



Teacher's Guide: for *Yesterday Was Once Tomorrow (or, A Brick is a Tool)* on exhibition at Plug In ICA from February 7 to May 24, 2015

Introduction to Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art.

Plug In, established in 1972, was Manitoba's first artist-run centre. For the first 15 years of its history, Plug In was one of the first (and few) organizations on the prairies to focus exclusively on the production and exhibition of contemporary art. The interest in contemporary art, coupled with a sense of isolation from large-scale cultural institutions such as the Winnipeg Art Gallery or the National Gallery, originally attracted artists to Plug In. Belief in the idea of an artists' network as a social, aesthetic and economic alternative to those represented by commercial and public galleries was the foundation of Plug In.

Throughout its forty year history, Plug In has encouraged and nurtured the development of independent arts group in the province that each address an identified community need (e.g., Video Pool was spawned by Plug In, as was Mentoring Artists for Women's Art and Counterparts: the Winnipeg Gay and Lesbian Film and Video Festival).

In the late nineties, after twenty-five years of operating as an artist-run-centre, Plug In began to re-envision its role in the local and national art community. Having arrived at a position of notable acclaim for its exhibitions and publications program, Plug In sought to have these programs matter in a larger way. To reach this goal, Plug In launched three initiatives to connect with larger audiences and expand the reach of our programming: the national and international circulation of exhibitions; the development of a website; and the creation of an audience development initiative. These changes marked Plug In's transition from an artist-run-centre to something that resembled both a gallery and a museum, yet was neither – an interim phase during which a new hybrid was taking form.

The descriptions, and various models of, "institutes of contemporary art" in the UK and the US confirmed that Plug In's mission; priorities; and activities fit best within an ICA model. And while this model is itself a relatively fluid one, for Plug In's purposes the ICA distinction meant: the generation of a thoroughly researched mix of exhibitions that offered multiple access points to contemporary art and ideas; insightful interpretation through publications, programs and events; and creating the facilities and environment for lively interaction among artists, art and audience.

With these goals in mind, in 2009 Plug In made the decision to move from its location at 286 McDermott to a new purpose-built facility for art and education in partnership with University of Winnipeg at the corner of Portage Avenue and Memorial Boulevard. This move tripled Plug In's exhibition space and expanded the ability to program multi-disciplinary activity that stretched what art, and what an ICA, could be. The facility was co-developed with the active

participation of Plug In, and hosts three permanent installations by internationally renowned artists Jimmie Durham, Dan Graham, Rodney Latourelle and Louise Withoft.

Plug In expanded its mentorship opportunities by focusing on education in a number of ways, including making a summer residency (the Summer Institute) a regular part of its programming. The goal of the Summer Institute is to provide a space for professional artists and other cultural producers and (scientists, engineers, writers, curators, architects, philosophers, etc) to research and produce work, individually or collaboratively. This program serves a distinct niche in that it provides collegial support for artists at all stages of their careers, following their basic training (university, art colleges, or equivalent experience). Faculty is hired, and provides feedback and support to artists on a peer-to-peer basis. Each year 10 to 15 artists participate in the program. The idea of encouraging mentorship and facilitating an open discourse has always, and continues to be, integral to Plug In as an organization, and the Youth Education Program is built upon these premises.

Objectives

Discussions:

1. To develop ways to speak about, and think through, contemporary art.
2. To learn about contemporary art in Canada through the exhibition *Yesterday Was Once Tomorrow (or, A Brick is a Tool)*
3. To learn about a specific history of publishing in relation to the visual arts in Canada and the do-it-yourself culture that surrounded it.
4. To speak about print and publishing in general: how in the 1990s the development and proliferation of desktop design software effected publishing; To learn and explore self-publishing and zine culture; and to open discussions around publishing's current state: is the internet threatening printed media?

Practical:

1. To visit Plug In Institute of Contemporary Art for a guided tour by gallery staff.
2. For each student to participate in a zine-making workshop lead by a member of the Sappho Zine Collective. Each student will produce a one page folded zine, using collage techniques.
3. Possible class assignments: a) to produce a more complex multi-page Zine, including text and images, focusing on a topic from the class or built around the exhibition *Yesterday Was Once Tomorrow (or, A Brick is a Tool)*. b) to research and present on an on-line publication that they feel embodies zine culture.

Context

The exhibition: *Yesterday Was Once Tomorrow (or, A Brick is a Tool)*: Magazines by Artists in Canada during the 1990s at Plug In ICA. *

Yesterday Was Once Tomorrow (or, A Brick is a Tool), curated by Canadian writer Kegan McFadden, is an exhibition of Canadian art magazines, focusing on publications that were both established and terminated in the 1990s. The exhibition presents an archive of these magazines showing original copies as well as graphic reproductions that line Plug In ICA's

walls and includes a selection of artwork gathered from public and private collections formerly featured in the magazines. Two commissioned pieces will be presented - a take-away poster by Charles Cousin and an on-going work in dedication to the radical American poet Kathy Acker by Geoffrey Farmer.

McFadden states, "These magazines found their ways through prison cells, had international correspondents, dealt with issues on the local levels, and even published book reviews by the baby sitter. They are an archive of activity through the most humble of means. Rather than predict the future or focus on the past, they dissected the present. The editors of these magazine reconsidered what was worthy of print, what was important to publish, and how to go about making information accessible to their communities."

Magazines include: Texts (Calgary, 1989 – 1993) Flower (Toronto, 1992 – 1996) Boo (Vancouver, 1994 – 1998), The Harold (Winnipeg, 1995 – 1997), and Cube (Montreal, 1996 – 1998).

Artists include: Shary Boyle, Geoffrey Farmer, GB Jones, Jake Kosciuk, Eli Langer, Denis Lessard, John Massey, Kathy Slade and Lori Weidenhammer

Reproduced graphics by: Charles Cousins, Kristine Friedman, Carl Skelton and Annie Martin

*There is some explicit content in the exhibition. Please contact janique@plugin.org for specific information.

Prescribed Learning Outcomes

Students will:

1. Participate in a guided tour of the exhibition.
2. Read and interpret visual materials; spend 10 to 15 minutes of self-directed interaction with the exhibition.
3. Communicate their ideas, experiences and feelings in a question and answer period.
4. Students will work in groups, discuss the themes within the exhibition and work towards completing collaborative zines.

Suggested classroom preparation (before coming to Plug In ICA):

- As a class, go over a selection of the background information provided, defining terms such as zine, collage, DIY culture, desk-top publishing. Discussions can be tailored to suit class interests. Some suggested general topics include current state of publishing; zine and collage culture.
- Answer the worksheet questions individually or as a group.
- In smaller groups discuss some of the themes you think will be important in the exhibition based on what you have read about exhibition. Discuss your expectations and thoughts on what the exhibition and gallery will look and feel like.

Activity (at Plug In ICA):

1. Tour of Yesterday was Once Tomorrow (or, A Brick is a Tool) exhibition with Plug In ICA staff.
2. Break into smaller groups and have each group select a work within the exhibition. Have each student discuss the ideas that they identify in the work, or in the exhibition as a whole.
3. Thinking of this same idea (or these same ideas), students can discuss other ways in which this idea could be expressed in visual form.
4. Zine workshop with Stephanie Poruchnyk-Butler.

Stephanie is the founding member of Sappho Zine Collective. Named after the first published female, Sappho Zine is a non-profit collective based in Winnipeg. Sappho Collective strives to inspire and empower the individual through the collaborative art of zine making. They hope to encourage the building of strong community through creativity, expression, and independent literature.

The workshop is two-fold:

i) Collage Party

Plug In ICA will provide basic collage material like scissors, magazines, glue, and paper but feel free to bring any extra materials for your collage.

ii) Zine-making

Zine-making basics like formatting, photocopying and collating will be covered as the groups work towards completing their collaborative zines.

Worksheet

The recent decade has been marked by various technological developments such as smartphone, tablets, e-books, just to name a few. However, these advancements have had a negative (financial) effect on the publishing industry. Declines in the revenues and budgets of newspapers, magazines and books made print seem old-fashioned, and to some, marked a descent into obsolescence.

1. The rise of digital technology has affected the production and distribution of printed matter. What do you think is the future of print media in a world where so much of the information we consume is digitized? Where do you envision print media maintaining or gaining momentum?
2. Despite geographic distance, and their lack of awareness of the other's existence, as you examine the publications in *Yesterday was Once Tomorrow (or, A Brick is a Tool)*: Boo, The

Harold, Flower, and Cube, connections between these seemingly disparate publications begin to emerge. What are some of the similarities between these publications (aesthetic and ideological)? What cultural shifts were occurring in the 1990s to precipitate these changes?

Background information:

Curatorial overview:

Yesterday Was Once Tomorrow (or, A Brick is a Tool) is an exhibition of Canadian art magazines, focusing on publications that were both established and terminated in the 1990s. As the 60s and 70s mark the proliferation of print as form in contemporary art, with many artists working conceptually through mail art and widely disseminated periodicals, the 1990s represent a pre-digital tailspin of such production. No longer were artists necessarily looking to subvert the gallery space through the dematerialization of the object into print media, but instead viewed publishing as a vehicle through which to promote dialogue among artists, encapsulate happenings or events taking place at the local level, and foremost to take the means of production into their own hands and produce printed matter that reflected their artistic community and its concerns. The output comprising these magazine projects varied from critical writing and interviews to reflective writing, poetry and diary entries. They often included reproductions of artworks, commissioned works, visual puns and jokes attempting to undo more prescriptive and commercial publishing models.

A spirit of irreverence and experimentation was the breeding ground for these short-lived forays into publishing throughout Canada during the 1990s. From Vancouver and Calgary to Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal, there existed various approaches to artist-produced magazines. Examples such as "Boo" (Vancouver), "Flower" (Toronto), and "CUBE" (Montreal) were published autonomous from any one institution, allowing for a heightened criticality and sense of play. Whereas magazines such as "Texts" (Calgary) and "The Harold" (Winnipeg) were published by organizations such as The New Gallery and Plug In Inc. respectively, and therefore focused primarily on programming and other activities adjacent to each gallery. Whether independent or affiliated to an institution it is clear these magazines represent a locus for creative approaches to the magazine as form during a specific period in the history of visual art in Canada. As an exhibition, *Yesterday Was Once Tomorrow (or, A Brick is a Tool)* attempts to manifest the aesthetic and exploratory ideology so prevalent in these publications.

Yesterday Was Once Tomorrow (or, A Brick is a Tool) is a timely re-visitation of the recent past, allowing many of its key players to take centre stage through the presentation of both original artworks and the reproductions of artist's graphics. Curatorially this exhibition pinpoints, for the first time, a loose network of activity taking place in major parts of Canada. By making this research visible we can identify interlopers, emerging artists at the outset of well-recognized careers, artists who have fallen away, and desktop design treatments we might rather forget. These magazines found their ways through prison cells, had international

correspondents, dealt with issues on the local levels, and even published book reviews by the baby sitter. They are an archive of activity through the most humble of means. Rather than predict the future or focus on the past, they dissected the present. The editors of these magazines reconsidered what was worthy of print, what was important to publish, and how to go about making information accessible to their communities.

Zines

Since the seventies the cultural phenomena and the proliferation of zines has risen: self-published periodicals with small press runs, often photocopied, frequently irreverent, and usually appealing to audiences with highly specialized interests have been made in the spirit of DIY culture.

Self-publishing has been a method associated with several art movements in the 20th century. In journals, magazines, leaflets, and mail-art, Dadaist, Surrealist, and Fluxus artists employed techniques such as the collage and bricolages of images, which had a strong influence on zine creators.

Zines began in the 1930's as science fiction fan magazines, and were typically noncommercial, low budget, irregularly self-produced and distributed – traits that tend to be true to this day. The 1960's revolution in alternative publishing – the availability of cheap offset printing and the atmosphere of political and social unrest – gave rise to a number of newspapers and zines. By the 80's, the abundance of photocopiers and copy shops allowed thousands of independent writers and artists to publish zines. As computers and technical savvy became commonplace at the turn of the century, a new generation of zines in electronic format was launched.

In the 90s the development of desktop publishing offered wider aesthetic choices to the zine producer. Graphic design and typography were no longer relegated to the private reserve of print shops. The new wave of computer-facilitated design, combined with the falling prices of high-quality photocopier equipment, meant that zines' presence and popularity exploded.

With approximately 20,000 zines in existence, they can no longer be regarded as a part of underground culture phenomenon, but rather must be seen as a significant part of the cultural landscape. Many artists have used zines to flesh out their own creative spaces, distribution networks, and audiences independent of the established gallery and exhibition system.

Zines are works that encompass a wide variety of subjects, from punk rock music to bowling, from the collection of Pez dispensers to the daily occurrences of the zine publisher's personal life. Despite the disparity of zines' subject matter, the great majority of zines share many common characteristics that bear examining as a whole—such as their emphasis on autonomy and independence, and their often confrontational relationship with mainstream culture and communication media—and the tremendous growth of zines in the past two decades.

Collage

Collage (which stems from the French word “to stick”) originally designated the cutting and pasting of bits of paper into pictures. This long-practiced domestic activity became, in the 20th century, a major art medium. Even as the format expanded to include cloth, a wood, metal, and entire object, collage was not just a novel way to create an image. It was also a way to subvert traditional “fine art” norms, to transgress societal conventions and to offer commentary in an unexpected form.

Modern collage began in 1912 with works by Picasso and the Cubists. After World War I, the Dadaists and Surrealists adapted collage to their own ends and developed techniques such as montage (ready-made images and cut-out illustrations mounted on a background) and photomontage (using primarily photographic images). American artists such as Jasper Johns, Romare Bearden, and Basquiat also used collage to express their views. Forms of collage are also found in video or sound art, mail art, artists’ books and zines. Zines have often used collage to communicate, regardless of their form (from folded and stapled mimeographed sheets to pop-up web pages) or their topic (from gender to libraries),

Sources

Link to Plug In ICA

<http://plugin.org/>

Links to artists in the exhibition:

Shary Boyle, Toronto:

<http://www.sharyboyle.com/>

Geoffrey Farmer, Vancouver:

<http://catrionajeffries.com/artists/geoffrey-farmer/works/>

GB Jones, Toronto

<http://www.paulpetro.com/artists/5-G-B-Jones/CV>

Eli Langer, Toronto

<http://www.mercerunion.org/exhibitions/main-gallery-eli-langer/>

Denis Lessard, Montreal

<http://www.denislessard.ca/>

John Massey, Toronto

<http://www.gallery.ca/en/see/collections/artist.php?iartistid=3579>

Kathy Slade, Vancouver

<http://www.kathyslade.com/>

Lori Weidenhammer, Winnipeg

<http://www.videopool.org/catalogue/artists/?id=371>

Art’s organizations that published 90s magazines:

Texts (New Gallery) <http://www.thenewgallery.org/>

Cube (Artexpte) <http://artexpte.ca/>

Articles on current state of publishing, zines, DIY culture, 90s publishing and collage

Publishing <http://www.mcsweeneys.net/articles/some-good-news-from-the-world-of-books>

A Brief History of Zines: <http://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingdb/zines/timeline/>

The History and Characteristics of Zines: <http://www.zinebook.com/resource/wright1.html>

Definition of Collage: http://arthistory.about.com/od/glossary_c/a/c_collage.htm

History of Collage <http://www.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/840686/from-cut-and-paste-to-action-montage-100-years-of-collage>

Zine examples

Illuminator Girl Gang

<http://illuminatigirlgang.com/>

A feminist zine, IGG publishes art and writing.

Short, Fast, and Deadly

<http://www.shortfastanddeadly.com/about.html>

Aimed at the reader with little attention span, online literary zine Short, Fast, and Deadly takes prose submissions under 420 characters and poetry submissions under 140, making the content of this zine a short, but not necessarily easy, read.

Post Comment Below

<http://www.postcommentbelow.com/>

Post Comment Below's Kelli Miller and Kendra Eash curate others' virtual interactions to create a striking, funny and very real picture of communication in the Internet age

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<http://www.undemi.fr/>

An art zine (photography, illustration and collage, mostly) curated by four friends living in different cities in Europe.

Scenes from An Alley

<http://www.goodpressgallery.co.uk/index.php?/hidden/scenes-from-an-alley-jeffry-kriksciun/>

Jeffry Kriksciun's latest zine, available in either purple or peach, can either be read as a narrative or each of the 12 pages can be appreciated as a standalone illustration.