understand the voices of our team members. Elizabeth has eloquently describe Chuck's attention to issues of theory. The passion he has brought to his reading of the manuscripts set a standard for engagement that guided me. I have also been grateful for Elizabeth's breadth of knowledge in our field as well as her editorial precision (she catches all the mechanical stuff that I miss!). She and I have also shared a growing passion for the gallery portion of JSTAE 14 (see the Gallery introduction for more on this). And, in the end, I am still the galley slave who knows how to run Pagemaker. Anyone interested in taking up an oar?


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The Deep Creek School: Technology, Ecology and the Body as Pedagogical Alternatives in Art Education

Daniel L. Collins & Charles R. Garoian

An old station wagon pulled up the dirt road of the canyon and came to a stop next to the stone house. Kai, an industrial design student, and his girlfriend climbed out of the car and stretched their limbs after their long journey from Phoenix. The rear compartment of the vehicle was jammed full of camping equipment and other necessities for Kai's participation in a five week art program in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. Most unusual were the control panels, speakers, and other electronic equipment that he had brought along, "to use in his art works," he said.

Kai immediately began to negotiate a studio space. Unlike the other students who chose to establish their working spaces around the open areas of the welding shed, the large open space in the new studio, or in the open areas near the sleeping tents, Kai wanted to seclude himself in the dusty ice house—a defunct turn-of-the-century food storage shed. As the other students walked through the pine and spruce forest, along the winding mountain creek, and over the rugged mountain terrain to search
The Deep Creek School: A Work in Progress

Three weeks later: Kai's synthesizer beats a syncopated pattern of random sounds similar to the aleatory music of John Cage and Steve Reich. The week's assignment for the Deep Creek School students was to produce an art work that would allow some aspect of the site to respond to their bodies (i.e., the impact of the movement and sound of the creek on the body, the thicket of trees and underbrush along the creek suggesting paths through which the body could move, the differences in climate along the canyon slopes influencing body activities, and others). Unlike art works that call attention exclusively to themselves—isolated objects that ignore the environment in which they are placed—the students were asked to create a reverse situation whereby the environment could take a more active role in the communication of ideas. Kai's sound piece is one example of what the student's created. (see page 63)

We walked into the ice house, where Kai's sound studio was now set up. As we listened to the strange beat from his synthesizer, we noticed he was nowhere in sight. Instead, the synthesizer was being played by a bank of solenoids attached to a wooden rack that was fitted atop the keyboard. The sound that we were hearing was produced by the electronic keyboard as the solenoids switched on and off. Where was Kai? How was this strangely compelling sound being produced?

After listening for a few moments, we noticed a wire that led from the solenoids down to the floor, out the ice house door, and beyond. Again our curiosity was piqued, so we followed the wire out the door and found Kai some twenty yards away leaning over the side of one of the bridges that traverses Deep Creek. He was adjusting what appeared to be a "found-object" sculpture constructed of wood, PVC pipe fittings, and a set of toilet floats. The wire that we were following was spliced into the construction. Kai explained that he was creating a method by which the water flowing in the creek could play his synthesizer. The construction, which he had suspended from the bridge perpendicular to the surface of the creek, contained a set of micro switches that were wired to the bank of toilet floats. The

out and familiarize themselves with their new surroundings, Kai isolated himself from all the natural beauty of the site. Instead, he worked independently to set up all of his sound equipment in the ice house.

As we observed this determined young man, we wondered how well he would adapt to the conditions of the Deep Creek School—an Arizona State University Summer Sessions art program in Telluride, Colorado. How well would Kai's plans and ideas about art, learned in school or in other contexts, relate with the myriad experiences and opportunities open to him in the natural setting of Deep Creek Canyon? Was Kai interested only in exploring the ideas he brought from home or was he preparing to deal with the phenomena of the site that now surrounded him? With time, we began to realize that what we were witnessing was Kai's ritual of familiarization—actions that were necessary for him to assimilate his new territory. Of special interest to us as artist/educators was that Kai's miniature hi-tech studio—positioned at the heart of a largely undeveloped canyon—tacitly acknowledged the pedagogical goals we had set for the summer: namely, to explore potential relationships between technology, ecology, and the body.

University level students like Kai are provided with pedagogical alternatives to conventional art education at the Deep Creek School. The unique program and teaching methodologies of the School engage students in theoretical and studio investigations that encourage them to reconcile dichotomies between various studio orientations in response to the three pedagogical metaphors indicated above.

In particular, the program focuses upon the differences emerging from direct, primary ways of working—as found in traditional sculptural processes, body art, and site-specific sculpture. These methods are contrasted with those that are indirect and dependent on secondary sources—such as photography, video art, computer graphics, and telecommunications. The following discussion will explain how students are asked to move fluidly between these different conceptual biases for making art and their material orientations.
balls of the floats were adjusted to exact a tangent with the surface plane of the creek so that the waves and ripples of water rushing by would strike the balls and effect an electrical connection. In this manner, the creek was literally playing the sounds that we heard in the ice house. Standing outside, we only heard the sound of the creek and watched the floats dancing on the surface of the water. Inside the ice house, we heard the “music” being produced by the creek and watched the mechanical fingers of the solenoids as they struck the keyboard.

In the dynamic that he had created between the creek and the synthesizer, Kai served as a mediator. Throughout the performance of the art work, he walked back and forth between the technology of the synthesizer and the ecology of the creek adjusting and tuning the instruments to accommodate the “voice” of the creek. In doing so, Kai had engaged the essential components of the Deep Creek School Curriculum.

The Deep Creek School Curriculum

Three “operative metaphors”—body, technology, and ecology—animate the discussions and activities at the Deep Creek School. In brief, students are challenged to understand their own bodies as sources for creative activity; they are encouraged to engage a range of technologies—from simple hand tools, to cameras, to computers—that, in effect, extend their reach or condition their response in some way; and, they are asked to merge their own internal processes and external skills with the interdependent systems of the larger environment.

We will develop each of these pedagogical metaphors in turn.

The Body: The “First Site”

The body, unadorned. Many of us shrink from the challenge presented to us by our own bodies. The many paradoxes of the body as site are discussed in an essay by Jean-Pierre Vernant (1989) entitled “Dim Body, Dazzling Body”:

The human body is, of course, strictly delimited. It is circumscribed like the figure of a distinct being, separate, with its inside and outside: its skin marks the surface of contact, while its mouth, anus and genitals are the orifices that assure communication with the outside. Nevertheless, it is not shut up on itself, closed, isolated or cut off from the outside, like an empire within an empire. On the contrary, it is fundamentally permeable to the forces that animate it, accessible to the intrusion of the vital powers that make it act. (p. 29)

At the Deep Creek School, the metaphor of the body emerges as a theme for focused discussion and creative pursuits in a number of ways. First, individuals need to meet the physical requirements of life in a wholly new environment. The high altitude, the rustic accommodations, the unfamiliar food, and the lines for the showers—all take their toll. For some students, it’s their first time sleeping in a tent. For the picky eaters, the idea of a fixed menu is inconceivable. Though we think we are dealing with well-traveled and adaptable adults, the simple fact is that people develop patterns of behavior and expectations that, when not satisfied, can lead to tensions across the program as a whole.

While one’s personal “comfort zone” and the ability of the camp to meet the minimum physical needs of the student are crucial, we also have a strong interest in body-work on other levels. There are opportunities for examining how the body functions as a dynamic system—well beyond its minimum appetites and demands. Many different disciplines and recreational pursuits feed into these goals: meditational practices, movement rituals, dance exercises, distance jogging, mountain biking, etc., serve to focus attention on the body and help to develop awareness of both one’s internal processes and physical limits and capabilities. While all of this kind of work is strictly voluntary and tends to coalesce and disperse depending on the staff in residence and the motivational levels of the students, it is a significant opportunity to explore one’s personal limits as well as to find different methods for interacting within the group.
Addressing the body as a vehicle for art activity, body-art (what Allan Kaprow [1976, p. 50] called “non-theatrical” performance) and performative works of all kinds have come to occupy a central role in the program. We understand the body to be “the first site,” and its physical envelope and bodily fluids as the raw materials for producing art works that are direct and unmediated. A “performance” may be nothing more than a repeated gesture—such as splitting wood or drinking a glass of water. But in the conscious framing of the activity, we come face to face with something irreducible and fundamentally human. Lucy Lippard (1981) has described performance art as “the most immediate art form, which aspires to the immediacy of political action itself. Ideally, performance means getting down to the bare bones of aesthetic communication—artist/self confronting audience/society” (p. 91). The idea is to strip away the preconceptions that come with particular material and process orientations—in order to exercise whatever happens to be fashionable in the art world that week—and find a vocabulary that is unique to each artist. As Gregory Battcock has stated, “Before man was aware of art he was aware of himself” (Nickas, 1984, p. xv).

How does this orientation manifest itself in the work of students? While performative works of all kinds have been initiated by students, one in particular stands out for drawing a thread between literally the “student body” and individual student responses. The following is a brief description:

Over a period of several days, one female student did an extraordinary project—a performance work—that utilized the student population as a “social context” and explored the taboos and mores surrounding the human body. Her performance work involved a wordless, one-on-one engagement of each of the students in the program in which the artist, with clear tape stretched over her mouth, would kiss an unsuspecting student. Each exchange would conclude with the placing of dogtags, made by the artist, around the neck of the surprised student. The dogtags themselves were inscribed with cryptic words and phrases that were meant to relate to the character of

the receiving student. While the work was in part a commentary on A.I.D.S., it also responded to class discussions dealing with universal issues of personal space, bodily fluids, and physical gesture. (Deep Creek Archives, 1993)

The body, as described by Merleau-Ponty (1962, pp. 80-97), is never just an object in the world but that very medium whereby our world comes into being. The self is viewed as an integrated being. The situation is complicated considerably when we place the body in a social setting—particularly one in which there is a discrepancy in power relationships. Drew Leder, a medical doctor and professor of philosophy at Loyola College in Baltimore, writes in his book, The Absent Body (1990):

When confronting another who has potential power over one’s life and projects—the patient with the doctor, student with professor, prisoner with jailer—there is a tendency on the part of the powerless to a heightened self-awareness...It is not a matter of a reciprocal exchange of intentions, so much as one body submitting to the intentions of another. When a student gives an oral presentation under the teacher’s evaluating eye, he cannot help a self-consciousness beyond that which he would feel with his peers. His own experience is not supplemented by the Other but, rather, supplanted...The body is always a place of vulnerability, not just to biological but to sociopolitical forces. (p. 98)

The individual’s body is a contested site. The social body, as any teacher knows, is a profound aggregate of different pulses, temperatures, and desires. Still, by confronting the self as our first medium with which to encounter the larger world, and gaining confidence and assurance that this first site is unique and valuable and deserving of care, the chances of successfully integrating into the social body are greatly increased.

Various activities are engaged that seek to identify, give voice to, and develop the social body. Of particular value has
been a volunteer activity called "The Talking Circle." After students and staff are introduced to the concept of the Talking Circle, the students themselves determine when and if additional Circles are desirable. This past summer, students initiated at least one Talking Circle a week. Patterned after time-honored rituals found in many Native cultures, the Circle provided an opportunity for anyone to speak from the heart. Our particular method involved passing around a special "talking stick"—a delightfully twisted tree root—that gave the person holding the stick the right to speak without interruption, fear of contradiction, or reprisal. As a result, a free space for venting honest thought and feeling was created. While it was not unusual for typical camp gripes to be aired, the majority of the comments revealed surprising insights and, for the most part, were strongly supportive of the individuals that made up the group.

At the Deep Creek School, even as individuals are becoming centered, and the social body discovers itself, the second pedagogical metaphor—technology—is introduced.

Technology and Connectivity at Deep Creek

While the word "technology" may evoke images of IBM or the military/industrial complex, the meaning of this term and its social significance are really far more subtle. Technology can be defined as the sum total of the way in which a social group provides themselves with the material objects of their civilization (Random House Dictionary, 1983, p. 10458). While computers and other hi-tech equipment certainly fall into this definition for our particular social group, we would also have to include the myriad technologies that serve to create our larger material culture. Indeed, any hand tool, process of making, production method, implement, apparatus, weapon, or machine could be said to comprise a technology.

What happens when the discrete envelope of our bodies intersects with a "technology"—a simple hand tool for example? Professor Leder (1990) writes:

We build machines because the resistance of the world demands a supplementing of our physical powers. For example, the sheer distances we encounter, incommensurate with the structure of our legs, call forth our technologies of transportation and communication. This dialectical body-world relation is concretized even in the simplest of instruments. Ordinarily, any tool will have one end specifically adapted to our human anatomy; the handle of a saw is designed to fit the hand. However, the other end is adapted to the world upon which we act. The sawteeth must "fit" the wood if they are to cut properly. The line, sinker, and bait must fit the fish. To incorporate a tool is to redesign one's extended body until its extremities expressly mesh with the world. (p. 34)

A performance work created by one Deep Creek student provides an example of how the empowerment of the body through technology described by Leder can lead to the body's engagement of environmental concerns. Gretchen's response to a group discussion on the natural/culture dichotomy was to produce a large-scale (10 feet in diameter) rotating squirrel cage constructed of steel that would accommodate her body (see page 65) To accomplish her task, she had to learn how to use a tool that was unfamiliar to her: an electric arc welder. Over a period of three weeks not only did she learn how to weld, but she also improvised a design that supported the weight and size of her body. In the end, her ability to use the electric arc welder enabled her to construct a cage in which she crawled in homage to her pet gerbil who had recently died. Caging her own body in the place of a domesticated animal, Gretchen's construction/performance served as a powerful critique of anthropocentrism and the domestication of nature.

Technology, whether a simple hand tool or a computer, provides a method for engaging the larger world. It both extends and mediates our perception of things. It can enlarge our vision, amplify our imperfect hearing, strengthen our grasp, speed our calculations, and alter the course of diseases and natural disasters. But it can also numb the senses, and anaesthetize us to the scale of the destruction. Too often it is the hammer that
drives the wedge between our sense of self and our sense of place. How can we become better at selecting and designing technologies that are appropriate for given situations—and have the personal confidence and clarity to bypass those technologies that are wasteful, redundant, unnecessary?

As Leder has suggested, a partial answer lies in our ability to redesign our extended body “to mesh with the world” (Leder, 1990, p. 34). There is a need for “tools” (in the broadest sense of the word) that are remarkable for the quality of their design—for their ability to fit the task at hand. In a phrase, “the right tool for the job.” The appraisal of a fit or the appropriateness of a tool should be based not in quantities but in qualities. Economies of scale favor blunt instruments: Clear cutting. Strip mining. Mass production. We need to build more specificity into the design of our technologies. We need infinitely adaptable tools with razor sharp edges and precise methods of measure. (To paraphrase an ancient sage: “If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to treat everything as if it were a nail.”)

At the other end of the equation, how do these technologies merge with the space of the body? These precision tools need to be “incorporated” (Leder, 1990, p. 34) into our physical selves—for it is only through the body that we can sense the impact we are having on one another and the planet. Consider the famous example of the blind man’s stick as discussed by Merleau-Ponty, who writes: “The blind man’s stick has ceased to be an object for him, and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight” (1990, p. 143).

At the micro-scale of the Deep Creek School, to illustrate the impact of tools might mean intentionally violating the moral imperatives of “balanced” responses in order to teach something about the appropriateness of good design. (This is of course exactly backwards from how an industrial designer would approach the problem.) The destructiveness of a chainsaw is made manifest not by reflecting in the comfort of your wooden home on how many square miles of rain forest are lost each week, but on how quickly its teeth can level your own backyard.

Just as framing everyday gestures as “performances” can help to throw certain behaviors into a different light, so can the use of technology for subversion highlight the necessity to match the tool with the job.

The magic of appropriate technology as a guiding principle is revealed not by calculated reactions using the best available data, but by improvised responses to unexpected events. Surgery with a pen knife. Nylon stockings as tea strainers. Truck tires as building material. Airplanes with their wings on backwards. How are we to be goaded into re-designing our material culture? Competition as the basis of a design philosophy can only go so far. We need inventive personalities, geniuses who are open-minded and obsessed by their own ability to improvise solutions apart from external demand. This characteristic is really the provenance of the artist. A significant domain of art is improvised response. Art is not industrial design—but good tool design has something to do with art. Artists can lead the way with new uses for old technologies, subversions of new technologies, and the invention of a whole new class of tools inspired by the irrepressible energy of details.

On the “hi-tech” side of the program the faculty and students at Deep Creek have been exploring how to integrate new technologies into the program without compromising the very reason that many students choose to participate—namely, the need to have a break from the highly technological environment of the large American university. Increasingly, we are understanding the potential of the computer—not only as a design tool or a means by which to solve technical problems—but as method for enabling students to “break from the shells of academic discourse” (Trend, 1992, p. 149). The computer and computer-based telecommunications serve as detours around traditional approaches to art theory and practice and provide opportunities that are culturally diverse and interdisciplinary.

This latter capability of computer technology was introduced into the Deep Creek curriculum during the summer of 1993. We received a free Internet connection through the generosity of the Telluride Institute’s “InfoZone”—the town of
Telluride's newly dedicated public access network connection to the Colorado SuperNet. Richard Lowenberg, project director for the “InfoZone,” and Judy Malloy, an information artist from San Francisco, collaborated with the Deep Creek School in the creation of projects generated using the Colorado SuperNet. The “Net” allowed for local access, gateway connections to the Internet, and the beginning of a (CWIS) community-wide information system.

Some artworks were designed specifically for this new medium. For example, Judy Malloy designed a digital suggestion box that enabled anyone to comment on the Deep Creek experience. Others took advantage of the computer’s capabilities as a research tool. One Muslim student from Algeria conducted a search for Islamic computerized “bulletin boards” in North America and Europe. Another student kept up an ongoing dialog with her major professor in Florida, as well as her boyfriend.

As there is not any specific “material and process” agenda at the Deep Creek School, students approach new media on an “as-needed” basis. That is, the curriculum plan of the School is not fixed, but tailored to the individual research interests of the students. Last summer, one student who was planning to focus on computer graphics ended up being seduced by the natural environment instead: he spent several weeks clearing a path through the dense forest to create a “labyrinth” that he then documented on video.

While one could predict that the presence of video monitors and VCRs would be irresistible to the “couch potatoes” of the group, another contingent of students became seriously involved with computer games—particularly a game called “Shangai.” In an odd reversal of the needs of older generations who continue to seek the familiarity of Nature as a kind of solace, some younger students found in the blinking screen of the computer terminal the “time-out” they needed from the demands of the program and the rough edges of their campsites. Indeed, for many of these students, Nature is not something to engage for comfort, but rather to sample in small bites. This leads us to our third and final metaphor, ecology.

Deep (Creek) Ecology

There is ample evidence, both on-site at the Deep Creek School and in the larger region, of human impact on the land. The area is rich in minerals—for one hundred years, the primary industry of the town of Telluride was gold and silver mining. Tailings from played-out mines look like brush strokes on the slopes of 14,000 foot peaks. But evidence of heavy metals such as hexavalent chromium can be found downstream. Sheep and cattle grazing and clear-cutting of old-growth forests by the logging industry destroy natural habitat and pollute the natural streams. And now development associated with the ski area at Telluride threatens to overburden the landscape. Chemical fertilizers from the golf-course find their way into the water table. Builders of huge second homes, perched on mesa tops, show little regard for energy conservation or the lay of the land. The ski area itself looks like a clear cut operation.

The land, like the body, is fraught with paradox. On one hand, it is robust, unpredictable, incredibly self-renewing, rich in its diversity. On the other hand, the tiniest intervention can have dire consequences. A pathway cut into the hill becomes an eroded gully. A bundle of willow branches and a few stones can change the course of the creek.

An understanding of ecology—the interrelationship of all forms of life in their diverse environments—is essential for the survival of the planet. The word derives form the Greek words oikos, which means “house” or “habitat,” and logos, which translates as “doctrine.”

Comparing environmental history with the history of art, one finds a number of striking parallels between changes in the physical environment and the emergence of new art forms and images. Several significant developments in art appear to coincide with periods characterized by environmental stress. Indeed, people have always altered their environment, often creating damaging and ultimately inhospitable conditions that jeopardize their own survival (Matilsky, 1992, pp. 6, 35). While contemporary humans have become more sensitized to the impact
of development and industry on the natural environment, the pace of destruction has accelerated.

The rapid destruction of habitats worldwide and the deteriorating conditions of urban life have catalyzed an ongoing debate on environmental issues. Well before the grass-roots movement that led to the original Earth Day in April of 1970 (the same month earth artist Robert Smithson completed his Spiral Jetty), artists responded to environmental issues. Through environmental and ecologically-based artworks, artists have attempt to raise consciousness about the natural world, or to mitigate environmental problems on a practical level—often by revitalizing an ecosystem or altering how humans interact with particular sites. Expanding upon the work of early environmental, conceptual, and systems artists such as Nancy Holt, Alan Sonfist and Hans Haacke, recent works represent a more socially oriented approach to integrating nature and art in which elements of nature are not isolated, but integrated into a total network of relationships (Matilsky, 1992, p. 56).

At the Deep Creek School, we try to instill in students a basic understanding of environmental issues and help them to create strategies for developing an art vocabulary that is sensitive to, and ultimately becomes part of, the ecology of the area. In many respects, it is the landscape itself that catalyzes the program. Its character, seasonal rhythms, diurnal swings, and diversity of flora and fauna provide a backdrop that throws the simplest gesture into high relief.

Even as students are trying to find their own rhythms, develop a personal performance vocabulary, and grapple with the bewildering range of technologies available to them, the larger environment beckons. For some students, the creek and surrounding forests provide an opportunity for solitude and meditation. For others, the rushing water and the interlacing web of pathways and roads on site provide recreational opportunities: mountain biking and fishing are popular. For a significant few, the landscape becomes their palette.

Ecologically-based art provides a unique approach to problem solving for students. By encouraging them to take their cues directly from the landscape, attitudes of receptiveness and empathy are fostered. In some works, students develop a dialog with the natural environment that reveals a power or natural beauty that may otherwise go unnoticed. In other works, students adopt a more political stance that translates into visual or verbal critique—or in some cases, active intervention.

The dialog established between the students and the land reflect their backgrounds, range of social concerns, and command of materials and processes. One young man constructed a "dry well" in the middle of the creek—an effort to call attention to the preciousness of the crystal clear water. In his native Algeria, hand-dug wells still provide life-giving water and serve as gathering points in the arid landscape. His choice of location and careful construction techniques amplified the paradoxes inherent in this site-specific work. Beyond its success as a sculptural response to the landscape, a powerful truth was expressed by the work that he was not consciously aware of: despite the winter snows and relative coolness of the San Juan mountains, water is increasingly scarce and litigation over water rights is commonplace.

Another young man used the creek to highlight the absurdly wasteful irrigation practices typical in the desert of his native Arizona. A complex system of paddles, belts, and pulleys placed in the creek served to drive a huge blade around a circular patch of imported sod. The work, a kind of hybrid of the kinetic sculptures of Jean Tinguely and the environmental concerns of Helen and Newton Harrison, served to focus attention on how modern civilization exploits natural resources for sustaining less-than-responsible life styles.

For all of the students, the day-to-day immersion in the natural landscape works its special magic. The rhythm of the day is regulated by the realities of temperature and sunlight. The only sound at night is the creek itself, an acoustical backdrop that masks the sound of the human voice and the occasional boom-box. The canopy of the night sky seems closer, more
tangible, of greater depth and intensity. The smells of Ponderosa Pine or wood smoke at the evening fire are intoxicating and unforgettable. This tacit method of teaching about the environment transcends all efforts to catalog and define the benefits of outdoor experience.

Such opportunities are needed if we are to establish empathy with the land—an empathy that traditional Native Americans continue to claim as their birthright. We know that for the Anasazi—the ancestors to modern Hopi and Pueblo Indians—what went on in the sky was of extreme significance. The Anasazi watched the heavens closely. From the sky comes rainwater and sunlight, both essential to survival in societies that live in harmony with the land. They also felt it was essential to orient their important buildings according to the cardinal directions, so as not to live “against the grain of the cosmos” (Malville, p. 28). These needs, together with the sheer beauty of sunrise and sunset in the desert and the larger Colorado plateau, certainly account for sun watching being a central focus of not only Anasazi astronomers, but any contemporary seeking to understand the deep cycles of the earth’s passage through time and space (Malville and Putnam, 1991, p. 28).

Reconciling the Three Domains

While students are presented at the outset with challenges that highlight each of our three metaphors—body, technology, and ecology—it is in the experimental fusing of these domains that some of the richest insights emerge. Indeed, to test one discipline in the crucible of another in many respects defines interdisciplinary scholarship and art making. Young artists need to be responsive to a full spectrum of demands. Traditional values of strength, truth, beauty, and individuality can and should be tempered by flexibility, diversity, empathy, and community.

We are not advocates of a “post-studio” approach at the Deep Creek School. The typical model of the University studio art program—with its hard frames around particular techniques and hardware—does not develop artists who are adept at reaching across borders. When materials and processes are seen as ends in themselves, larger ideational and expressive—as well as social—goals are often sacrificed. In terms of a praxis, we are not interested in falsely romanticizing the human body, allowing software to drive aesthetic decisions, nor confusing the sublime with what can fit on the front of a postcard.

We are interested in the unlikely connections that are made, for example, when one uses an holistic approach to look at the complexity of experience. This may mean applying the methods of the geographer to the problem of the body, or approaching the complexity of information systems with the wide-angle lens of the ecologist. An example of technology, ecology and the body being reconciled by Deep Creek students can be found in a performance art work titled “Thunder Volt.” Gene’s piece involved an interface between electrical activity being recorded by the National Lightning Detection Network (NLDN) and the electrical activity of his body. He used his computer to process information coming from NLDN and to transmit that information via electrodes to different parts of his body. Small electrical shocks generated in response to remote lightning strikes stimulated Gene’s muscles. The electrical activity of his own body was amplified in consort with the lightning strikes to produce an experience of the “geographical and atmospheric” characteristics of the body (see page 69).

Currently, we as artists and educators are marginalized by a society that puts little value on the practice of artists. A new pedagogy would address how artists could be called upon to perform crucial work within society as a whole. Today’s artists are seen by most people as largely irrelevant—a diversion—even an irritation—to the larger discourse of living. In his catalog essay for a recent exhibition entitled Artificial Nature, Jeffrey Deitch (1990) writes:

Representing nature today is not easy for the artist, who sees nature being recreated everyday by the likes of geneticists, computer programmers, and real estate developers. Plastic surgeons, farm managers, and all kinds of ordinary people are now making the kinds of aesthetic decisions that only artists and architects once
made. Particularly in the fast approaching era of genetic engineering, the kinds of aesthetic choices once made only by artists will be central choices for society. Artists who can grasp the new technology may have a much more direct opportunity to redefine our idea of nature than they did when their media were limited to painting and sculpture. (pp. 72-73)

In addition to redefining our relationship to nature and the environment, the work of artists described by Deitch can also manifest social change. To accomplish such a task, performance artist/critic Suzanne Lacy (1995) calls upon a visual art "based on engagement;" one "that uses both traditional and nontraditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives" (p. 19). In her anthology, Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art, Lacy describes the work of "new genre public artists" such as Allan Kaprow, Tim Rollins and K.O.S., Judy Baca, and others as pedagogical in nature.

The notion of sustaining or continuing a connection begun through the artwork is an expression of personal responsibility that has a pedagogical thrust, often expressed as educating engaged community members, students, or even the art world. This pedagogy is rarely as doctrinaire as its critics would have it. Rather, the artist imparts options for developing activist and aesthetic work, generally on the constituency's own terms. (p. 34)

Lacy's notion of engagement has direct bearing on the pedagogy of the Deep Creek School where students are continually challenged to consider the ecological ramifications of their art works. To make art assumes taking responsibility for one's actions, one's work. Challenging the Modernist assumption that isolates art from society, the students learn that art is not produced in a social or cultural vacuum. The work of the artist is informed by the culture and, in turn, the art work informs the culture—an ecological cycle similar to the one we find in nature. As a working metaphor, Deep Creek students discover that "ecology" is not exclusive to the caretaking of the land, but also in the care and respect they demonstrate towards what critic Lucy Lippard (1995) calls our "cultural geography."

We have to know more about our relationships to each other, as part of the cultural ecology, to know where we stand as artists and cultural workers on homelessness, racism, and land, water cultural, and religious rights, whether or not we ever work directly on these issues. Because they are linked, to be ignorant of one is to misunderstand another. (p. 118)

The Deep Creek School is grappling with a cultural condition in which the line between actual experience and its simulation has become blurred as never before. Today's students are conversant in the language of electronic media and consumer culture—but they encounter difficulties when trying to navigate the real crises in the health of their bodies and the global environment. There is a deep sense among many of the artists and educators that we speak with that art programs nationwide are not responding sufficiently to the dramatic changes occurring in the culture at large. The precedent of fitting programs to the demands of society or other factors external to "art for art's sake" is well established—and usually short lived. Rather than retrofitting curricula to produce a weak echo of social trends, current events, or the "state-of-the-arts," the Deep Creek School experience asks students to take a pro-active stance with respect to their bodies, the tools the culture has developed, and the spaces they inhabit. We firmly believe that artists—and art as a discipline—can occupy a leadership role in driving the culture forward.

Footnotes

1'Ve are indebted to Dr. Will Heywood, a visiting artist and psychologist during the 1994 session, for introducing the "Talking Circle" to the students and staff. Every student has expressed the positive role the Circle played in knitting the group together. It provided a healthy, risk-free space for
everyone—students, teachers, and staff—for communicating thoughts and feelings.

References


The Green Quilt: An Example of Collective Eco-Action in Art Education

Doug Blandy

Kristin G. Congdon

Laurie Hicks

Elizabeth Hoffman

Don Krug

At the 1994 National Art Education Association (NAEA) Convention in Baltimore we initiated two eco-action presentations that resulted in the making and display of a Green Quilt (Blandy, Congdon, Hicks, Hoffman, & Krug, 1994a; Blandy, Congdon, Hicks, Hoffman & Krug, 1994b). All of us have been coming to NAEA conventions for a number of years. Every year we have heard discussions on the gap between theory and practice. Discussed also has been the importance and need for activism within the NAEA. As a result of listening to these discussions, the five of us met at the 1993 convention to plan a session for 1994 that would be collaborative, active, political, and ecologically oriented. All of us have an ongoing research interest in eco-active art education. Consequently, we planned...