, private, and institutional settings are bleeding together. Our roles as citizens and community-members are becoming more visibly similar.

To continue the potential of the inquiry into ways that public funding impacts conditions within neighborhoods. Students might also consider the quality of schools and history of land
development to understand broad and deep connections between the institution in which they are positioned and their larger public. In an ideal scenario, this kind of learning would function throughout a school, so that students could explore a common topic through history, math, science, and English. This way, the approach not only tears down the walls between the school and the outside world, but also the walls between separate classrooms or subjects. By providing daily prompts to students to trigger awareness, students leave school thinking. Even if students are not consciously focusing on inquiry, privileging nomadic potential in education may produce tiny ruptures in the way students see their everyday.

Producing Subjectivity through Socially-Engaged Pedagogical Encounters

To conclude my image of the art room as ethico-aesthetic workshop, I return to some ideas considered at the end of Chapter 3, and I introduce Socially Engaged Art and ideas about the participatory turn in art to position this form of pedagogical aesthetic engagement in relation to the larger art world. Throughout the dissertation, I have argued for the potential of direct engagements with people, spaces, objects, and the environment as a way to produce affective ruptures that may affect change. Jagodzinski (2008) explains,

I have mobilized the term self-reflexivity to make distinction between self-reflection and self-reflexivity as previous conceptualizations, which do not recognize the unconscious affective virtual Real, symbolized here by an ‘X.’ . . . A pedagogy of ethical encounters explores the ‘X’ of the self’s unconscious body as experiences of intensity and the unconscious of thought, the realm of sensibility and non-sense respectively. (p. 156)

A pedagogy of ethical encounters relies on the performative aspects of our lives in the world and an emphasis on affect, as I have argued throughout this work.

In her examination of the “social turn” in art, Jackson (2011) explains how art described as social practice,

Combines aesthetics and politics, as a term for art events that are inter-relational, embodied, and durational…. Social practice celebrates a degree of cross-disciplinarity in
art-making…. It also gestures to the realm of the socio-political, recalling the activist ad community-building ethic of socially engaged performance research.” (p. 13)

As I read Jackson’s description of social practice, it describes the ethico-aesthetic approach I hope to produce. In his book, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, Helguera (2011) explains,

> Most artists who produce socially engaged works are interested in creating a kind of collective art that affects the public sphere in a deep and meaningful way, not in creating a representation—like a theatrical play—of a social issue. (p. 7)

A shift to a socially engaged art involves a focus on public participation that is local, performative, and often political. To shift to an ethico-aesthetic position through public action, Manning (2012) calls for

> material conditions for public assembly and public speech….taking over the public is a tactic that reminds us that the political is active everywhere a group-subject takes hold, and that this politics, the politics of the emergent collective, is the one where new potentials for collective living best take form. (p. 3)

These political and public shifts to a performative action are emerging in response to increased private ownership of all public space, as well as an institutional critique of the state, the school, and the art world. Artists, educators, and scholars are coming together publicly as members of larger communities to enact change and attempt to produce a collective intersubjective shift in our global society through direct engagement. Kester (2011) references Deleuze’s ideas of an ethics based in creative desire to highlight that the difference between contemporary collective, dialogical, and collaborative projects from the political work of an artist like Santiago Sierra. Both aim for a shift in consciousness, but Sierra stages public works as embodied performances knowing their outcome; while socially engaged art aims to disrupt and transform “through a form of practical or experiential production, the outcome of which is not predetermined” (Kester, 2011, p. 185).

> Art education has historically drawn on creative production, the use of artists as subjects
from which to draw inspiration, communities of local, folk, and professional artists, and an engagement with the broader arena of visual culture. A shift to socially engaged art and its education draws on all of those previous models. In *Time/Bank*, artists Julieta Aranda and Anton Vidokle developed a “parallel economy based on time and skill” with an international community of over 1500 artists, writers, curators and others in art-related fields (Thompson, 2012, p. 108). The project works through exchanges, some local and many online, of services paid for in time. For instance, you might commission an artist to make a project that takes nine hours. Rather than paying the artist in currency, you now owe nine hours of your own service or skill. To become part of the community, you must also have a skill to offer. This system provides a direct exchange of goods and services outside of a state-produced system of currency. It engaged directly with ideas I discussed related to Amanda and the elimination of the middle man or the surplus value of commodities. While this project functions primarily online rather than the direct physical exchanges of public performance art, *Time/Bank* produces an alternate economy through new spaces, utilizing the potential of technology to bring together creative efforts outside of a profit-based system.

Another project that produces an alternate economy through direct public exchange is *El Museo de la Calle* (The Museum of the Street). The “Barter Collective” or Colectivo Combalache in Bogota, Columbia started the project (Thompson, 2012). It is essentially a swap meet, where the artists bring used items in large wooden carts and community-members can bring items to exchange. The work draws from a DIY ethic to recycle through collective engagement outside of capitalist practices of consumption. As an art work, the project highlights the performativity of both consumption and community work. In many ways, the work reminds me of Ken’s recycling practices and the collective nature of his community on the land, while
Time/Bank operates similarly to Ken’s work exchanges with his friends.

London-based artist, Jeremy Deller acts as artist, curator, historian, and director to reenact political events with local communities (Thompson, 2012). He spends years researching an event, such as the 1984 National Union of Mineworkers’ strike that took place in South Yorkshire. The event had a deep significance to the community, and many of those involved died. Deller’s reenactments engage with ideas of cultural memory and perception through direct engagement. In the 2001 reenactment, “one third of the more than 800 participants were former miners and police officers, many of whom had been involved in the original strike” (Thompson, 2012, p. 142). Consider how students might learn through this kind of performance-based community engagement that is politically engaged and deeply personal. I wonder how a high school student might feel different about their community if they took part in this type of performance with along with their parents. At the same time, this kind of performance of history reminds me of the layered performative enactment of memory, history, and desire that was evoked in Amanda’s story of becoming a farmer.

Finally, the group, Fallen Fruit, made up of artists David Burns, Matias Viegener, and Austing Young, created the Public Fruit Jam in 2006 (Thompson, 2012). The group produced maps of the five-block radius around their homes where fruit trees were growing and handed the maps out for free. Their concept plays with the ambiguity of Los Angeles’s ordinances regarding publicly grown fruit. It encourages people to walk in their neighborhood to find free/fallen fruit. To take the project further, the group has put on a series of Public Fruit Jams. These community events happen at galleries and museum where people bring street-picked or homegrown fruit and sit at large tables with other community member to collectively make jam without any instructions or recipe. They are encouraged to work together with the ingredients
available to creatively produce fruit jam. The events operate as a “reconsideration of public and private land use, as well as relations between those who have resources and those who don’t. ‘Using fruit as our lens, [we] investigate urban space, ideas of neighborhood and new forms of located citizenship and community’” (Thompson, 2012, p. 150). This work reminds me of Ken’s planting of trees to use city ordinances as a tactic against development, as well as the ways that the gardens at Sue’s school were planted as pizza gardens to introduce students to the origins of ingredients in a popular food that many would only recognize in its pizza form. These educational and artistic approaches to nature, ownership, engagement, and community invite participants to see common spaces, objects, and social practices in a new light through alternative approaches.

By engaging with contemporary forms of socially engaged art, my vision of the classroom even engages the educational space of the institution as a politically and socially charged space through a lens of performance and participation. Artistic engagement expands to everyday social engagements to highlight the importance of even the most common or overlooked actions in the everyday.
I walked out of the back door of the mess hall at Ken’s to see Rose running up the hill toward the cement columns. The last time we met, Ken described his vision of a wedding procession walking up the same path. Most conversations with Ken included us visualizing possible futures or reminiscing about his past. At that moment though, watching Rose on the hill (Fig. 49), she became the event. She occupied the space that had been about memories, dreams, and data. The research was no longer about representing someone else. My worlds of mother, student, research, and friend had folded together.

As I finish this dissertation and open up to a lifetime of new encounters, I think this is an important time to consider the work’s effect on my life as an ecology of becoming. I started with an interest in place, and specifically considered the potential of homes. I was initially
embarrassed that I lived in a large community development when I started this work because I thought it seemed superficial and hypocritical in relation to my dissertation interests. Through this research, I realized that who I am is determined by what I do with my circumstances. We bought a house we could afford in a good school district. Bill and I try to make choices in our home that are earth-conscious and teach our children to think about the outcomes of their choices on other life forms. I realized that my hang-ups about owning a specific type of home were the product of the same consumerist coding as someone who identifies themselves by expensive labels and products.

My consciousness of the production of space has shifted the ways I engage in classrooms as well. Where I used to see lack in limited resources and congestion in overcrowded rooms, I now see potential. I use my small classroom and overcrowded tables to open up group discussions and teamwork. I ask my students to help me come up with possibilities for making our limited resources useful in ways outside of their original purpose and to identify new resources in nature and found objects. Shifting my perspective from one that is lack-based to a view that is affirmative has opened unlimited potential.

My research started from a place of curiosity, recognizing three people’s differences from me, and a desire to learn about them. I became a living inquirer, and I learned how they live as inquirers every day. I did not know what I was looking for when I started the research. My lack of predetermined direction created what felt, at times, like burdensome unlimited directions of curiosity. But the process of coming to know through the chaos of engagement was the most beneficial part of this project. Becoming curious, awake, and desiring to learn is the power of living as the nomad.
The process of engagement revealed a living energy in the everyday that I had not recognized before. I realized early on that my methodological approach to the social elements of my research was extremely loose. I felt uncomfortable about it at first, trying to fit my approach into predetermined methods based on others’ previous studies. I now realize that the tighter I constructed a method of approach, the more limited the potential of learning through engagement became. Anytime my focus shifted to a method, I was no longer directly engaged with places and people. I realized how attempts to devote my energy to the “reliability” of designated methods coded the engagements, like a religious dogma mediating a person’s experiences with life. Instead, I had to trust myself, and I recognized how pragmatism and ethics took the place of a coded methodology. Deterritorializing as nomad required also letting go of a methodological structure. I restate Marks’s quote from earlier in this chapter because it is critical to the value of my dissertation research.

It is rather ‘Life’ itself that constitutes its own immanent ethics. An ethical approach is, in this way, essentially pragmatic . . . . It rejects the search for moral consensus and the construction of transcendent values, and it conceives of society as experiment rather than contract: a community of inquirers with an experimental spirit . . . . ethics is a form of affirmation and evaluation. Such an ethics applies the acceptance that the world is, as Deleuze puts it, neither true nor real, but ‘living.’ To affirm is to evaluate life in order to set free what lives. Rather than weighing down life with the burden of higher values, it seeks to make life light and active, and to create new values. (Marks, 2010, p. 88)

Once I began to see that the research was a series of “living” encounters, I had to trust myself and respect my participants. I see this as a critical aspect of my approach to nomadic inquiry.

This research has also made me more critically conscious of how my other social experiences are coded, how rarely I listen, and how much potential exists in each of our stories if we open up to hearing them. I now consider Ken, Sue, and Amanda my friends. As I came to know them, the constraints of identifying labels, such as researcher/subject, teacher/student, young/old, and even right/wrong dissipated. Before submitting the dissertation to my committee,
I shared each participant’s chapter with him or her. I was nervous about the quality of my writing and how they might receive my readings of their lives. They all, however, expressed extreme gratitude and joy about reading an outsider’s understanding of the significance of their lives. In his typically understated manner, Ken said,

You did good. I really like it. I would have just said, ‘I met a guy, he hung a bunch of junk on the wall, and we drank a beer on the hill.’ But you found so much more in what I have done here. (Ken, personal communication, February 27, 2014)

Throughout the process, I often viewed Ken as a father-figure, possibly because he is the same age as my father. To hear his appreciation and approval of the work meant so much to me.

I was most nervous to hear from Sue. She and I consistently discuss life and events from a critical perspective. Her chapter is the most challenging in my opinion because in her story I recognized important global connections to the research. While she corrected a couple dates, she ultimately said, “This gives me so much joy” (Sue, personal communication, February 15, 2014). Even though we are friends, I have always looked up to Sue as a sort of big sister, since our relationship started with her acting as my mentor teacher. My excitement about her approval of the chapter was not simply about acceptance, but it was also about reciprocity. They gave me time, honesty, and insight. I hope that I might return something that she meaningful to her in return.

Amanda’s chapter was difficult to write because of the layers of memories and time. I went to her house to talk about the chapter, and she explained that she had called her grandmother to tell her about it because she was so excited. She discussed how strange it felt to read her words from only one year earlier and to think about how much had changed and how many of her hopes had materialized. I wondered what it might mean for all of us to have that type of experience, where we could see the actions of our lives and their potential from afar.
After the conversations with Ken, Sue, and Amanda, the dissertation’s value shifted. I saw the document as a work of art, a living form, and an archive.

The power of my participants’ lives lay in their values and pragmatic approaches to the world. None lived by a rigid moral code, but instead, were awake to the changing nature of life, determining actions through the conditions of each moment. I have started to consider how I can teach art in ways that highlight how creative processes emerge from a practice of thinking. I am considering how I can produce encounters that reveal the value of life, where students consider how each thing we do can be art. Art, like life and change, takes time and hard work. It takes making mistakes and learning through them. Art requires bravery and a willingness to experiment. Art opens the potential of seeing across time and space. We can become nomadic art educators, producing engagements that rupture the codes and labels that separate living forms to see that we are all in this together.

Allowing myself to become open to getting to know Ken, Sue, and Amanda and ask for their help as collaborators revealed potential for transversal relationships in other areas of my life. Most importantly, I see this potential with my children. Over the last year, I have begun to understand them as individuals and recognize the power of our relationships entirely differently. I now see them as my team in life. We are together in this, and I see my role as mother as one who can build confidence, and encourage inquiry and engagement rather than simply to act as leader. I understand that I have a responsibility to provide for them, but I think I have an equally important role in creating conditions for them to find their own paths.

Over the course of the dissertation research and writing, I started to question the ways I assign value to the places, people, and experiences in my life. I have argued throughout this document that as educators, we teach what we find valuable. I am realizing that changing what
I do every day is as much a form of praxis as anything I might do as an educator, activist, or parent. I have found that living a life that is aligned with my values is hard, but I am changing. This work has shown me that much of what I do not value in myself is derived from an historic belief in dichotomies and products rather than the potential of flux and process. I thought I might become something else over night, but that is false marketing. Instead, I am starting to recognize the potential of each moment, place, and relationship as a possibility for learning. There is so much to do in this world, so much to learn and experience, becoming nomad may be a start.
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