LEARNING WITHOUT KNOWING

Which pedagogies, learning environments, or situations further our commitment to working with artists or through aesthetic points of departure? In this session, we examined the compelling work of artists who have transformed storefront environments into lively public classrooms. These experimental spaces serve as interesting models for creative environments that offer easy access to the public, and that generate enthusiasm and participation in a wide range of experiences. Mark Allen, Sean Dockray, and Adam Lerner gave presentations followed by a group discussion.

ALLEN: I want to talk informally about various ways of structuring educational projects in communities that may involve a variety of educational domains. I operate a storefront space in L.A. that's called Machine Project. I was struck by the cultural trends that we just saw upstairs, and the idea of porosity is important to me—that a storefront is a space that's both private and public, and the barrier between those is very thin.

Artist Walter Kitindu at Machine Project

Inside the storefront we present a variety of classes. This is my friend, Walter Kitindu, who teaches an instrument-building class at the Exploratorium. We're also interested in teaching technology, but we think of technology as anything that comprises the built environment, not just technology in terms of things that use electricity. Instead we ask, "How do you make soap?" Or, in this case, "How do you start a fire with two sticks?"

Pizza oven

I'm also interested in flows between the outside and the inside. We present a workshop in which we send people out to look for discarded sofas. Then we harvest the foam from the sofas to make Halloween costumes. Or we might build a pizza oven on the street. A recent class, aimed at kids, presented a workshop about car theft. So parents and children together learn how to break into cars, how to hotwire cars, and how to break out of the trunk.

> We are interested in doing things in public, and we are not afraid to use ridiculous hooks as a way to teach students about electricity or other mechanisms.

Hotwiring a car

We are interested in doing things in public, and we are not afraid to use ridiculous hooks as a way to teach students about electricity or other mechanisms. We presented another workshop about the origins of protective coloration in animals, and how that led to the evolution of camouflage. Participants then tried to make costumes that blend into the neighborhood. One person's costume attempted to blend into the library setting.

I was also interested in the matrix of interactivity between participation and democracy. Sometimes these ideas blend together, but each has specific nuances.

Architectural Workshop at Machine Project

Many projects involve participatory models of education. This is a piece by Liz Glynn in which, over the course of 24 hours, participants recapitulated the architectural history of Rome. They started building basic structures, and then more advanced structures as the hours, related to the years, went on. At the end of the 24 hours, the audience was told that it is the invading Visigoths and will destroy the city.

In another project, called DorkBake, participants designed and built their own easy-bake ovens. It is one of my favorites.

It was nice to see Margaret's hyperbolic crochet coral reef in the video. We presented a workshop with her earlier involving that project. One of the things that interests me is the way in which different communities come together to interact in a more profound way than just being at an event together. Whether it's artists and mathematicians crocheting along with crochet enthusiasts, or people creating papier-mâché at a museum, I've been interested in the intersection of disparate communities.

If we think of museums as engines for attention, we discover that they are mechanisms that allow one to focus.

We've been doing a lot of projects in storefronts, but I'm also interested in the way that art museums can function as a civic space for learning in an exploratory and less formalized way. I've been involved with several projects at the Hammer Museum. One involved Phil Ross's project, Critter Salon. Participants walk into the museum and see a hallway where people are playing miniature pianos. And then, behind a nondescript door, is a display that describes the history of microscopes.

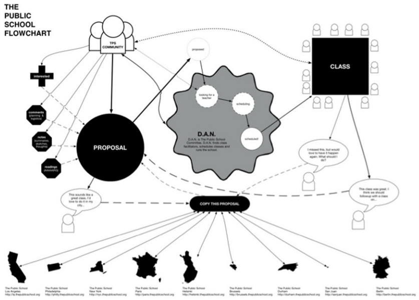
If we think of museums as engines for attention, we discover that they are mechanisms that allow one to focus. It's an interesting place in which to look at the various aesthetics of scientific practice. This was a rainy year in L.A., and it produced a lot of mushrooms. We used the lobby of the museum as a mycology center, presenting demonstrations and a ballet based on mushroom reproduction. Attendees could get their picture taken with a mushroom.

The idea of workshops as a way of joining disparate communities of interest is one that we've been explicitly addressing. In one project, we'd been teaching sewing and electronics, and we noticed that the electronics students were all men, and the sewing students were all women. So we built a class to combine the two. Participants started by making their own felt out of wool, then dyeing it using natural dyes. Next, they designed a sound circuit-board, sewed the felt into a stuffed animal, and then inserted the sound circuit into it. The result was a stuffed-wool construction that was also an electronic instrument.

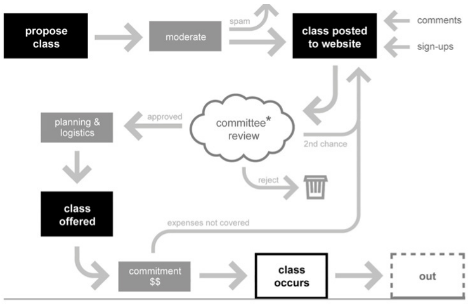
Another project that I participated in last weekend at UC Berkeley Museum was called the Machine Project Confusatron. It comprised four popular workshops with overlapping audiences that wouldn't normally intersect. One part of the project focused on making musical instruments from watermelons, which is somewhat of an electronics lesson. Other participants made kim chee, while still others investigated plant cloning and drag make-up—a buffet of topics.

DOCKRAY: My name is Sean Dockray, and I'm a director at Telic Arts Exchange, which is a non-profit in L.A. Our mission is to provide a critical engagement with new media and culture. We've being presenting exhibitions and performances for about four years. We started one project, called the Public School, in our basement. Part of the motivation might have been that the "What" part of our program had been addressing new media and things like that, including how the Internet changes the way that we see the world and see other people. But the "How" part of our program was still functioning like a gallery.

That was our motive to try a different way of running an arts organization. The initial idea was that it would be a school with no curriculum, which is an empty school. People proposed classes that they either wanted to take or wanted to teach. They could decide which ideas were good and discuss them in more detail.


THE PUBLIC SCHOOL FLOWCHART
THE COMMUNITY
PROPOSAL
D.A.N.
CLASS
COPY THIS PROPOSAL

Public School Committee Review Club


propose class
moderate
spam
class posted to website
comments
sign-ups
planning & logistics
approved
committee* review
2nd chance
reject
class offered
expenses not covered
commitment $$
class occurs
out

Public school around the world

Turning a proposal into a real physical meeting is an amorphous process. That slide shows the Committee Review Club, which was formed at the beginning of the project three years ago. We don't give out degrees, or have accreditation, or anything else that would be worthwhile for a lot of people.

Much of the time that I have been involved in the school, I found myself in the position of not knowing something, which is when I'm the most interested.

We made this diagram three weeks ago. The first one's more speculative, much like an idea. The second one is reflective. It provides some sense of how things have gone. In that time, schools have opened in nine other cities. Approximately 700 class proposal and hundreds of classes have been held. I won't describe them in detail.

One way is "Not Knowing the Subject," and refers to the teacher. One straightforward proposal titled, "Learning to play chess while talking about Duchamp," involved a chess class where the participants talked vaguely about the history of Duchamp, who abandoned art to play chess. We were able to persuade the senior chess master from Los Angeles to teach the class. He enjoyed the highest rating a chess master can achieve in the U.S., apparently. But because of the nature of the proposal, he felt obliged to give an art history lecture about Duchamp, which was interesting, because it wasn't necessarily the way that I'd experienced art history. He was absolutely relieved to have finished that part of the proposal, but then he started analyzing the chess games that Duchamp had played. So this was our first experience of a teacher not knowing the subject that he was teaching.

The second way is "Not Knowing Where to Go." We presented this project, which comprised a reading group in Berlin. We lacked a dedicated space, so we met in public spaces around the city every day for 13 days. We picked a location that caused students some anxiety about whether they were in the right place. Once there, it was necessary to find the other people from the class by searching sociological cues as to whether they're in the same group as yourself. Even then, it was a matter of figuring out where to sit and then doing something. Essentially there was a class before the class.

The third way is "Group Not-Knowing," which occurs when students know nothing about the subject. We once presented a class about speculative realism, which is floating around in the blogosphere, but no one in the room knew anything about it. We didn't have the luxury to wait for a philosophy student to explain Heidegger to us, so we tried to walk through it ourselves over the span of six weeks, using only a chalkboard.

The fourth way is "Not Knowing the Other Teacher." Usually we like it when people propose something that they don't know anything about. It's more interesting when someone says, "I want to know about S&M," which we consider a proposal. I would then combine theory and practice by saying, "I'd like to see this class happen, but I have no intention of teaching it, and I have no idea who can teach it." This usually provides the most generative possibilities. Someone can always volunteer to teach something that they have found on a website, as we make use of the Internet quite a bit.

Occasionally people have proposed classes that they fully intend to teach, such as "Economies of Attention," a history of attention throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Out of the blue, someone said, "I'm interested in attention, and I also want to teach that class." We once had an uneasy relationship between two people who had no relationship outside the class. They were barely communicating, even before the class, yet they were both ostensibly teaching the class. It was weirdly complementary, but also, at times, antagonistic.

The fifth way is "Not Knowing What the Class Is." David Elliott proposed a class titled, "Making Something out of Something," which investigated the strategies of creativity in a post-digital age. He didn't provide much more information, and yet it was one of the most popular classes, to judge by the number of people who clicked the “I’m interested” button. People seem to love the idea of learning about a topic, even though they know nothing about it.

Recently, someone mistakenly posted something, then tried to delete it but failed, so they simply retitled it, “It Was All a Mistake.” This became another wildly popular class.

The sixth way is “Not Knowing How to Run a School,” which we don’t. We’re not accredited, and we make no claims to be. We don’t grant degrees. But that doesn’t mean that we shirk all claims or responsibilities. I think that not knowing how to run a school helps us in a number of ways. Over the past three years there’s been an ongoing dialogue about how to run the school. We’re obviously open to revising it because we have no idea, and we’re willing to make 90-degree turns in the process.

Because this is Learning Without Knowing, as well as Art as a Way of Knowing, I wanted to make a case for not knowing.

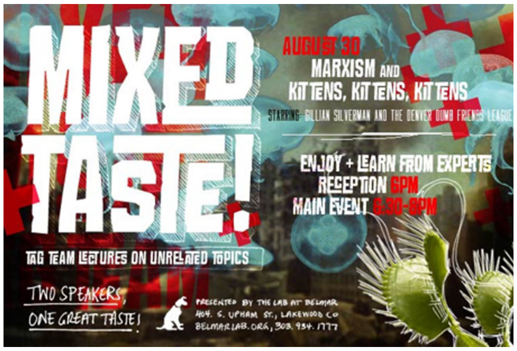
LERNER: My name is Adam Lerner, and I am the director and chief animator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Denver. We consider our live programming (what you would normally call “educational” programming) as important as our exhibits. For us, both the educational programs and the exhibits are mechanisms for creating an energized cultural and intellectual community.

T. S. Eliot meets meat sausage

I’ve had one good idea in my life, and I built my career on that idea. It occurred in 2004 and was called, “Mixed Taste: Tag Team Lectures on Unrelated Topics.” One example was, “Andy Warhol and Artificial Lighting.” During Mixed Taste presentations, one speaker addresses a topic for half an hour, and then a second speaker addresses an unrelated topic for another half hour. We then have a question-and-answer session involving both speakers simultaneously. During the first two talks, the speakers are strictly forbidden from making any connections between their subjects, but during the question and answer session, anything can happen.

For example, the speaker on the left in this slide is a professor at the University of Colorado in Denver, and a T.S. Eliot expert. The man on the right works at Marczyk’s Fine Foods, and is an expert on fresh meat sausage.

When we started this, we were working in vacant storefronts in Belmar, a suburban shopping district outside Denver. Belmar is not known for culture.


MIXED TASTE!
AUGUST 30
MARXISM AND
KITTENS, KITTENS, KITTENS
STARRING: GILLIAN SILVERMAN AND THE DENVER DUMB FRIENDS LEAGUE
ENJOY + LEARN FROM EXPERTS
RECEPTION 6PM
MAIN EVENT 6:30-8PM
TAG TEAM LECTURES ON UNRELATED TOPICS
TWO SPEAKERS, ONE GREAT TASTE!
PRESENTED BY THE LAB AT BELMAR
404. S. UPHAM ST., LAKEWOOD CO
BELMARLAB.ORG, 303.934.1777

Poster for Mixed Taste Program on Marxism and kittens

This is a sample season of Mixed Taste presentations: “Carnivorous Plants and Color Field Painting,” “Earth Art and Goat Cheese,” “Capoeira and Le Corbusier,” “Chinese Opera and Alfred Hitchcock,” “Walt Whitman and Whole Hog Cooking,” and “Tequila and Dark Energy in the Universe,” “Soul Food and Existentialism,” “Prairie Dogs and Gertrude Stein,” and the summer blockbuster, conceived by my creative partner, Sarah Baie, was “Marxism and Kittens, Kittens, Kittens.”

This program alters the conditions of knowledge. Normally a lecture includes the content of the lecture, as well as the universe of authority behind the lecture. If it’s a single lecture, the authority remains unquestioned and is the invisible context that forms the basis of the lecture. But when you pair two things—a philosophy lecture on Marxism with an animal husbandry lecture on cats, for instance—you have two universes of authority alongside each other. They destabilize each other, so you’re forced to abandon conventional ways of thinking about each.

The philosophy behind Mixed Taste is an exquisite corpse approach. When you listen to a lecture, there are “conditions of knowledge,” which is a great term. This program alters the conditions of knowledge. Normally a lecture includes the content of the lecture, as well as the universe of authority behind the lecture. If it’s a single lecture, the authority remains unquestioned and is the invisible context that forms the basis of the lecture. But when you pair two things—a philosophy lecture on Marxism with an animal husbandry lecture on cats, for instance—you have two universes of authority alongside each other. They destabilize each other, so you’re forced to abandon conventional ways of thinking about each. By pairing two topics arbitrarily—they’re always paired arbitrarily, and not on the basis of a logical connection between them—you force your mind into new directions of thinking about both topics. You follow pathways that are not conditioned by the conventions of either.

The first season of this program began with 12 people and ended up with 150. Seven years later, our limit is now 330 people, and we often sell out five weeks in advance.

Our motto in the early days was, “Because Culture is big like Canada.”

I have a video to show you about how each speaker begins with his or her own authority structure, which then destabilizes by being juxtaposed with a completely different system

[LERNER NARRATES VIDEO]

MALE VOICE: What he was doing in his film is trying to get people to unlearn socialized seeing.

MALE VOICE: You really don’t need to refrigerate salami.

FEMALE VOICE: These artists exhibit a very strong commitment to reach a broad audience.

MALE VOICE: Okra is very important to gumbo, primarily because it’s slightly gelatinous.

MALE VOICE: What we’re attempting to do in recreating this hollow tree is to provide the woodpecker with something that resembles what he would find in nature.

MALE VOICE: Camp, in Susan Sontag’s words, is a tender feeling.

LERNER: The humor in this video, and in Mixed Taste, generally, stems from the fact that the speakers have such enormous passion for their individual fields. That expertise usually creates a universe of authority for them, but they’re forced into a relationship with something that has equal authority in a completely different universe. That’s what makes the conversation fresh every time.

Even though this was the only good idea I’ve ever had, every decent idea I’ve had since then, I learned from this one idea.

One of our programs is called “Feminism & Company: Art, Sex, and Politics,” which is co-directed by Elissa Auther and Gillian Silverman. It creates juxtapositions relating to gender issues. We’re presenting one a few weeks from now titled, “Sex Toys and Tupperware,” in which a passion party expert and a Tupperware lady will both give presentations, followed by a sociologist talking about women’s home-based industries. Another presentation, “Feminism & Company,” addressed the subject of power, and juxtaposed a woman bodybuilder with someone from the Latina Initiative, a woman's political organization.

We organized a program in 2010 titled, "Art Meets Beast," a three-day event related to the bison. It began with a Mixed Taste of "Buffalo Bill and Cave Paintings." That was followed the next day with a workshop on how to butcher a bison, which was introduced by people playing Buffalo Springfield on the horn. During the bison-butchering workshop, the "vegetarian option" featured a rocker expert, who's also a vegetarian, playing the guitar. Afterwards the meat was divided up and given to eight of the leading chefs in the city. The next day we presented a collaboration with Nicola Twilley and Sarah Rich, who organized a "FoodPrint" panel of five experts to explore the relationship between meat and design. After the panel discussion we prepared a meal for 300 people and ate the bison together. The performances at the dinner were a collaboration with Machine Project, Mark Allen's program. Chris Kallmyer produced a surround-sound buffalo stampede and played the drums on animal bones, while Emily Lacy made bison masks for the diners to wear to "hide their shame." Here is a two-minute video montage of "Art Meets Beast."

> **LERNER NARRATING VIDEO:** This is Art Meets Beast. If you think about what is our most immediate connection to culture, it's not painting or sculpture. It's probably food.
>
> **MALE VOICE:** We procured a whole bison. As there's a bison shortage, that was a coup.
>
> **FEMALE VOICE:** Meat, it's still the center of the dinner plate for most people.
>
> **MALE VOICE:** I think that the factory food industry has made butchering almost a factory job. This has caused a backlash, and some really great artisan butchers are starting to emerge. The butcher's place in society is now more highly regarded by the consumers.
>
> **MALE VOICE:** Buffalo Bill hunted the buffalo for meat. When the buffalo came close to extinction, he was very concerned that they would disappear altogether, and he spoke out against the slaughter.
>
> **MALE VOICE:** When an animal gives its life for our nourishment and enjoyment, there's a contract that we have with that animal. To relegate it to a trade pact..., that's not for me.
>
> **MALE VOICE:** The industry associated with meat is very different from most other industries, and it doesn't really matter what species we're discussing.

> Instead of taking a bunch of raw materials and manufacturing them into a finished product, we're starting with the finished product and disassembling it into parts and pieces.
>
> **MALE VOICE:** We cut the [thigh] bone off. We cut all the [feather] bones off. We leave the ribs on, or take them off, and tie them back on. That's your prime rib.
>
> **MALE VOICE:** When it's alive, it's a bison. When it's dead, it's buffalo. And it's tasty, as well.
>
> **MALE VOICE:** We made a bison demi-glace and served it with meatballs to keep them moist. And we have a Three Sisters Succotash.
>
> **MALE VOICE:** I took a rib-eye, and we're having prime buffalo rib-eye with Yukon Gold mashed potatoes and red [Shirley] buffalo gravy.
>
> **LERNER [VIDEO]:** The more that we understand art as continuous with the entirety of our culture, the more that we can have an authentic relationship, and the more that we understand that art and food are both expressions of who we are.

LERNER: The point of the whole program is that without making art about food, we tried creatively to discern multiple points of intersection between art and food. We brought together the craft of butchery, the performances of Buffalo Bill, and the creativity of individual chefs and musicians. Our task was to find a way of developing a creative new discourse about food that's not the language of sustainability or the slow food movement, but that feels inventive and fresh.

In much of what we do, we try to be the authors of a new discourse, and the producers, or co-producers, of new ways of thinking about culture.

What I'm really interested in is the aesthetic experience of the social dynamic of the participants in any particular knowledge set being conveyed. This is something we're excited about launching: The idea of thinking about art as a discursive space rather than as a knowledge-generating space. What does that mean for leveraging art toward ideas of science education or informal science education?

ALLEN: Thanks, Adam. Before we open the discussion up to everyone, we thought we'd first see if we have any questions for each other.

LERNER: What effect does learning and knowing have on what you do?

ALLEN: I think it's interesting to think about how to disassociate knowing from a kind of instrumentalization of education or culture—thinking about the entire process rather than only the end-space. What I'm really interested in is the aesthetic experience of the social dynamic of the participants in any particular knowledge set being conveyed. This is something we're excited about launching: the idea of thinking about art as a discursive space rather than as a knowledge-generating space. What does that mean for leveraging art toward ideas of science education or informal science education? I think it's complicated.

LERNER: What's your take? How do the terms "knowing and learning" feel relevant to what you do—or not?

DOCKRAY: Over the past few weeks, I've been wowed. It's such a silly way of describing the events happening around the world, including the revolts in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. They are all very far from our space, but when I think about the type of knowing or learning that happens in a huge process like revolution, the drive to replace a regime with a different form of government, it's like filling up the state again. To assume the state form seems to ignore the possibilities that are latent within the process of revolution.

For me, working in a cultural space is about how we experience the various ways people experience their world. It becomes a communication tool. It's almost as if the learning aspect is a side effect of simply inhabiting somebody else's world.

LERNER: It relates very much to what Mark was saying about non-instrumentality. When a symbol is gone, the idea of leaving no symbol, no destination, or no flag is a very unstable but also a very powerful moment to keep. At the MCA, we use learning environments, but learning is a driver for meaning, or more importantly, for various kinds of communities that we want to create. I don't necessarily want people to learn anything about a bison, but learning about the different types of people who are affected by the bison and its place in food production creates a creative, cultural, and intellectual energy in the city that filters out elsewhere. Thus, even though knowing and learning both happen, they're not the terms that I would use to describe what it is that we do.

ALLEN: Yes. I was thinking during the talk about the way that a presentation can be a very interesting way of experiencing somebody else's subjectivity, and when somebody who is excited about something gives a talk, it doesn't matter what the topic is. You see it through their eyes as a sort of prosthetic enthusiasm. This is a profound way to inhabit another person's subjectivity. For me, working in a cultural space is about how we experience the various ways people experience their world. It becomes a communication tool. It's almost as if the learning aspect is a side effect of simply inhabiting somebody else's world.

LERNER: It's amazing. It speaks to some aspects of not knowing what Sean was talking about, as well. Not knowing another person's position has an incredible ethical dimension to it, doesn't it? One of our most moving Mixed Taste events was Bigfoot and Carl Jung. One speaker is a Bigfoot researcher, and you have had Bigfoot researchers as well, right?

DOCKRAY: Well, it was natural.

LERNER: Exactly. He has been on about 30 Bigfoot expeditions. He is also the head of the Colorado Institute on Bigfoot, and he catalogues all the sightings of Bigfoot in the state of Colorado. He claims that most sightings occur along the I-70 corridor. The audience snickered a little as we heard him talk.

Then the Carl Jung speaker got up, a professor at the University of Denver, and spoke about Carl Jung's sense of the irrational, which we have lost, and how we need to recover some sense of it. We tend to ignore the irrational side of us, when we need to embrace it. By doing do, we will have a true and more meaningful understanding of who we are. I found myself thinking, "That's really interesting. We should all do that."

The first question was, "Why has a body of Bigfoot never been found?" The Bigfoot expert replied, "Maybe they bury their dead." We all laughed at him. He believes that the Bigfoot creatures bury their dead. Then the Carl Jung speaker said that we don't want to find the body of Bigfoot because then we'd bring it to an MIT lab and study it, and it would become part of our rational thinking.

What happened was amazing. We had all listened to the talk about Carl Jung and the irrational, and we agreed we should accept the irrational as part of us. Then we listened to the talk by the Bigfoot researcher, and we all laughed at him. Only later did we realize that the Bigfoot researcher is the most beautiful thing that we can probably aspire to. He's searching for a monstrous version of ourselves, and he has the sense of the miraculous and that sense of the mystique of the modern world, which Jung was searching for. We all simultaneously felt that we had just been deceived. We had fallen for the belief that we moderns push things outside.

We were unable to see the world from the perspective of the Bigfoot researcher, even though originally we were so accepting of him.

That ability was the most wrenchingly powerful experience. We never describe what we do as learning, but I think it achieves what learning wants to achieve, which is to make us not fearful of things that are outside of ourselves.

LERNER: I think that we all have various perspectives on participation, different levels of participation from performance to Q&A to audience-generated content. We'd like to know if participation is always a value, or is there a tension between participation and the creative voice of an institution or an artist? We try to balance participation with what we might call creative voice. We attempt to engage people.

FEMALE VOICE: I'm from the Carnegie Museum, and we are a big collections-based institution with researchers and curators. I'm the curator of public engagement, so I'm thinking about how to bring people in. I'm excited about everyone's ideas and thinking of the museum as a community that's intersecting with other public communities. These communities might see the museum as something different than just a place where people tell you lots of facts. People love that aspect of the museum, but it's not my idea of a compelling experience.

I'm really curious. When I think about a storefront space that you can make into whatever you want, it seems so liberating in a way. And yet there's also something exciting about meeting the people who work behind the scenes. The people who come to hear museum lectures are curious. Museum lecturers are very passionate about their work, and when we take the public behind the scenes, it's exciting for them.

I've often thought that we should think of ourselves as a coral reef, and have a space where people can come in and design experiences. Even if it were an art experience, or a social experience, or something that had nothing to do with what we say we're about, it would reflect how people see what we do. There is a tension among those who define the meaning of that space. I think there's room to play with it, but I'd be curious to hear what people in this room would do if they had the opportunity to come to Pittsburgh and set up shop for a while. I'm sure that's what the Exploratorium's done for years, with Osher Fellows and...

FEMALE VOICE: Yes. I think it relates to that, but there's a larger question about cultures of participation. There isn't a neutral culture of participation. I think about some of the things that Mark talked about—juxtaposing things that have natural affinity audiences in such a way that those people discover things about themselves that they didn't know. Or maybe something about how the new content of a subject was presented didn't feel relevant to them or for them. That allows everyone to redefine their notion of themselves, as well as whatever it is that that has brought them to that place. That seems central to me. Who goes to these events? Who is it really for—those whom you already have an affinity for, even though you're creating these wildly juxtaposed ideas? Or is it beyond your ability, as the developer of those programs, to know?

FEMALE VOICE: In other words, the museum must also share the audience's experience?

FEMALE VOICE: Yes.

ALLEN: We sometimes think that authorship and participation are on the same axis—as it becomes more participatory, the authorship or the institution decreases. But it's more like crossing. We sometimes make participatory pieces that are highly authored. They're very much a Machine Project. It's interesting to pull those two things apart and to realize that it's not necessarily more democratic or more transferring of the authorship.

> I would like to ask people from institutions that are trying to develop more participation: What are your goals? Do you want to shift the power relationship in terms of how the audience relates to the organization, or do you want to present a different learning modality that allows people to access information differently?

PENNY: I was excited when Adam was emphasizing the universe of authority that exists in the writing of this kind of presentations. To use the temple structure analogy, the museum is precisely the kind of place where to move those things out of the temple and into the bus stop outside would completely change the meaning of everything. I think that removing the validating context is also an interesting possibility. I can see it working both ways in the Mixed Taste events. It's possible that the authority of both speakers would be eroded and the whole situation would devolve. How does positioning these different kinds of knowledge affect the speakers and the audience?

LERNER: What almost always happens is that the person whom you thought was the joker, and the person whom you thought was the straight man, get reversed, which is amazing. We once had a professor of German who talked about Wittgenstein and hula dancers. We thought, "Hula dancing—that's funny." What was amazing is that the hula dancers had an amazing understanding of what they did, whereas the German professor's understanding of their dancing was as an expression of Wittgenstein's interest in finding meaning beyond language. As a result, you think, “Wow, hula dancing is an amazing thing.” So I think that what you meant by taking it outside the temple is that the temple gives it an energy. When you break that energy, it becomes funny, energetic, and interesting. The fact that you didn’t expect hula dancing to be so interesting in the context of a philosophy lecture—that tension—keeps it meaningful. It’s not dull; it’s very funny and powerful because of that. Does that answer your question?

DOCKRAY: I spoke last summer about data visualization, and the other person discussed fly fishing. It was the most beautiful speaking event that I’ve ever participated in. But an essential aspect was that it was very much a game situation. The audience was so engaged and motivated to use its energy to make connections between two disparate things. I think that this game quality is implicit in the organization. What makes it such an entertaining event was that everybody played the game. It became a competition to see who could one-up and make the most absurd connection.

Whose ideas count? Whose ideas matter? Whose ideas do we take seriously?

WERTHEIM: I think that this question of authority and destabilizing power structures is critical for what we are all trying to do. I loved your talk, Adam. I’m intrigued that so many people still have the idea that the hula dancing people will be funny and Wittgenstein will be serious, because it seems to me that one of the interesting things that’s happening in society today—and I think it’s one of the things that really needs to happen—is precisely raising that question. Why should anyone think that Wittgenstein is a more serious subject than yoga or hula dancing or Bigfoot? Fundamentally, we’re asking: Whose ideas count? Whose ideas matter? Whose ideas do we take seriously? This gets to the essence of the group participatory project.

LERNER: I try to be as honest as I can. In fact, I’m trying to learn myself. If other people get something out of it, that’s great. I catch myself being a snob all the time, and it’s funny. I think that the power of high culture is something that you can’t wish away. You can’t just say, “Art will suddenly stop being something magical that has sparkle dust on it.” I don’t think that it’s going to disappear in the near term.

The Internet has become a radical decontextualizing device for hierarchies.

WERTHEIM: No, but we can dream.

ALLEN: I have a proposition. I think that recreational use of the Internet at work has radically transformed how we perceive those things. I find myself thinking: "Hula dancing, Wittgenstein, hog slaughtering, volcanoes, and Peru are all the same field." The Internet has become a radical decontextualizing device for hierarchies.

MALE VOICE: Just with that search result?

LERNER: Or a great search result.

WILLSDON: I have two things to say. As to the participatory aspect, there's almost the suggestion that healing happens here, whether it's bringing people together for a project, or the art/science idea. Lawrence Weschler suggested that once upon a time, art and science were together, and then they split. That idea makes me wonder whether at some point, there might be a new division between art and science, because science needs to understand itself as being comprehensive. What's done in science is cumulative and it builds coherence, whereas art kind of splits. It's a collage. Mixed Taste is a form of collage, right?

There's no effort in art practice, or in a set of art practices that comes together. If anything, there's an element in art and culture that's divisive, that seems to believe: "This is my culture, and that is your culture." It's tribal, and part of the importance of it is that no particular artwork or cultural practice is for everybody. At some level I think that it's hard to reconcile different parts of the discussion here.

We curated a show with Rudolf Frieling, entitled Art and Participation. One online reviewer, who writes about the 2.0 version of the museum, criticized it because there wasn't enough participation in certain pieces. He almost judged some pieces to be more successful in quantifiable terms by how much participation there was. I know that Rudolf wanted a show that made you experience the limits of participation and ask yourself if the participation was staged or bogus. Are you just the lab rat? Participation is not like health care. It's not something that you should just have more of.

BARTELS: But there's an important distinction here. We've gotten ourselves into a situation, which is so easy to do in this kind of forum, in which we back into issues of authority, the authority of the institution, or the authority of the speaker in the context…or the authority of the disciplines. And so we think of the delivery end of it.

What I haven't heard is people coming back to the learner. Where's the learning theory here, the cognitive sciences, or the learner's experience? George and I had a wonderful time working with Georgia. We did a paper together, and one of the things that impressed us about learning theory and why we assume that learning happens is that in a school, all the pupils are the same age, and the teacher is teaching the same subject for nine months. The fidelity of what teachers think they're teaching and what the students are learning may be at best 50%. Maybe. I don't know.

> Many of us are excited about what we're doing, and the correlation between what the lecturer is intending and what the learner is getting out of it may drop below 10%. But guess what? It doesn't matter. It's really fun that people derive their own meaning from it. Because we're such human pattern-formers, we're going to find some connection between those two topics no matter how disparate you make them. That's how we're wired as learners.

You get into the sort of situation here. Many of us are excited about what we're doing, and the correlation between what the lecturer is intending and what the learner is getting out of it may drop below 10%. But guess what? It doesn't matter. It's really fun that people derive their own meaning from it. Because we're such human pattern formers, we're going to find some connection between those two topics no matter how disparate you make them. That's how we're wired as learners.

What excites me about participation is that the Exploratorium, Burning Man, the Crucible, MAKE, Techshop, and other institutions on the West Coast are coming together, and their audiences and staffs are becoming almost one. It's quite a remarkable thing to watch. What is it about those institutions, that style of participation, that coming together at the same time, that feels like a do-it-yourself zeitgeist is forming? There's something about the fundamental nature of the learner, as it relates to different and disparate domains in science and art. That's the fun and interesting part for me. It's about the learning; it's not about the authority.

LERNER: If somebody attends a program that feels exciting and energizing, but doesn't participate, yet later becomes inspired to create something that hasn't existed before, is that a form of learning, a form of participation? Sometimes when you listen to music that you think of as amazing, even though you don't think of yourself as participating, it might inspire you to become a musician.

FEMALE VOICE: It makes me wonder what learning means. Is it something that we're doing right now, or something that we're preparing to do in the future? When teams interact in the museum, for instance, they're doing something right now and feeling engaged and connected to it. Of course, we want to have rich learning environments, but it seems that what we are doing is making the community a rich place for exposure to ideas. That reframes how people see the world, which is a kind of learning, right?

MALE VOICE: It seems to me that there are a couple of conversations taking place. One is about learning and providing fascinating experiences, which you're doing, and Mark is doing, maybe with materials and structure. The other conversation is about control. Who's in charge? In one sense, your program is very traditional. You get the experts. You have lectures. We know what that system is. And you provide a set of materials that are going to determine what people will do. I think that Sean is probably the one who intrigues people because he takes the real risk that the thing will collapse completely. The course won't work. The two instructors will quarrel. People won't meet each other. I wondered what you thought about Burning Man and the Exploratorium. How much control are you willing to give up, Dennis?

BARTELS: It‘s an illusion that I ever was in control.

MALE VOICE: Your institution is in your control, and that's probably the question that you were asking. What can I get away with in my institution? How far can I expand beyond whatever it is—the director's control, the institutional control, the history of the culture of our institution? You're a new institution that has freed itself in some ways. So that's one conversation that's going on here. How do we give up control? I used to teach a course in which I told the students that they had to present the content. And it was scary as hell giving up that control. Some weeks were really bad for me. They didn't know their stuff. But that was the price I paid for trying to shift that.

LERNER: Are you saying that giving up control is always a good value to pursue?

MALE VOICE: No. It depends on what you want to accomplish. My job is to get you through the licensing exam for some profession, then...

LERNER: But that's pretty far from what Sean is doing; his licensing exam.

MALE VOICE: It depends on what your responsibilities are. There are certain responsibilities that you want to keep, you need to keep, and you feel the need to keep control of, just as I wouldn't let my two-year-old cross the street without holding his hand.

LERNER: Yes, but both examples that you supported regarding control involve very ends-oriented control, like the safety of your child or a licensing exam. Do you value situations in which control happens that inspire people to be creative? The kind of control that creates aesthetic situations that have a degree of uncertainty to them. You're still controlling, but you're controlling in a way that you feel is a result of an attempt to rethink the world afresh with your programming. Would you value that as a form of control, or is that like saying, "You should give up more control?"

MALE VOICE: I'd need to evaluate the program to see what [sounds interesting.] No, that's an empirical, but it's an experimental question. I mean, I don't know *a priori* how much control is going to be for the best in a particular situation.

LERNER: Interesting.

ALLEN: I think it's interesting to think that in your toolkit of design experiences, participation is one set of tools and control is another set of tools. They're not the same set.

NAJAFI: I run a magazine called *Cabinet*. We did an issue on testing a while ago. For that particular issue, we decided to send an e-mail to local subscribers, asking them to come in on a Saturday afternoon for a project. We told them to bring a pencil. That's all we told them. As they came in, we told them that we were going to give them milk and cookies. That was the only reward, as it were. As they came in, we photographed each one of them against the wall. Then we gave them milk and cookies and asked them to sit down. We locked the doors, and we asked them to take out their pencils. Then we gave them a test. The test was to see whether they read at least the last three issues of *Cabinet*. They were all subscribers. The idea was to cancel the subscription of whoever failed the test. It was kind of amazing to...We didn't lock the doors, but nobody budged. Everybody sat down. Everybody took the test. They sweated. There were three of us marching up and down the aisles. Afterwards, when I took the exams back...

FEMALE VOICE: Proctors.

NADJAFI: Like proctors, exactly. And we said, "We're going to publish the results without your knowing the results. We're not going to tell you in advance. We're just going to publish them." One person, who was a lawyer, said that it was okay with her, so long as she got a disclaimer saying that she answered the questions based on what she thought we wanted her to answer. The right answer, she might have known. But everybody said, "Fine."

And then we had a very intense conversation, which goes back to some of these questions of control and authority. In some sense, what came through was a certain sense of nostalgia for moments when you were told exactly what to do as a participant. Participation, and the anxiety of too much freedom in a certain way, was what led them, I think, to enjoy being infantilized in this way. “Sit, take the test.”

I got very long letters from two of the people. One of them wrote, “I’m sorry I did poorly on the test. It’s a terrible thing to happen to my life.” It was a very intense letter. But it was interesting to me. It was like a complete negative of what we’re all discussing here, this sense of anxiety of too much freedom, almost. I myself enjoy much more pedagogical shows in museums than most people I know. I love a good pedagogical show. I’m serious about this. And I…there was some sense of that model still having a hold on people. I’m not exempt from that, and it’s not even an exemption. I mean, it’s not a bad thing as such. Anyway, I just wanted to put it out there.

LERNER: That’s great. Okay, go ahead.

I, as a viewer, want either to be able to learn as a novice, to be taught, or to be in a sort of destabilized space. But I want a repertoire of ways to experience a place, and being able to choose. There’s an autocracy of sorts in saying, “Thou shalt participate.”

WOLF: I had a recent experience at the Rubin Museum in New York. I don’t know much about Himalayan art, so I was hoping to go and learn in that fashion. I was offered a tour guide who said, “What are your questions?” I felt so cheated. I had come to learn from people who knew. It made me yearn for a museum or an experience where [you could, in a sense. You could say there’s a whole repertoire of being in this place. And I, as a viewer, want either to be able to learn as a novice, to be taught, or to be in a sort of destabilized space. But I want a repertoire of ways to experience a place, and being able to choose. There’s an autocracy of sorts in saying, “Thou shalt participate.”

LERNER: Yes.

WOLF: Just as much as, “Thou shalt take notes on what the docent says.”

LERNER: I think that’s great. I’ve experienced some of the most controlling environments that were supposedly very democratic environments. Some of the most enjoyable environments that I’ve been in have been environments like the ones Sina described. There’s something else that I need help finding the words to describe, which is sometimes more important than choice. The only words I have for it are “very high-falutin’” or “too grand for my comfort.” It’s like the feeling that you're creating the world afresh; the feeling that you're inventing something new and are a part of that reinvention.

SACKS OF
RUBBLE
FREE
TO NEW
MEMBERS
TODAY ONLY

Membership rewards at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver

We used to give out two free drinks at our café. And we would give the customer something ridiculous to redeem. For instance, we'd say, "Just give this cinder block to the person in the café." The customers would have to carry the cinder block up the stairs and redeem it for their free drinks. We never told the café staff what we were doing. So they'd say, "Okay, I guess the cinder block is..." We realized that we could do that with anybody, so we started saying, "Just bring this..." Then we got a 5' x 5' sign that read, "Good for one free meal." We told them, "Bring it to Ted's Montana Grill." But we didn't tell Ted's Montana Grill. So the person would just walk in with this big sign and say, "I'm here for my free meal." That's abusive of your audience, so we did a giveaway, two free tickets to the King Tut exhibit, where they just had to redeem two used tires at the Denver Art Museum. And then we had to end the program. But basically, people were happy in some ways to participate in something that felt like...

FEMALE VOICE: Uncertain?

LERNER: Uncertain, maybe. It was like something that was exciting because it felt fresh, new. It was not the way things are usually redeemed. It was not the way a test is usually taken. It's not the way a workshop is usually held. For a workshop, you don't lock your kids in the trunk. You're not supposed to lock kids in the trunk. That's why it's exciting. You're not supposed to have the participants determine what the class is going to be. The excitement is to reverse the conventions.

FEMALE VOICE: Adam, I think that Sina raises an interesting point, which is the idea that people become anxious when there are no limits. It's like with children. Tell a child, "Here's a blank piece of paper. Draw something." Children get very anxious. They don't know what to draw. But if you say, "Here's a blank piece of paper. Draw your vacation," they will get busy. Many people need parameters. But there's a distinction in this discussion that's worth making. That is, there's the issue of authority. But that doesn't mean that you should give up the idea of expertise. The person who's a hula-hoop dancer is an absolute expert. They may not have a Ph.D. They may not have a professorship. They're not going to win a MacArthur Award. But they're absolute experts. Authority is not challenging. I don't want to challenge the expert. Someone who spent 50 years doing yoga knows a great deal more than I do. I think I'm back to Mark's idea of this prosthetic enthusiasm.

And I think that's one of the things that is really worth thinking about—the difference between expertise, credentials, and authority. They're not the same thing.

NAJAFI: You said something I wanted to bring up earlier, which is that Foucault talks about two kinds of intellectuals: a traditional intellectual and a specific intellectual. In the magazine, we've thought about this a little bit and tried to work with this idea. In the traditional intellectual frame is someone like Sartre, who says that he's the last of the traditional intellectuals. That is someone with authority. Sartre can talk about anything, from revolutionary movements in Africa, to philosophy, to whatever else. He's willing to write about anything, because he's got authority, per se. And then he says that the first specific intellectual is Oppenheimer, because it comes out of the specific knowledge of the bomb.

And he talks about hospital workers, people working in prisons. And those are the experts in some sense. I think of them as being specific intellectuals, who don't have universal authority of a certain moral perspective, only a certain kind of intellectual tradition that he has mastered.

LERNER: So let me ask you this. Do we want a world of experts with no sort of authority, or do we want to create classifications for them? It sounds to me as if you feel that a world of experts is interesting. Do we agree?

MALE VOICE: Sartre's authority came from some idea of the authority of philosophy. When you have only experts, you end up with technocrats. Some experts have more power than other experts, which is purely political. It's the usual reasons. The hierarchy just rushes back in, but not on the same basis that held up the idea of Sartre's authority.

NAJAFI: But are those hierarchies more negotiable? Or do you believe that there's a new segmentation of those new structures of authority? Instead of philosophers, let's consider scientists. Are they more mobile and more...

MALE VOICE: I think it's mobile. But I'm not arguing for a return to a universal or something like that.

NAJAFI: I'm interested in this. I haven't thought about the question, the relative authority of the new kinds of technocrats, as you call them, as well.

MALE VOICE: That goes back to Dennie's desire for choice. There are times when I want to place myself under the tutelage of an expert. I'd like to learn from a very fine violinist who's also a very good teacher. When she says, "Do it this way," I do that. I don't say, "Who are you?" And there are other times when I go to the museum by myself and may not want to be bothered by an expert. Depending on what the situation is, we are willing at times to subject ourselves to expertise, to structure, to control. Other times, maybe not.

MALE VOICE: There's a distinction between knowledge and know-how, as well, isn't there? The technical expertise of someone who plays a violin or who hula hoops, as opposed to a knowledge of Marxism, which is supposed to explain everything.

I think there's also a pleasure in discovering that there's a much more horizontal or distributed know-how.

FEMALE VOICE: I think there's also a pleasure in discovering that there's a much more horizontal or distributed know-how. There are hula dancers and Jungians and Bigfoot experts, but they aren't organized into traditional intellectual hierarchies, but are more 19th century.

FEMALE VOICE: I think there's a sort of zeal, pleasure.

FEMALE VOICE: Yes, there is. For instance, discovering a man down the road who knows how to make birch beer. There's a depth of having pursued...it is sort of prosthetic...somebody who cared to find the bizarre ingredients and to transform his basement. There's a hopefulness.

GREEN: I think that a lot of this comes out of the Internet—the undermining of authority and the idea of participation. All that's great. It's hard to argue with participation. But at the heart of it, it is economic dynamics, and that can be problematic, too. The idea of "We don't need journalism. We're all citizen journalists." Or Current TV's motto: "We don't need people making video. Everybody can do it." A lot of user-generated content is great for the people making it. You can sell it to *The Huffington Post* for $200,000,000, because you haven't paid anybody for it. So there's that whole dynamic. Participation is great. User-generated content is great. Amateurism is great. There's also that slippery thing that's happening at the same time that I am somewhat suspicious of.

LERNER: Can you define a little bit more what you're suspicious of?

GREEN: I think that economic forces are pumping those ideas out. People are benefiting from that. And it's not necessarily only about the loveliness of participation and the wonderfulness of amateurism, and "We're all experts," because those ideas are all great. But there are complicated dynamics that are happening. It's important to look at them fully, instead of in a one-dimensional, "Yeah, this is great" way.

ALLEN: I think it does. Of course there are economic impacts, but you're positioning it as if it's being driven by...

GREEN: Not driven at all.

ALLEN: There are economic situations that take advantage of those kinds of notions.

GREEN: Yes, or that are happening at the same time. They are separate but also co-mingled. I'm not using that to discredit this, or even to say, "This is what that's about." But it is there. With journalism, this makes a big difference. The idea that we're all citizen journalists, and we'll all go out and cover our neighborhoods is bullshit. We're not going to, and if papers are undermined and there is no journalism, creepy terrible forces are empowered by that. So that really makes a big difference. And those ideas are not about people loving participation, and we're all amateurs. It's just that economic forces are at work using those ideas to mask other things that are happening. I don't mean to be a spoilsport about all this.

WILLSDON: I think that the Internet is advancing something that has been happening for a long time. It's a modern phenomenon that had its beginnings in the 1960s counterculture. And then, as you saw with Stewart Brand, you can see the formation of the Internet, and the DIY punk generation, all of which was heading toward this. John Seabrook, in his amazing book *No-Brow*, refers to a culture in which we no longer have high- or low-brows. It's just a big wash, where the culture of marketing is the same as the marketing of culture. Is anybody concerned about that? Does anybody want to hold on to the sort of an authority that ...

FEMALE VOICE: I do. Simply put, yes.

PENNY: Sina says, "Oh, but it's negotiable." So we have these different things. But It's almost as if we could all agree to the terms with which we're going to negotiate this. That would be fine. But if we don't have that...I mean, if we had all these different fragments and terms in which they could be negotiated, that would be fine. But it's not knowing who, or on what terms, anyone's going to succeed or...

ALLEN: To negotiate with.

PENNY: Different forms of expertise differ. How language games and frameworks of that...

LERNER: So for you, is it all about power?

PENNY: Yes. It's all about power.

LERNER: The people within institutions have power, but there's also the sort of powerless people who have 50,000 Twitter followers, right? So are they really powerless? Therefore, there are interesting ways in which power works to negotiate influence, aren't there?

PENNY: Yes.

> That's really the crux of the matter, that the broadening of knowledge is what makes a democracy and makes people equal.

MALE VOICE: I don't know if anybody mentioned it this morning, but Frank Oppenheimer started the Exploratorium to empower people, to educate them so that they'll question authority and not follow the rules, necessarily, but learn for themselves. He believed that by giving people the power to think, they can learn and they will learn. That's really the crux of the matter, that the broadening of knowledge is what makes a democracy and makes people equal.

FEMALE VOICE: I came into this conversation in the middle, so I'm taking a big risk here, because I may be off base. I'm trying to figure out what is the big question that is being discussed here. It sounds as if participation and authority have become dichotomized in this conversation. Maybe I'm wrong about that, but it sounds to me as if it's a question of, "Is it this, or is it that?"

And that seems to paint people as extremely passive. George said something like, "Being put under control." And it's as if accessing expertise is different from being subjected to expertise. I think you used the word "subjected." That's a participation. It's a form of participation to access expertise. A lot of people don't have that form of access, and they're excluded from participating with people who have access to knowledge, or experience, or institutions, or whatever it is.

Participation in the world often includes learning from others, and by working with, by listening to, by observing. If we dichotomize the situation you're talking about, and if people think that just because they're contributing something, they don't understand, then the whole system of checks on government has disappeared in the process, because participation is broader than that.

LERNER: I think that we're trying to navigate a very complex matrix. My question is this: I have a museum, and that means I have to believe in the idea of a museum. I believe in this sphere, a field, a discipline of art. And in many ways, that is a rear-guard effort, a rear-guard effort to preserve a tradition of art that I believe has value. At the same time, I absolutely believe in the importance of court hula dancing and meat butchery and other forms of culture that intersect and are continuous. I want both, and I'm personally not ready to give up the field of contemporary art, which is my field, because I believe that it has a lot of power. It has power as a driver. It has power to produce students and artists, and power to produce revenue for what I want to do, for having a meat butchery program as well as…because I think that creates really interesting art as well as this other creative life. But I suspect that museums think of themselves as being avant-garde, when they're really rear-guard. My task, as I see it, is to be both rear-guard and connected to what I think is the true avant-garde, which is those who invent culture afresh in many new ways, as I think Sina is doing with his magazine. So I want both.

WERTHEIM: I think that Sina's point is critical about the economics of all of this. I was invited to participate in *The Huffington Post* very early on, and I declined, because I wasn't prepared to work for Arianna Huffington for free. And I could see where it was heading.

LERNER: And that's where it went.

WERTHEIM: I do, however, write articles for Sina's magazine for almost nothing. Not quite, but very close.

NAJAFI: Very little. Almost nothing.

MALE VOICE: Hopefully, he'll go public and get $200,000,000.

WERTHEIM: However, I do that by choice, because I think that *Cabinet* is a fabulous thing. And I choose to participate in it. Other people choose to participate in *The Huffington Post*. But I think the economics of all of this are crucial. Mark and Sean and Sina—and I have an organization too, the Institute for Figuring—we all operate with miniscule budgets to try to do new things. We all do it by the skin of our teeth every year. And so I think that the economic circumstances on which things are being done are extremely relevant to what you can do and how you can do it.

My institution, the Institute for Figuring, is currently working on the Hyperbolic Project Coral Reef, which is on display at the Smithsonian, the biggest cultural institution in America, probably one of the biggest in the world. It has been mind-blowing to me to work with them. The sheer level of inefficiency and waste of money and time astounds me, not just because I'm an expert, but because I have a little institution. If I did things in their way, we'd never get anything done. And I think that the economics of these new participatory modes of engagement are really pretty cool to discuss.

FEMALE VOICE: I imagine that you started the Machine Project and the lab because museums weren't representing the type of programming that you were interested in, or you wanted to make something for people who were more like you. But as you move into institutions, what's been the biggest frustration in doing things that were at one time fun and easy?

ALLEN: I showed you guys the projects that we did at storefronts, but as a group of artists associated with that storefront, we've been doing projects with larger museums. The one thing I realized is that a lot of the things that happened in Machine get their meaning from their chronological adjacencies to other things that have happened in Machine.

If Adam does it all in one night, we do it over the course of a year. Sex lives of sea slugs, history of computer programming, dance performance, butchery performance. It creates a kind of community of equivalency about human culture. I've learned that when working with larger institutions, you can't airlift an entire culture into the museum. You can't really just lift the Machine Project and put it into a museum, because then it becomes a very artificial representation. You have to make things that are specific to that body. I don't know how to tie that into what we were just talking about, though.

One thing that I have noticed about institutions is that sometimes people work in a larger institution, or in art museums, where they believe that if they bring in a participatory project, it will automatically generate participation, as if this were a side effect, in the same way that switching on a light will automatically give light. Because a participatory audience has been nurtured, and grown, and explained to, it's very hard to transplant this delicate seedling of your community doing stuff together into a museum and expect it to grow into a tree.

FEMALE VOICE: Casey's comment about the game aspect in Mixed Taste having been obviously cultivated over time... People know how to interact.

ALLEN: What we do at Machine is very curated. We make decisions about how things work. But in a way, the community in which that takes place, or the audience for it, has been an emerging growth, constructed by everyone who comes. And that drives how things happen.

LERNER: I started these in a place called Belmar, because a real estate developer wanted to create an annex of the Denver Art Museum. I gave him my idea, and he said, "Wow! That sounds a lot better." Then we created a non-profit. He funded it for the first few years entirely, and then less over time as we tried to become independent, which we never did entirely.

We ran that for a while until I became the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art. We then closed the facility in Belmar, and the real estate bust meant that we were not going to find any more funding. At that point, I had to make a decision as to whether I wanted to do this on my own in the way that these guys do it, but with a lower budget. That was is much more authentic, more interesting, and more radical, because it can be freer and more oppositional. Or should I try to work in a museum or other conventional setting?

The experience with the real estate developer was a positive one, because it led me to say, "Let's see if we can take this to a traditional museum context." And then it was like "same tequila, different margarita," because I took all the programming from the lab and moved it to the museum. It somehow felt different, as if the museum made it heavier."

We realized that the programming was not just the programming. There was a whole ethos around it. Of course, it sold out, as I said. When we moved Mixed Taste to downtown Denver from a suburb, into a space that could fit 330 people, it sold out five weeks in advance. The move changed the whole complexion of the event, because no self-respecting 25-year-old plans five weeks in advance. So we ended up with a much older audience.

The important thing we realized was that we had to learn how to be as interesting as a museum. We couldn't simply move what we did at the lab to a new location. We had to make a new margarita. I think that I'm still learning how to do that—how to be a museum, and be interesting, and be a creative force. That's what gives it energy. When you do the same thing over and over, no matter how interesting that thing is initially, it becomes boring. It dies.

What makes these guys' programs so amazing is that they put new energy into it every night. People feel that energy and they return the energy. I think that this is also true for museums. They say, "Okay, we've got our program. Good. It's running every Thursday night for the next ten years." And I think that's why they die. The creative energy that happens at first, becomes stale. So as I run a museum, I try to apply the same lessons. I also believe that I also have a non-conventional museum.

NAJAFI: One of my favorite things was an essay that we published by Holbein, called "On Being the Right Size," which states that animals must be certain sizes. An insect cannot be this big and an elephant cannot be this small. It explains exactly how heat has to be released from the skin, how the cross-section of bones expands a certain way. But at the end, he suddenly begins discussing the size of institutions and that every institution must be a certain size. They can't be too small or too big. At that point, it will die or become unfaithful, in some sense, to what it was initially. We've thought about this at *Cabinet*. We've become a little bit bigger. Sometimes I think that we're too big. We should cut back to two people, not three. But in some sense, the question of size becomes important when you bring programming from the lab to the museum.

LERNER: Yes, that's the way it feels. I still haven't found the answer to that question, but I'm working on it. My first thought when I got to that size was, "Oh, good. Now we can have our own cable TV channel." What I really thought was, "Let's think about new ways of expressing this same creativity. Let's do this stuff as media." Of course, maybe we're a little too small for that, but we'll find the right size.

FEMALE VOICE: It might be a good time to wrap up the session. Any more final comments? I want to make some announcements about the evening. This has been an incredible conversation. So thank you.

LERNER: Thank you, guys!