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BFAMFAPhD

BFAMFAPhD is a collective that makes art, reports, and teaching **tools** to advocate for cultural equity in the United States. The collective formed in 2012 after a series of open **meetings** that Caroline Woolard convened. Its name combines all of the degrees that a person could accumulate in undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs: a BFA, an MFA, and a PhD. Concerned about the impact of debt, rent, and precarity on the lives of creative people, BFAMFAPhD asks: What is a work of art in the age of \$120,000 art degrees? The collective embodies a commitment to bringing people together to analyze and reimagine **power** relationships in the arts.

BFAMFAPhD core members are: Susan Jahoda, Emilio Martínez Poppe, Agnes Szanyi, Vicky Virgin, and Caroline Woolard. Susan Jahoda is a Professor in Studio Arts at the University of Amherst, MA; Emilio Martínez Poppe is an MFA candidate at the University of Pennsylvania, Agnes Szanyi is a Doctoral Student at The New School for Social Research in New York, NY, Vicky Virgin is a Research Associate with the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity in New York, NY, and Caroline Woolard is an Assistant Professor of Sculpture at The University of Hartford, CT. Contributors include: Pasqualina Azzarello, Julian Boilen, Ann Chen, Dia Felix, Art Jones, Ben Lerchin, Alex Mallis, Blair Murphy, Kieran Startup, Mauricio Vargas, Lika Volkova, Jeff Warren, and Zipeng Zhu.

More information is online at: <http://bfamfaphd.com>

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Imagine that this September,
instead of matriculating at
a traditional 4-year school,
prospective freshmen and
first-year MFA students pool
the money they would otherwise
spend on tuition. The class of
2018 (around 100,000 students
paying \$25,576 on average)
would have \$2,157,600,000 to
work with.

—Caroline Woolard, 2013

Reflect

Idea in Public

Experiment

Timeframe

Inquiry

Commitment

Study

Experience

2012/2013

[Occupy Wall Street](#) 2011Art & [Labor](#) Working Group

Cooper Union threatens to charge tuition for the first time in 154 years

Cooper Union occupied by students 2013

2014 [Strike Debt's Rolling](#)[Jubilee](#) project has abolished almost \$4 million in private student debt for a little over \$100,000. Rolling Jubilee (a Strike Debt project) buys student debt for pennies on the dollar, but instead of collecting it, abolishes it.[Black Lives Matter](#) 2013

hand in

[hand in hand in hand](#)In hand in [hand in hand in hand](#)"education should be as free as air and [water](#)"

artist as organizer

[artist as long term resident](#)

culture : organizing

"Organizing artists is like herding cats."

Study

We can learn together,
in public, as a collective, and
embody the participatory
learning that we want to see.

Commitment

Experience

Cooper Union is going to
charge tuition for the first
time in 154 years!



Should I get an MFA?

Artist's Unions
[freedom schools](#)
[unschooling](#)
free schools
debt

Inqu

Artists Report Back

A National Study on the Lives of
Arts Graduates and Working Artists

A report by [ARTISTS REPORT BACK](#) 2014

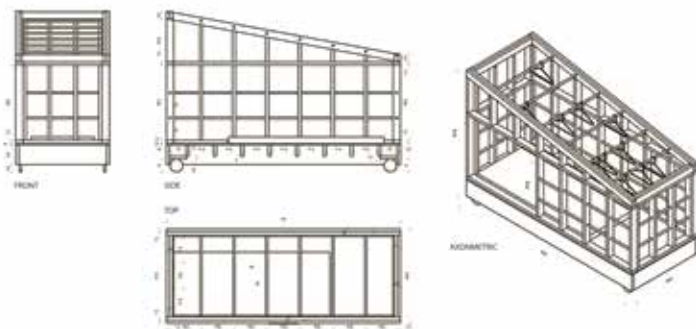
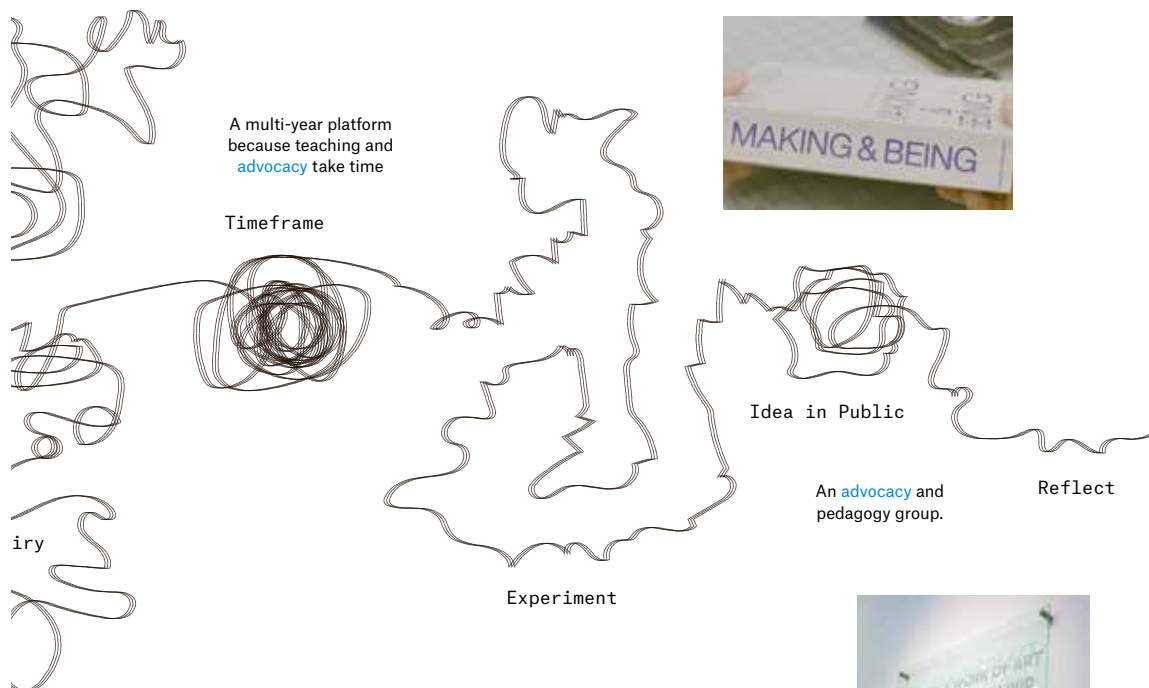
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solidarity economies
Howard Singerman
Critical University Studies
Mark McGurl
James Elkins
Every ten years, in the United States alone, one million students graduate with a BFA, MFA, or PhD in visual art. What might we—1,827,087 arts graduates since 1987—do together?

There are more creative people in our nation than doctors, lawyers and police officers combined—if we organized, we'd be larger than the US military!



union
advocacy



donor plaque
report
credit card
land trust
art made from disclaimed
(thrown away) art
events
playing cards

Meta-critical Mobilization

Larissa Harris is a curator at the Queens Museum. Exhibitions at QMA include *Red Lines* *Housing Crisis Learning Center*, a project on home finance by artist and urban designer Damon Rich; the first U.S. solo presentation of Korean video and performance artist Sung Hwan Kim; *People's United Nations (pUN)* by Pedro Reyes; *13 Most Wanted Men: Andy Warhol at the 1964 World's Fair*; and, with Patti Phillips, *Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art*.

Larissa Harris, Curator, Queens Museum, 2020

Between 2009 and 2013 the Queens Museum expanded, but at a certain point it appeared there wasn't enough money yet to program and staff the doubled building. Our director Tom Finkelpearl had the idea to start a studio program in what would become the old wing. We got funding from a foundation whose guidelines stipulated that it had to include "artist services" and "professional development." Caroline was part of our first cohort, and used this funding stream to hold a series of public conversations under the name BFAMFAPhD, which referred to an emerging collective Woolard hoped would form and solidify.

These [events](#) tackled some of the same questions around [professionalization](#) or institutionalization of creative work that the funding itself embodied. The series combined community conversations and talking with people who had written about the art-school complex. Against the backdrop of Caroline's own experience in and desire to build para- or counter- institutions whose members could see and control the [power](#) and resources they themselves produced, these were open conversations that avoided complete condemnation of "[professionalization](#)," and instead debated the possibilities, comprised or not, inherent in the institutions that inevitably shape artists and the arts as a field. As Caroline said at the start of one of these early BFAMFAPhD [events](#), "The question is not the [scandal](#) of the individual, necessarily, but how can individuals create institutions that they want to be part of? Where they

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see the **power** of the institution as collectively generated, rather than a random chance occurrence they need to participate in.” In this case, Caroline used resources at the Queens Museum to imagine and enact collective action outside the institution.

these were open conversations that avoided complete condemnation of “**professionalization**”

BFAMFAPhD’s first major project, *Artist’s Report Back*, was produced the summer after this series, amidst the energy of the protests around Cooper Union tuition, Debt Strike, and Rolling Jubilee (now Debt Collective). It revealed data on the interface between higher-education debt and art careers. But the most striking statistic for me was how many more artists without a BA apparently make a career from their art than those with degrees. Debt is obviously one reason for this, but the wide-open definition of art (both in society and in the survey) is probably a bigger one.

The Queens Museum has been a place that sought out and supported working-class creativity. In the immigrant neighborhoods that flank our park, people develop businesses—web design, wedding photography—based on what they have to offer and the needs of their communities. Caroline has also mentioned that this statistic includes a lot of musicians, whose economy has always been broad-based rather than semi-feudal like visual art as conventionally understood. I believe Caroline was the only artist in the studios that year to take advantage of the

funding available for “professional development.” Taking her critical mobilization of the concept as a starting point, could “**artists services**” be a tool to connect the makers of more broadly defined creative work with the people for whom art school is a likely proposition (even if it produces debt)? Is this solidarity around cultural work what we will need now, to the extent that it crosses real class and cultural boundaries, and as we face down a world in which at least some patronage may be out of the running?

That year Caroline also built a mobile sleeping unit in her studio, reacting in a practical manner to the realities of life in the “real estate state” (as Sam Stein calls it). Not originally meant for exhibition, but making underlying structural problems visible (and thereby calling up Krzysztof Wodiczko’s “interrogative design”), these small refuges (she built a similar structure at another artists residency in 2009) may protect her from the pressure on precious **solitude** that comes with a commitment to living and thinking together—whether it be your living space or an active life in New York. Caroline extrapolates questions from her own life situations about the structure of society under capitalism, makes and catalyzes **tools** and communities to address these structures, then ploughs back what she learns into her own life and her commitment to making the process of social change a democratic and inclusive one. Indeed this book itself is an attempt to make this iterative **practice** visible.

BFAMFAPhD



fig. 5-1
Caroline Woolard in her studio
in 2008. Courtesy of the artist.

Study

Caroline extrapolates questions from her own life situations about the structure of society under capitalism, makes and catalyzes tools and communities to address these structures then ploughs back what she learns into her own life and her commitment to making the process of social change a democratic and inclusive one.

—Larissa Harris

Art holds the fantasy and the contradiction of mobility, of individuality, and of the desire to resist that, to imagine cooperative ways of being. These houses on wheels at the MacDowell Colony and at the Queens Museum do that, too. They might want to move, but you can't get very far with those little wheels! These structures are symbols, metonyms, for bodies—architecture as an extension of the body, as supportive spaces for dreaming, thinking, and making. They are sculptures that are functional, that are places where conversation, hanging out, and making art happen. They might imagine mobility, but in reality, they are quite fixed.

—Caroline Woolard, interview
with Larissa Harris

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fig. 5-2
Shaker Residence, 2008, birch wood, sheetrock, paint, performance, 72 × 36 × 144 inches. Courtesy of the artist and the MacDowell Colony.



fig. 5-3
Studio/Home, 2014 (reconstructed 2020), framing lumber, hardware, mattress, fabric, casters, 86 × 46 × 98 inches. Courtesy of the artist and the Queens Museum. Photo by Aaron Strauss.

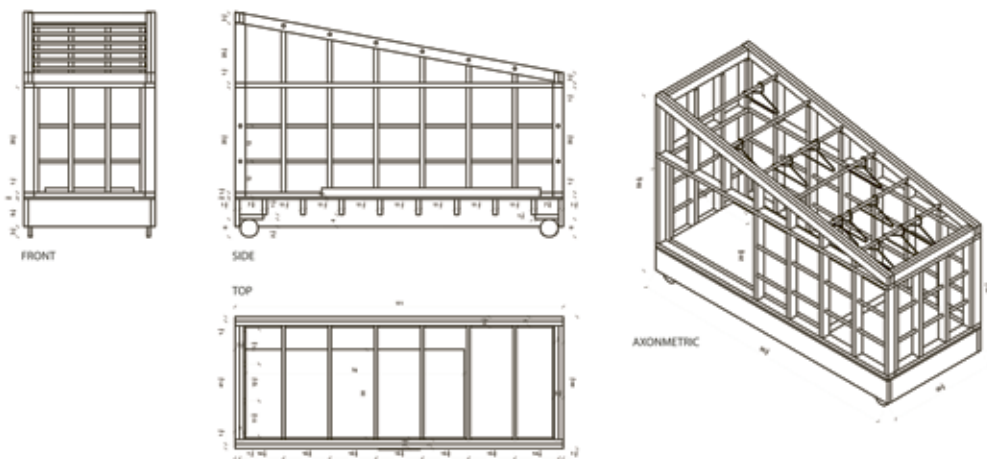


fig. 5-4
 Caroline Woolard, *Technical Drawings for Studio/Home*, dimensions variable, 2019. Courtesy of the artist.

The Collective Forms of Decommodified Labor

Leigh Claire La Berge, PhD, professes at the intersection of arts, literature, [visual culture](#) and [political economy](#). She is the author of *Scandals and Abstraction: Financial Fiction of the Long 1980s* (Oxford University Press) and *Wages Against Artwork: [Decommodified Labor](#) and the Claims of [Socially Engaged Art](#)* (Duke University Press, 2019). She is Associate Professor of English in the Department of English at BMCC CUNY.

Leigh Claire La Berge, critical theorist, adapted from *Wages Against Artwork: [Decommodified Labor](#) and the Claims of [Socially Engaged Art](#)*.²⁷

“If artists want to survive in a corporate capitalist society, they must organize themselves externally.” —Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

In 2014, the artist-run institution BFAMFAPhD — composed of collective members Susan Jahoda, Blair Murphy, Agnes Szanyi, Vicky Virgin, and Caroline Woolard — released the publication *Artists Report Back*. This report was concerned with how artists function as professionals, including how they pay rent, how they pay back loans, how they obtain supplies—in short, how their professional lives as artists are sustainable and how they make due when such a life becomes circumscribed. Perhaps the most relevant of the group’s finding for my own study is their claim that while there are over 2 million arts graduates in the United States (there are more artists, the group claims, than there are doctors and lawyers combined), only 8 percent of those artists — some 180,000 people — make a living from their art. How, the group wondered, can one sustain a career as a professional artist if one cannot make a living through the remuneration of one’s artistic [labor](#), particularly if one has paid to train as an artist? If the increasing number of conferences, calls, and

Study

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Leigh Clare La Berge, *Wages Against Artwork: [Decommodified Labor](#) and the Claims of [Socially Engaged Art](#)* (Duke, 2019).

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For example, the New Museum recently organized a call

for a conference on the theme of “Why Are Artists Starting Institutions?” See also the ambitious convention in Vancouver on “Institutions by Artists” at <http://arcpost.ca/conference>, accessed March, 2017. Afterall reported on the conference.

See Liz Park, “Pluralising the Institution: On the Conference ‘Institutions by Artists,’” *Afterall/Online*, December 20, 2012, <https://www.afterall.org/online/pluralising-the-institution-on-the-conference-institutions-by-artists#.WPDmXtwh5pY/>.

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directed residencies is any indication, one answer seems to lay in the collectivization of artistic [labor](#) through artist-run institutions.²⁸ In my writing, I read the work of BFAMFAPhD as an institution for other artists founded by Woolard in an attempt to redress the decompmodification of artistic [labor](#).

Artists Report Back located what are essentially two categories of art graduates. The first group, the majority, have BA and BFA degrees in the arts and often function professionally as artists through a network of nonwaged concessions: artist residencies, museum sponsorships, access to university-based facilities, self-created artistic communities, community centers, and so on. The second group, which is much smaller, comprises those who do in fact make a living through the sale of their artistic [labor](#). This group predominantly includes musicians, photographers, and filmmakers, all of whom probably sell their [labor](#) through vocational channels. The striking irony to emerge from *Artists Report Back* is found in the fact that artists trained in art school, artists professionalized qua artists, are probably unable to live off their artistic [labor](#), whereas artists not trained as such were better able to support themselves via their [craft](#). That irony is amplified by the likely art school debt that often comes as a consequence of arts [professionalization](#).²⁹ Furthermore, the report included demographic analyses of race, class, and gender:

more women and people of color attend art school than are represented in the general population, but less of those groups than represented in the general population will make a living from their art.³⁰

BFAMFAPhD's results in *Artists Report Back* empirically amplify the theory that artists often function outside of the wage system in their specific work as artists. The accuracy of this claim increases in the fine arts, and indeed in [socially engaged art](#) in particular, which itself has a higher percentage of women artists. Many scholars have made the claim about the wagelessness of art as a generic category, if without the data to support it. John Roberts plainly says: "Artists are not wage laborers." Dave Beech contends that "it is clear that artists are exceptional to the wage structure." Artist and theorist Anton Vidokle's argument in "Art without Market" is rather eponymous. He argues in a slightly different idiom that "art is not a profession."³¹ No less an observer than Karl [Marx](#) claims that artworks are not included in his study of capitalism for they are "of a special nature." *Wages Against Artwork*, the book from which this text is excerpted, both assumes that "special nature" of art to the wage and asks how and why the relation between the two has been transformed and represented in our economic present. And while critics have long made such claims

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Artists Report Back, available at bfamfaphd.com (accessed October 27, 2016).

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Juliana Spahr and Stephanie Young have produced absolutely important demographic findings about similar race, gender, and

class disparities in the field of creative writing. See Juliana Spahr and Stephanie Young, "The Program Era and the Mainly [White](#) Room," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, September 20, 2015, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-program-era-and-the-mainly-white-room/> (accessed May 1, 2107).

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See Anton Vidokle, "Art without Market, Art without Education: [Political Economy of Art](#)," *e-flux Journal*, no. 43 (March 2013), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/43/60205/art-without-market-art-without-education-political-economy-of-art>.

about art's exceptional status to the wage structure, two features of this contemporary discourse have been updated and deserve attention. First, artists themselves are now making such claims and incorporating those claims into their art. This fact is something that critics, including some of our best on the topic of art and economy—John Roberts and Dave Beech in particular—have not addressed. John Roberts suggests art should be understood to participate in “second economy,” that odd space of non-market activity in which a majority of arts production operates; Beech suggests that art is structured by a process he calls “commodification without commodification,” in which art is not made as a commodity but sometimes is sold as such.³² What neither Beech nor Roberts attends to, however, is the manner in which such economic processes are not only the social conditions under which art is often produced; rather, these economic limits become both productive possibilities and heuristic devices in their own right. Art produced without wages must be read, in part, through its wagelessness.

Art has long been positioned as independent of the world of goods and **labors**, of the world of commodification—a separation that since early Modernity has been understood to constitute “the **aesthetic**.” This separation undergirds art’s “autonomy.”³³ Yet oppositional independence often belies

a connection, and the institution of art history has been entangled with the wage form.

Capitalism hides the value of **labor** through the wage, which comes to assume the seeming totality of **labor’s** value. One must begin, not end, with the wage. And once we move past the surface appearance of the wage to the essential relations of wage **labor**—with all of its compromises, dependencies, and exploitations—the independence of the institution of art is threatened. Conversely, the structures of our capitalist economy make **labor power** in its commodified form difficult to see and, according to Peter Bürger, provide art as a **compensation** for that loss of sight. One can’t see the economy, but one can see art. Thus the institution of art, oppositional to but entangled with the wage form, is endowed with the possibility of critique.

artists often function outside of the wage system in their specific work as artists

Decommodified labor in art designates a similar if more local struggle over art’s potential emancipatory possibilities, the realization of which requires a confrontation with **labor’s** unfreedom. Without a wage to which it is counterposed, it becomes difficult to say what, precisely, art is independent of. Yet those

Study

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See Dave Beech, *Art and Value* (London: Brill, 2015); John Roberts, *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde* (London: Verso, 2015).

33

See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1984).

34

David Joselit, “Institutional Responsibility: The Short Life of Orchard,” *Grey Room*, no. 35 (spring 2009): 108-15, 109.

35

There are many lineages of and requiems for institutional critique—what it wanted, what it succeeded in getting, how it

failed, and how it was institutionalized. The most thorough collection is *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists Writing*, edited by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009). In a different register altogether, Gregory Sholette and Blake Stimson write, in their

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changed coordinates of [aesthetic](#) disinterestedness do free art to occupy a place that is not only “interested” but insistent, demanding, organized. It is by now a common enough historical narrative to place [socially engaged art](#) after institutional critique, a dating that relies on the assumption that, in David Joselit’s words, “Institutional Critique, as we know it, is obsolete.”³⁴ Joselit’s is a claim that is both true and incomplete, and what I want to do in this essay is examine how certain artists’ historicization of their own and other artists’ decommodified artistic [labor](#) has organized a particular aspect of the movement from institutional critique to [socially engaged art](#).³⁵ While the art produced through institutional critique offered critical assessments of the museum, the gallery, their financing, their ties to American [imperialism](#), and the race, gender, and class politics that subtend the foregoing, institutional critique largely did not critique the wage.³⁶ That is, it did not critique the fact that many artists are not paid for their [labor](#) and that we live in a system in which social reproduction is only possible through [labor’s](#) remuneration.

That omission has begun to change. At the height of the 2008 global credit crisis, the artist group Temporary Services staged a national conversation called “Art Work,”

devoted to art and [labor](#). The organization W.A.G.E. (Working Artists for a Greater Economy) now makes demands for wage rates and work standards for arts. W.A.G.E. states, “W.A.G.E. is made up of practicing artists, but we are not an art collective and our work is not art. We are an activist and [advocacy](#) group. Our participation is never in the capacity of being artists.”³⁷

Woolard has inherited the mantle of institutional critique and enjoined it to her own understanding of the decommodification of artistic [labor](#). And she has done so through the construction of new institutions, a crucial term that, in this essay, will mediate the [aesthetic](#), the historical, and the practical. Caroline Woolard uses the term “institution” to describe many of her collaborative, long-term [practices](#) and installations. Tarrying with when and how to move beyond institutional critique, she quite consciously engages in forms of [institutional elaboration](#). She constructs what we might call “institutions as art.” Her respective institutions—what she sometimes refers to as “platforms”—have as their foundation the question of how artists might continue to make work outside of the wage form or whether they must organize themselves and fight for inclusion in the wage,

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wonderful history of artistic “collectivism after modernism,” that “Modernist collectivism, as we will have it here, was the first real effort to develop a sustained alternative to commodified social life by cultural means, and it was full of the spirited and sometimes foolish ambition of youth.” Gregory Sholette and Blake Stimpson, eds., *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 3.

The signal exception here is awc, Art Workers Coalition, and their “Art Strike.” See, of course, Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). As Gregory Sholette writes, “one of the awc’s demands was for the establishment of a [trust](#) fund that would provide living artists with ‘stipends, health insurance, help for artists’ dependents and other social benefits.’” Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter* (New York: Pluto Press,

2010), 14. Note in particular his comparison between the awc and the apt (Artist Pension Trust) (116–34). Note also that before the 1960s existed groups including Artists League of America and Artists Equity.

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See the [website](#), <http://www.wageforwork.com/about/6/faqs>, accessed June 2015. The group W.A.G.E. and its [website](#) is still active, however this specific link no longer functions.

as this chapter's epigraph from Adorno suggests that they must do: "If artists want to survive in a corporate capitalist society, they must organize themselves externally."³⁸ OurGoods.org and TradeSchool.coop^{see chapter 3} respond to decommodification at the level of the individual work, and like these institutions, BFAMFAPhD is another example of a durational institution. Without secure access to a wage, these artists have developed their own institutions to address their own and other artists' precarity. Why, I ask, have artists turned from institutional critique to [institutional elaboration](#)?

Without secure access to a wage, these artists have developed their own institutions to address their own and other artists' precarity.

"Something has to come after Institutional Critique," artist Caroline Woolard has said. "And something has to be possible other than ironic institutions," she insists.³⁹ Such an ["afterness"](#) and otherness of artist-run

institutions in the wake of institutional critique has been given a variety of names by critics. There is the "counter-institution," so named by Yates McKee; there is "institutional detournement," a term proposed by T. J. Demos; the "anti-institution" is Tom Finkelpearl's term for a similar insistence;⁴⁰ David Joselit speaks of a turn toward "institutional responsibility" in his discussion of the artist-run Orchard Gallery; Chris Gilbert notes that Anglo-American collectivism often takes what he calls an "institutional form."⁴¹ In each term we may locate a remainder of the [power](#) of both institutional critique and something retrievable from the institution itself. The institution persists, it outlasts any individual, it embodies a historical memory. Perhaps curator Maria Lind best captures the spirit of this kind of work with her term, "constructive institutional critique," itself similar to Claire Doherty's claim of a "new institutionalism" now present in contemporary art.⁴²

Indeed, the past ten years have seen a flourishing of actual artistic institutions as well as considerations of them. What both distinguishes Woolard's work and places it on a continuum with institutional critique is that her institutions are centered on the problem of arts production—that's the continuity—but specifically, they isolate the problem of

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Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 33.

39

Personal conversation with the artist, 2014.

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Tim Finkelpearl, *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 12.

41

Joselit makes the important

claim that one of the limits of institutional critique is that "institutions are run by people"; see "Institutional Responsibility," 113. He stops short, then, of [looking at labor](#), what those people produce and exchange to run institutions, and instead introduces a Latourian notion of actors, agency, and networks. A nice response to that tendency is found in Chris Gilbert: "Why is it that most 'institutional critique' has remained satisfied

with the easy target of bricks and mortar, while setting aside the more volatile flesh, bones, and brains that are just as much a part of an organization's equipment?" See Chris Gilbert, in Sholette and Stimpson, eds., *Collectivism After Modernism*, Chapter 3, "Art & Language and the Institutional Form in Anglo-American Collectivism," 77.

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Maria Lind cited in Janet Marstine, *Critical Practice*:

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decommodified artistic **labor**, which is the distinction. Institutions like BFAMFAPhD are durational in that they are ongoing and that they have transpired over a matter of years and continue to do so. These works attempt to reclaim duration as it has been embodied in **labor**; “what the worker sells is time,” reminds Harry Braverman.⁴³ But these decommodified workers do not sell their time; rather, they possess time, and it is that resource that will mold and contour the shape of the institutions they construct. The relation of these works to duration echoes Peter Frase’s description of the benefits of decommodification. Highlighting the emancipatory sense of the word as Gøsta Epsing-Andersen originally used it, Frase writes, “we can think of the de-commodifying welfare state as giving people a choice about whether or not to commodify their **labor**. ... The choice that is involved here is not merely about income. It ultimately comes down to how we want to organize our time, and how we want to structure our relations with other people.”⁴⁴

If **socially engaged art** is that which seeks to **ameliorate** restrictive social conditions, then perhaps the **aesthetic** reflexivity to be found in the institution-building work of Woolard is best located in how she seeks to change her own working life and the lives of other artists.

Her work asks us to question whether art that remains decommodified may remain recognized as art

In Woolard’s work there is no negation, no irony, no moment of “institutional detournment”; rather there is a commitment to endurance. Her work asks us to question whether art that remains decommodified may remain recognized as art. I want to suggest that we think about “institutional reflexivity,” the manner in which the institution as a kind of art returns the ability to understand how decommodified artistic **labor** frames the work of the art institution itself.

Artists, Museums, Ethics (New York: Routledge, 2017), 21. See also Claire Doherty, “The Institution is Dead, Long Live the Institution! Contemporary Art and the New Institutionalism,” *Engage*, no. 15 (summer 2004): 1-6, 1. Note also Creative Capital’s 2013 invitation to fund such bodies: “Over the years, Creative Capital has noticed that an increasing number of grantees have decided to start their own organizations. ... These new institutions have focused on

issues of social justice, food, product development and critical thinking **skills**.” Lisa Dent, “The In-between: Artists Build New Frameworks for Institutions,” *Creative Capital* blog, April 11, 2013, <http://blog.creative-capital.org/2013/04/artists-build-new-frameworks-for-institutions/> (accessed January 2017).

43

Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degrada-*

tion of Work in the Twentieth Century (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974).

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Peter Frase, “De-commodification in Everyday Life,” June 7, 2011, <http://www.peter-frase.com/2011/06/de-commodification-in-everyday-life>.

Idea in Public

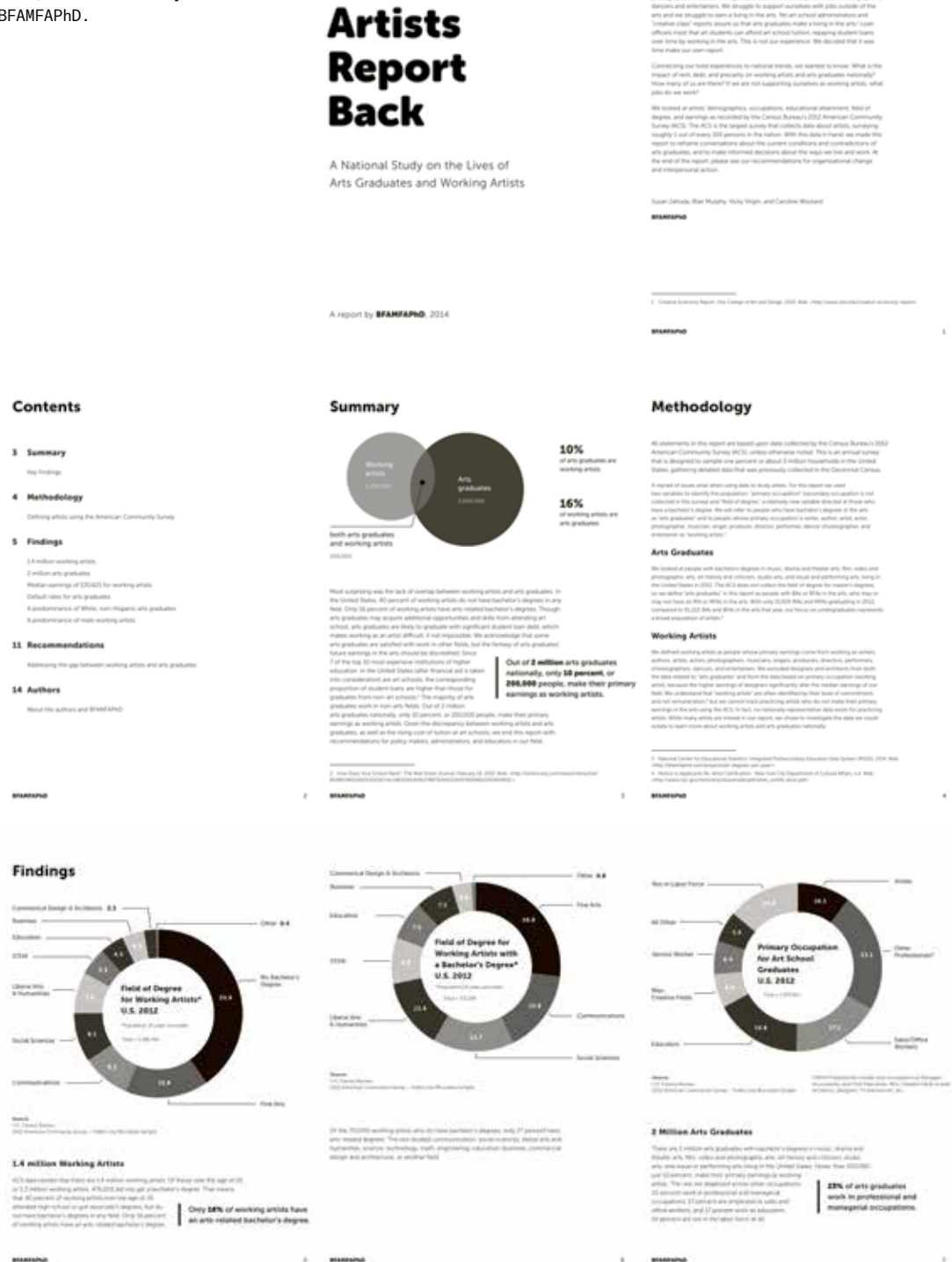
IMAGINE A GROUP GATHERING

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IMAGINE A GROUP GATHERING

BFAMFAPhD

fig. 5-5
BFAMFAPhD, *Artists Report Back*, 2014. Courtesy of BFAMFAPhD.



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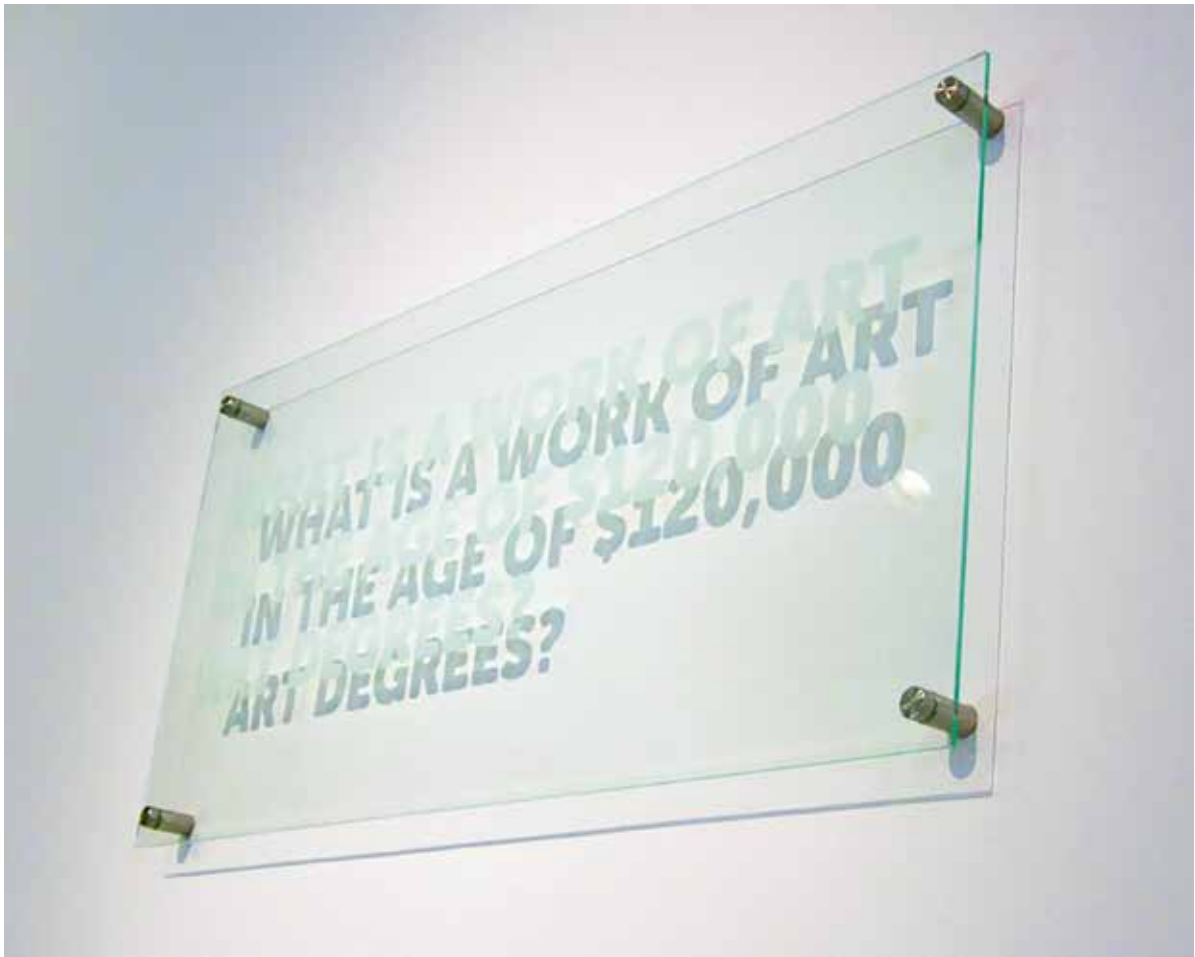
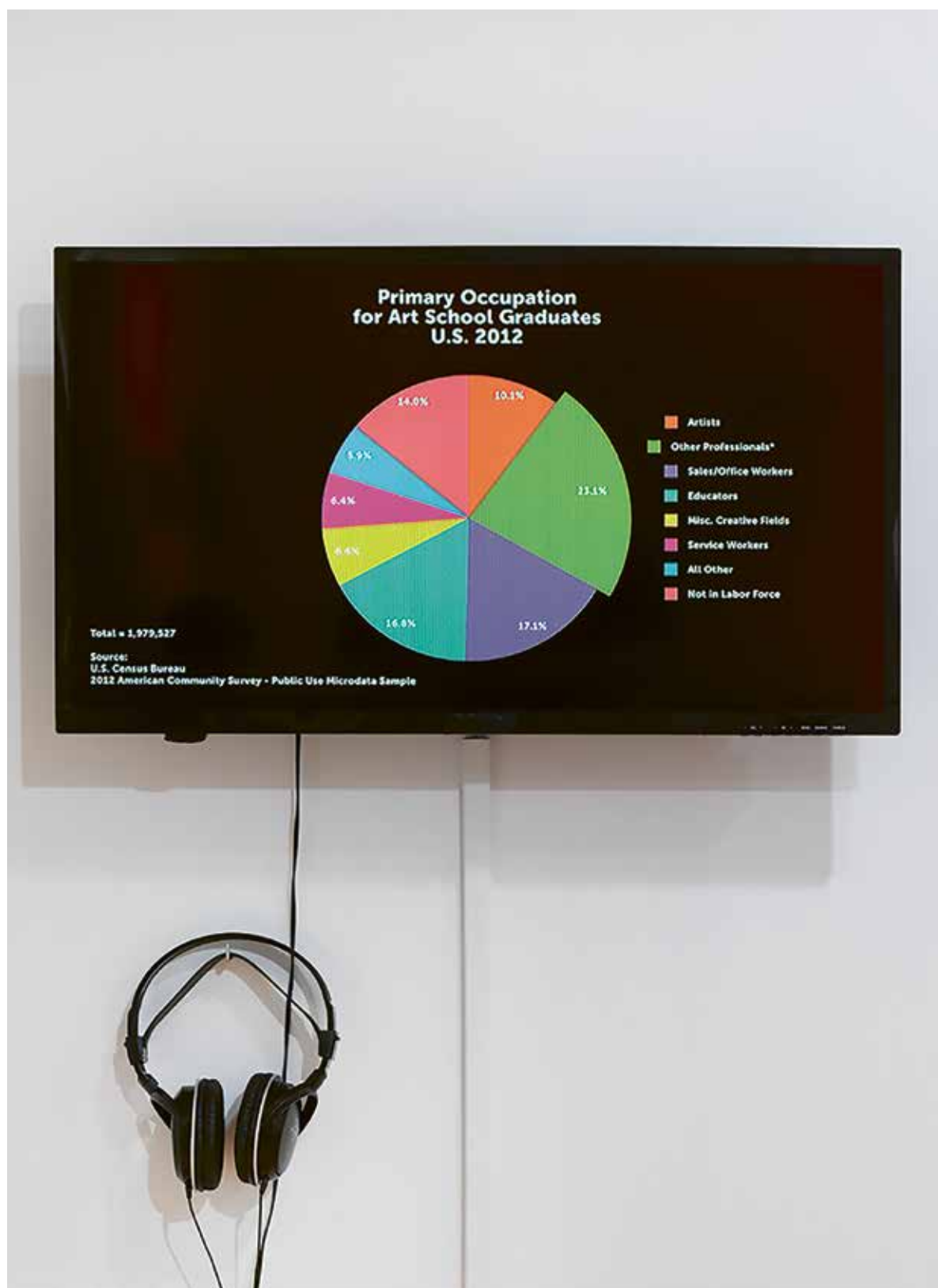


fig. 5-6
Statements, 2013, plexiglass,
 hardware, 11 × 23 × 1 inches.
 Courtesy of BFAMFAPhD.

fig. 5-7
Artists Report Back: Animated,
 2014, single-channel video,
 06:40 minutes. Courtesy of
 BFAMFAPhD.

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Ephemera

In the pages that follow, you will see the correspondence, budgets, grants, readings, and writing required to create and run the arts [advocacy](#) collective BFAMFAPhD, as well as a printed excerpt from the book, *Making and Being* (Pioneer Works Press/DAP, 2019), co-authored by BFAMFAPhD core members Susan Jahoda and Caroline Woolard with support from BFAMFAPhD core members Emilio Martínez Poppe, Agnes Szanyi, Emily Tareila, and Vicky Virgin.

Woolard has selected ephemera that serves as visual reference points for BFAMFAPhD. All materials here are reproduced with the consent of [collaborators](#).

fig. 5-8 (overleaf)
Making and Being book, card
[game](#), and embroidery pre-
 sented in a workshop at Rhode
 Island School of Design
 facilitated by Susan Jahoda
 and Caroline Woolard in 2019.
 Photo by Trevor Holden. Cour-
 tesy of BFAMFAPhD.

What do we hope, and what
 can we hope, that institu-
 tions can do for us, as
 writers and artists and
 intrinsically creative
 beings? And how further can
 we not be ashamed of and
 rather redeem the 'institu-
 tionality' of writing and
 artmaking in our time? A
 utopia where the collectivi-
 ty we experience in our
 institutionalized lives is
 redeemed as a precondition
 for collective action.

—Mark McGurl, event
 organized by BFAMFAPhD at
 the Queens Museum, 2014

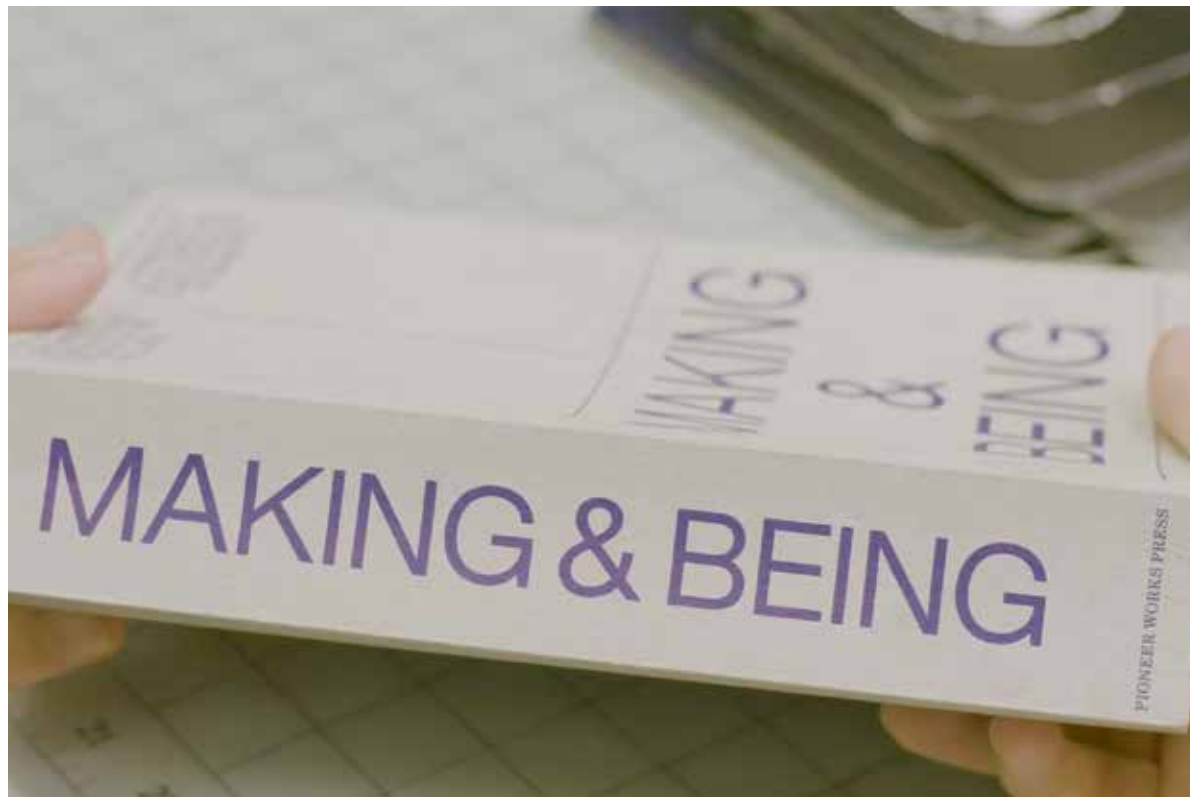
fig. 5-9
 BFAMFAPhD, *Making and Being:*
Embodiment, Collaboration, and
Circulation in the Visual Arts,
Making and Being: Embodiment,
 2019. Still from a video by Alex
 Mallis. Courtesy of BFAMFAPhD.

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 Initiated

What is the social field we want to be in to recognize things as novel, whether those things are social or *aesthetic* or economic? And is the institution the place for that to happen, if that is a place that does produce a certain amount of conformity?

—Leigh Claire La Berge,
event organized by BFAMFAPhD
at the Queens Museum, 2014

Making and Being: Embodiment, Collaboration, and Circulation in the Visual Arts is a multi-platform pedagogical project that offers *practices* of contemplation, collaboration, and *circulation* in the visual arts. *Making and Being* is for artists and art educators who want to connect art to economy, and for students who want to make artworks that reflect the conditions of their own production. *Making and Being* provides a framework that guides artists to explore both who they are becoming as they make projects and also what their projects are becoming as they take shape and circulate in the world. *Making and Being* is a book, a series of videos, a deck of cards, and an interactive *website* with freely downloadable content. More information is online at: <http://makingandbeing.com>



BFAMFAPhD

Making

I never considered that the classes I taught at TradeSchool.coop^{see chapter 3} would lead to a job in an accredited BFA program, but they did. Teaching at TradeSchool.coop was always an experiment, and I was only 24. I was the primary person who hosted classes during the first run of TradeSchool.coop, helping teachers set up and welcoming students into the space for 35 days in a row. Every now and then, I would teach a class on grant writing (since I had raised over \$300,000 with Jen Abrams over the years, for OurGoods.org) and also a class on so-called “alternative” economies (what I would later learn to be solidarity economies). In 2010, TradeSchool.coop was written up in *The New Yorker* and in *The New York Times*, and the classes started getting so full that we had to turn people away. We had a wide range of people in our classes: millennials who thought it was cool, activists who believed in solidarity economies, retirees who wanted to keep teaching, high school students, unemployed artists, well-known artists with art market success, and lots of people who were present for the sake of self-directed learning. Because of this range of students, I thought nothing of the faculty members from The New School who were in my classes.

But in 2010, one of my TradeSchool.coop students, Pascale Gatzen, who was also a faculty member at The New School, and who had met me at an experimental school called Mildred’s Lane, invited me to teach a class at The New School. With only a BFA, I never imagined that I would be invited to be an adjunct teacher at the college-level. That summer I got really depressed and felt like all my students would know that I was an imposter. I was so nervous to enter a “real” classroom with BFA students paying over \$40,000 a year in tuition. I asked everyone I knew how to teach a fifteen-week BFA course, and a curator named Erin Marie Sickler put me in touch with Susan Jahoda. I was relieved when, a year later, Susan started the New York City-based Pedagogy Group with Maureen Connor, and I could meet with other faculty members, adjunct and tenured, to talk about how to teach.

It was the year of [Occupy Wall Street](#) when I started teaching my first class for BFA students at The New School. That fall, the new president at Cooper Union, President Bharucha, also started talking openly about charging tuition at Cooper.

Experience

Collectively-
Initiated

I never imagined that I would be invited to be an adjunct teacher at the college-level. That summer I got really depressed and felt like all my students would know that I was an imposter. I was so nervous to enter a “real” classroom with BFA students paying over \$40,000 a year in tuition.

This would be a radical shift, the first time in the institution’s 154-year history when any student would have to pay for their education at Cooper. I knew it was time to move from my work on self-organized learning with TradeSchool.coop and into arts [advocacy](#) for cultural equity and for free education. In addition to joining the Art & [Labor](#) working group and the Alternative Banking working group at Occupy, and demonstrating against charging tuition at Cooper, I began to shift away from my work with OurGoods.org and TradeSchool.coop. In 2012–2013, I held open [meetings](#) throughout New York City with a call to found a collective called BFAMFAPhD which would exist to investigate the relationship between student debt and precarity in the arts, and to advocate for cultural equity and free tuition on a national scale. By 2014, Susan Jahoda was fully involved, and we led *Artists Report Back*, which used rigorous statistical methods and data visualization to advocate for cultural equity in arts education.

So the question is not the [scandal](#) of the individual, necessarily, but how can individuals create institutions that they want to be part of? Where they see the [power](#) of the institution as collectively generated, rather than a random chance occurrence they need to participate in.

— Caroline Woolard, 2014

BFAMFAPhD

To form BFAMFAPhD, I held a series of open [meetings](#) in 2012-2013 in New York City where I invited a range of people to a facilitated conversation. At first, I sent emails to people that said things like this:

Subject: volunteering on a project about creative graduates? | BFA MFA PhD

Dear Steve (and Louise?),

I'm coordinating a group of artists, designers, and sociologists that's doing a project that attempts to make visible, and organize, creative graduates in this country. We started with a quick site: <http://bfamfaphd.com> and we are working this December and January to make a more robust visualization of graduates.

My friend Jeff Warren (of <http://publiclab.org/>) is pulling a bunch of data from IPEDS, and I'm wondering if you can help sort it, compile it, make sure it's accurate, and even present it visually to the public. I can explain more on the phone, if you have time/interest. Here's where the data is stored right now: <https://github.com/jywarren/bfamfaphd/>

Let me know!

Caroline

PS: here's more info ...

Summary of the project:

How many artists are in this country, and what might we do together? Informally called "BFA MFA PHD," this project visualizes the number of students graduating with creative degrees, elicits proposals for collective work, and generates dialogue and conversation. A lecture series and

Collectively-
Initiated

Inquiry

Study

exhibition of visualizations will open on February 2, 2014, in Caroline Woolard and Lika Volkova's studio at the Queens Museum.

According to the census, there are more artists than police officers, lawyers, or doctors in this country. Reporting on the census in 2008, *The New York Times* noticed that "if all artists in America's workforce banded together, their ranks would be double the size of the United States Army." In fact, we may be three times the size of the army, as the census only tracks people who identify their primary occupation as "artist." BFA MFA PHD looks at students graduating with BFAs, MFAs, and PhDs, noticing that the growth curve is extreme, and that there are now a million new graduates in this nation every ten years.

Who's working on the project so far: Jackie Armstrong: manually pulled data from IPEDs site/Agnes Szanyi: sociologist, correlated data for population growth/Jeff Warren: writing code to pull data from IPEDS? we hope!/Annelie Berner: data viz (we could use more folks)/Ben Lerchin: [website](#)/Christin Ripley: printmaker, may make prints of data viz/Lika Volkova and Caroline Woolard: installation

And later on, when more people were working together in a clear way, I sent emails to remind people of our progress, like this:

Subject: info and materials for BFAMFAPhD
today: 12-6 p.m. at 63 5th Ave at 13th Street
(6th Floor # 620)

Dear all,

I am so excited to gather together today! If you can, please bring a laptop, an ID (the

BFAMFAPhD

guard needs to see it), and some food/drinks to share with 6-8 people. We will meet at the New School's University Center at 63 5th Ave at 13th Street (6th Floor # 620). It's the new, shiny building on the corner of 13th and 5th Ave.

We will be able to do very focused work today, as there are 6-8 of us fully confirmed, enough to work together and still all be heard. We will get to know each other better, talk through our progress so far, and work together on projects that we care about. These seem to be: Solidarity Research: what groups and organizations should we learn from, support, and work with? and Mapping: based on existing tenants organizations and [solidarity economy](#) initiatives, what are ideal neighborhoods for community [land trusts](#) and learning together?

Ann, Pasqualina, and I have created an agenda, and will be reviewing it from 11-12, in case you want to arrive early!

[Looking](#) forward to it,
Caroline

WORKING GROUPS WE ARE INTERESTED IN:
Mapping: Based on existing tenants organizations and [solidarity economy](#) initiatives, what are ideal neighborhoods for community [land trusts](#)?

Library and Reading Group (sorting PDFs and links sent, learning together)

Documentation: video and/or audio recordings about WHY we are gathering

All of the above dataviz + exploring financial-social models for community [land trusts](#)

Data Visualization/Drawing: race/ethnicity distribution (bring a laptop, if you can)

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Timeframe

Study

Solidarity Research: What groups and organizations should we learn from, support, and work with?

Library/reading; mapping; solidarity research; public calendar; documentation
(I also do not have a laptop)

Solidarity Research: What groups and organizations should we learn from, support, and work with?

Library and Reading Group (sorting PDFs and links sent, learning together)

PS: BFAMFAPHD.com is an interactive [website](#), an installation, and a community of thinkers that wonder: How might we mobilize artists in the United States? According to the census, there are more artists than police officers, lawyers, or doctors in the United States. Reporting on the census in 2008, *The New York Times* noticed that “if all artists in America’s workforce banded together, their ranks would be double the size of the United States Army.” How many of us are there, and what might we do together? BFAMFAPHD.com visualizes the number of students graduating with creative degrees, generates dialogue about our collective [power](#), and elicits proposals for organizing efforts. For example, if just ten prospective MFA students could agree to pool \$200-2000 a month for four years, they could generate between \$100,000 and \$1,000,000. Rather than going into debt to belong to a 2 year community in a traditional school, this group could use this money to buy a building, create a community [land trust](#), and secure space for place-based art, community organizing, [internet activism](#), and community resilience, in perpetuity.

BFAMFAPhD

By 2014, we had a clear core group. Susan Jahoda, who became my primary [collaborator](#) from 2015–today, proposed this structure, based upon her experiences working in a collective on the journal *Rethinking Marxism*. Susan and I wrote about the structure of BFAMAPhD in our book, *Making and Being*:

BFAMFAPhD has both a core group and contributors. To be a core member you must be aligned with BFAMFAPhD's [aesthetic](#) and ethical principles. You must be aligned with the [solidarity economy](#) concept that "another world is not only possible—it already exists." You must be interested in prioritizing the remaking of institutions over institutional critique for the sake of critique itself. You must be interested in [looking](#) for strategic opportunities to advance cultural equity in the arts and to build a community of rigor and care over a cynical, ironic, or antagonistic stance that denies our capacity to create change in the world.

People become group members by emailing us and asking to join the collective or by being invited in through existing relationships. The core group takes care of all of the administrative tasks that keep the collective alive. These include maintaining the [website](#) and caring for the well-being of members through [events](#) like collective meals, meditation, and movement [practices](#). [Friendship and emotional labor](#) are central to our group agreements, and we privilege these in order to maintain the collective. One benefit of being in a collective is that we have five people to draw from. While one of us might be sick, two (or four) of us are likely rested and awake.

Contributors are people who have created projects that the core group has agreed to host. Contributors can also potentially become core

Collectively-
Initiated

Commitment

Study

members but are not responsible for the maintenance of the group and do not have the right to approve new contributions or to represent the group in public. Our book, *Making and Being*, is one contribution to the collective. Other core members of BFAMFAPhD are working on a wide range of projects, including a PhD dissertation about art and the sociology of professions by Agnes and a choreographic work about student debt by Vicky.

From 2013–2014, Susan Jahoda, Vicky Virgin, Agnes Szanyi, Blair Murphy, and I worked together to publish *Artists Report Back*, a fifteen-page report that analyzed data collected by the Census Bureau's 2012 American Community Survey (ACS) to ask questions about race, ethnicity, gender, and inequity in the arts. Vicky knew how to work with data from the the American Community Survey (ACS) because she works by day as a Research Associate with the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity in New York City. By night, Vicky is a dancer and choreographer. She knew how to use ACS data, and to ask questions based upon this annual survey that is designed to sample one percent of US households, about 3 million households. This was important because self-reported data (if we had simply emailed our friends) does not account for over-representing or under-representing the population at large. With rigorous methodology and Vicky's experience, our report was taken seriously. We received national attention and we were suddenly in the news, suggesting how established artists and recent arts graduates might advocate for one another, and how cultural equity initiatives might recognize and strengthen cooperative and solidarity art economies in the United States. We knew we were on to something, as a collective.

What we realized in 2014, after publishing *Artists Report Back*, is that although we were effective on a national level, in terms of making news headlines and speaking as a kind of think tank for cultural equity, we were still teaching in classrooms and we had not changed our pedagogy, our

In general, therefore, the *fictional institution* functions by juxtaposition with the 'real' institution. The comparison between the two opens a question that reaches the heart of the distinction between reality and fiction. If we are led to consider existing institutions as 'natural facts,' fictional institutions should reveal the narrative character of the former, the fiction that produces their reality.

—Marco Baravalle, 2020

BFAMFAPhD

ways of teaching and learning. We asked ourselves as artists and teachers: How can our [production process](#) reflect who we want to be in the world? How can we embody some of the principles that matter to us? How can we bring [systems-thinking](#) to traditional studio arts pedagogy? How can our [production processes](#), our projects, our cultural landscapes and ecosystems align? This led us to start trying things out in our classrooms, and to begin writing about our experiences. We did not know that this would become a six-year project that would culminate in a 700-page book, *Making and Being*, published by Pioneer Works Press and distributed by Distributed Art Publishers in 2019.

although we were effective on a national level, in terms of making news headlines and speaking as a kind of think tank for cultural equity, ... we had not changed our pedagogy, our ways of teaching and learning.

As I write in our book, *Making and Being*:

June 1, 2019

In 2014, Susan Jahoda and I really found each other as [collaborators](#) and friends. There is something amazing about Susan's ability to approach people of any age and status—student, administrator, etc.—with a sense of openness. Susan is able to truly see me as an equal. This is very unusual from someone at her stage in her profession; I rarely feel a sense of mutuality with older faculty members and artists that I have wanted to collaborate with. Other people have “pulled rank” and let me know that we could not grow together or transform one another.

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Initiated

There is a comfort between Susan and me in speaking about everything from our bodies to research to relationships to careers. We are curious about one another rather than embarrassed to share vulnerable realities. We think about our differences as generative, as moments to understand the limits of our knowledge and to grow together. Collaboration is pedagogical. I collaborate because I want my limited perspective to be challenged and transformed in dialogue with other people. It allows me to refine my ideas in debate and in encounters with difference—difference of experience, of perspective, of values.

BFAMFAPhD

Managing

Susan is 66 and I am 36. As Susan and I write in *Making and Being*:

Working in an intergenerational collective brings together, through lived and embodied experience, a sense of the past, the present, and the future. We bring in readings and references with the specificity of having lived through those debates. We speak about our need for public recognition with an honesty that is possible because we have different needs and goals according to our life stage and [financial stability](#). For example, at the start of writing this book, Susan had job security through her tenured faculty position and supported Caroline in her successful search for a tenure-track job during the writing of this book. Likewise, Caroline and Susan supported Emilio in their search and acceptance into an MFA program. We prioritized Caroline's need for [financial stability](#), and then Emilio's need to focus on making projects and being in a consistent space of learning. Moving through these life stages can bring emotional reactivity to our collective work. We can become emotionally unavailable to one another because we are trying to balance our personal goals with our collective projects.

We created an internal budget for the collective to keep track of the money that we generate from workshops, nearly all of which we put back into projects that we are working on.

From 2015–2019, we channeled most of the money we made from grants, artist fees, and pedagogical workshops toward the expenses related to our book, *Making and Being*.

You can see that here:

Collectively-
Initiated

Timeframe

INCOME			
research grant	\$1,000.00	UMASS	12/1/2015
workshop	\$400.00	Creative Time	12/1/2015
workshop	\$400.00	Creative Time	12/1/2015
workshop	\$1,500.00	Cornell	8/30/2016
exhibition	\$200.00	Chicago G400	9/24/2016
workshop	\$100.00	NYPOP	10/14/2016
grant	\$700.00	Research Grant	10/14/2016
grant	\$300.00	Research Grant	10/14/2016
research grant	\$333.15	Leftover Susan \$	11/1/2016
exhibition	\$600.00	CUE	2/22/2017
exhibition	\$200.00	CUE	4/27/2017
workshops	\$500.00	Spaceworks	7/14/2017
workshop	\$600.00	EFA	7/14/2017
workshop	\$500.00	More Art	3/25/2018
website	\$2,000.00	UHartford CTEI - dev	6/1/2018
materials for WOB	\$500.00	UMASS	6/1/2018
workshop	\$150.00	Columbia TC	6/1/2018
Pratt	\$1,000.00	Caroline	6/1/2018
Pratt	\$1,000.00	Emilio	6/20/2018
residency/materials	\$2,000.00	Pratt	6/30/2018
illustrations	\$1,200.00	Hauser and Wirth	6/30/2018
writing text	\$200.00	Social Practice Queens	9/10/2018
Kickstarter profit (after fee / printing)	\$5.00	BFAMFAPhD	9/24/2018
manuscript advance	\$3,000.00	Pioneer Works Press	7/18/2019
workshop fee	\$600.00	Elizabeth Foundation	4/1/2019
workshop fee	\$600.00	Elizabeth Foundation	2/23/2019
workshop fee	\$200.00	Art in General / SHIFTER	11/25/2018
project fee	\$751.99	University of Toronto	2/1/2019
writing fee	\$600.00	College Art Association	1/25/2019
Kickstarter pre-sales	\$6,333.42	Kickstarter Backers	9/9/2019
event production	\$2,850.00	Hauser & Wirth	2/8/2019
editing support	\$2,000.00	Pioneer Works Press	6/29/2019
design support	\$5,000.00	Pioneer Works Press (estimate)	6/1/2019
funds for peer review	\$750.00	Pioneer Works Press	3/24/2019
Total	\$38,073.56		
EXPENSES			
Personnel			
copyedits	-\$50.00	Katherine	12/1/2015
NEW INC residency	-\$450.00	NEW INC	8/15/2016
text edits	-\$438.75	Sara Bodinson	9/24/2016
retreat	-\$63.48	Loomio Workshop	7/1/2017
interview for the book	-\$100.00	Oscar	6/1/2018
interview for the book	-\$100.00	Stephanie	6/30/2018
kickstarter video	-\$500.00	More Art	7/1/2018
interview for the book	-\$100.00	Alice	7/24/2018
interview for the book	-\$100.00	Edgar	8/15/2018
printing	-\$21.60	New School	8/15/2018
overview of art ed	-\$500.00	Sakina	8/31/2018
documenting Pratt exhibition	-\$500.00	Joao	9/23/2018
documenting Pratt exhibition	-\$500.00	Joao	9/23/2018
illustrations	-\$1,200.00	Topos Graphics	9/24/2018
book design style guide / brief	-\$1,800.00	Topos Graphics	12/20/2018

Managing

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early edits	-\$50.00	Daniel	1/1/2019
early edits	-\$350.00	Daniel	1/1/2019
design for newspaper excerpt	-\$1,140.00	Angela	1/25/2019
peer reviewer fee	-\$750.00	3 Reviewers	3/24/2019
design of book	-\$5,000.00	Pioneer Works / Daniel (estimate)	6/1/2019
editing—structural edits pass 1	-\$2,000.00	Helen	6/16/2019
feedback	-\$500.00	Judit	6/26/2019
editing—structural edits pass 2	-\$2,000.00	Helen	6/29/2019
website and card game	-\$6,000.00	Or and Ben	8/1/2019
editing—line edits	-\$500.00	Helen	8/4/2019
illustrations	-\$300.00	Emily	8/4/2019
writing fee	-\$700.00	Alta	8/7/2019
editing—line edit of proof	-\$500.00	Helen	9/1/2019
Total	-\$26,213.83		
Materials and Services			
window crayons	-\$6.08	Blick	8/24/2018
printing newspapers	-\$255.85	Linco	1/17/2019
printing deck of cards	-\$219.79	University of Toronto	1/17/2019
thank you materials for H&W speakers	-\$13.27	Flower Power	2/21/2019
thank you materials for H&W speakers	-\$10.78	Paper Presentation	2/22/2019
thank you materials for H&W speakers	-\$13.27	Flower Power	4/16/2019
thank you materials for H&W speakers	-\$20.14	Paper Source	4/19/2019
thank you cards for H&W speakers	-\$40.14	Cards by KT	6/7/2019
font	-\$85.35	MyFonts	6/20/2019
thank you materials for H&W speakers	-\$16.00	Flower Power	7/7/2019
Kickstarter service fee	-\$755.00	Kickstarter	9/1/2019
hard drive (for Kickstarter video)	-\$65.31	online	9/6/2019
printing the book for copyedits	-\$100.00	copy center	TBA
Kickstarter books	-\$2,912.00	Printer Estimate	TBA
		182 books x \$16	
Total	-\$4,506.90		
Accommodations			
workshop	-\$65.76	Northstar Restaurant	9/15/2016
workshop	-\$42.00	breakfast	9/15/2016
Cornell workshop	-\$540.00	bus	9/15/2016
workshop	-\$12.00	taxi	9/15/2016
retreat	-\$358.62	Food Co-op	5/24/2017
workshop	-\$22.68	Barista Panini House	7/14/2017
workshop	-\$15.98	Key Food	7/14/2017
workshop	-\$10.00	Lyft	7/14/2017
workshop	-\$42.06	Lyft	7/14/2017
retreat	-\$20.00	greens	6/1/2018
retreat	-\$22.00	fish	6/1/2018
retreat	-\$17.00	Café and Market	6/1/2018
retreat	-\$63.00	Le Gamin	6/1/2018
retreat	-\$12.00	coffee	6/1/2018
retreat	-\$82.94	Hudson Food Studio	6/1/2018
retreat	-\$81.64	Hudson Food Studio	6/1/2018
retreat	-\$24.46	Health Market	6/1/2018
retreat	-\$46.65	Barista Panini House	6/1/2018
retreat	-\$10.53	Tea	6/1/2018

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retreat	-\$52.09	Pizza	6/1/2018
event space rental	-\$70.00	Dzochen Community	2/28/2019
lunch	-\$26.50	Court Street	6/26/2019
lunch	-\$35.94	Bar Taco	6/20/2019
groceries	-\$19.00	Coop	6/20/2019
retreat space	-\$295.68	Hartford	6/16/2019
retreat space	-\$250.00	Hartford	6/18/2019
drinks	-\$10.00	water	2/28/2019
Total	-\$1,588.77		

EXPENSES TOTALS	-\$32,309.50
INCOME (FROM ABOVE)	\$38,073.56
REMAINING	\$5,764.06

BUDGET NOTES:

This budget does not include the salaries of the staff at Pioneer Works who provided project management, photography, video, design, marketing, and sales support for the project. We wish to note that we were not compensated for the time required to write the book, but that our salaries provided income that enabled us the time to do so. We have relied upon so many [gifts](#). As a collective, we determined that we would rarely reimburse ourselves for collective meals and transportation. All money made in workshops has gone back into collective projects.

It was possible for me to contribute our workshop fees back to the collective, rather than taking that money as income, because I got a tenure-track job in 2017 at the University of Hartford. I had a full-time salary for the first time in my life. When I held open [meetings](#) for what became BFAMFAPhD in 2012–2013, I was truly unsure about my relationship to academic institutions. From 2012–2017, the collective had been a place for me to understand how my personal experience connected to the experiences of other students, adjuncts, and administrators within the academic arts institutions in the United States. I now know that this is part of the emergent academic field of “Critical University Studies,” and my salary at the University of Hartford supports me, in part, to do this research. In *Making and Being*, I wrote about the balance of day jobs and collective work in the following way:

In 2014, when BFAMFAPhD’s *Artists Report Back* came out, I was four years into teaching as an adjunct at The New School (with a stint at RISD). I turned 30 and began to think about job security with a kind of desperation. I had started to love the dialogue that is possible in the classroom; I also loved being recognized as an academic in the academic art community. The grants that had supported OurGoods.org had dried up, and TradeSchool.coop ^{see chapter 3} had never generated any money; we were opposed to payment in that collective. I was working three part-time jobs at [nonprofits](#) while teaching as an adjunct and trying to sustain my organizing work and my artistic [practice](#). I was deeply exhausted. My partner had a tenure-track job, as did Susan, so I knew it was possible, despite all the odds against me; I had no MFA. But teaching in higher education seems to me to be the best job in the United States, despite the contradictions of tuition-driven education. Where else do you get four months off each year, support for experimental art projects, and job security for life?

Mark McGurl has called the university system, employing artists since the 1950s, the “largest patronage system for living artists in history.” I was fully aware, from BFAMFAPhD, of

Collectively-
Initiated

Study

Experience

the contradictions held within the neoliberal university, including the fact that the majority of faculty will be adjuncts. I started applying for tenure-track jobs while also trying to find free and fully-funded MFA programs. I had job interviews at a number of places, but a few search committee members told me confidentially that the lack of an MFA was a real problem. I asked an artist to put me in touch with someone at SVA, hoping to get an MFA there. When I asked the Chair of MFA Fine Arts at SVA if I could get an MFA for free at SVA, he suggested that I teach in the program! I went from trying to get an MFA to teaching in their MFA program, starting in 2016. I kept applying for jobs.

... the university system, employing artists since the 1950s, the “largest patronage system for living artists in history.”

Managing

After teaching at The New School for seven years, from 2011-2017, and at SVA from 2016 on, I got a tenure-track job at the University of Hartford, without an MFA, in 2017. The summer before I began teaching in Hartford, I allowed myself to feel the anxiety that had propelled me from 2011 onward. I had to confront the difference between the workaholism that was necessary for my survival as a precarious adjunct and the compulsive workaholism that numbs me from the present, numbs me from feeling, and from being available to others. The incredible stress of seven years of adjunct work is starting to wear off, but the contradictions of inequity between faculty does not go away. I now have to confront the inequity of the university from the privileged side of the adjunct-tenure-track

BFAMFAPhD

divide. I feel as though I have gotten on a cruise ship, sailing away from my peers, all of whom continue the precarious hustle. With the privilege of a tenure-track job, I am able to devote at least forty more hours per week on my research and organizing.

**I had to confront the difference
between the workaholism that
was necessary for my survival as
a precarious adjunct and the
compulsive workaholism that
numbs me from the present,
numbs me from feeling, and from
being available to others.**

In my first year as a tenure-track faculty member at the University of Hartford, I decided to enroll in a tuition-free MFA program. This year is the first year that Bennington College has offered the Master of Fine Arts in Art and Public Action program, designed “for candidates with significant careers and substantial professional experience in the visual arts, well beyond undergraduate studies.” While the University of Hartford and the School of Visual Arts have determined that I have equivalent professional experience to a Master of Fine Arts, and indeed while I have now taught graduate students for over five years, I recognize that for many institutions, it is important that all faculty possess a terminal degree. Bennington requires that I teach undergraduate courses as part of the conditions for the MFA.

So from 2018-2020, I taught three, seven-hour courses per week at the University of Hartford and one, four-hour course per week at Bennington while doing service work and research. My partner is an Associate Professor of English at the

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City University of New York, and switched her schedule so that she was teaching on week-ends, so that we could commute from New York to Connecticut to Vermont each week. We try to be together, even if we have three different “homes” and beds to sleep in. It is exhausting. My partner has supported me throughout this entire experience. Recently, I was offered a tenure-track job at a Research-1 University, but, after many negotiations, I decided to remain at the University of Hartford. I realized that it was more important for me to stay in place, in community, with my partner and collaborators nearby than to follow some fantasy of an academic career that would leave me in solitude in a totally new context.

Today, Susan and I recognize the importance of being in a “pod” together, in a quarantine of sorts, with another friend and our partners during the COVID-19 pandemic. I just had a baby and Susan is over sixty, so we are both considered vulnerable. I am going to move to Amherst, MA, to be near Susan so we can continue our work together. Our work includes the support that Susan is offering, which means helping me to raise this child. She wrote to me the other day to say, “whatever family is, we are that.” This is what I believe chosen family is all about. Collaboration, in its most intentional and holistic form, can produce a deep emotional and intellectual friendship.

Managing

Mediating

It took me a while to realize that I have a skill with meditating, narrating, or “marketing” projects. I think I learned a lot of this from Rich Watts and Louise Ma, with their talent for design and documentation in OurGoods.org and TradeSchool.coop ^{see chapter 3}. First, I knew that *Artists Report Back* should be a video and a written report, as it would spread more easily this way. To get press for our projects, such as Artists Report Back, I emailed over 20 people who were leading cultural organizers, and also over 20 journalists who had written about OurGoods.org or TradeSchool.coop in the past. I wrote emails like this to press contacts:

Subject: lead: new national report on art student debt BFAMFAPhD

Alan,

A friend tells me that you might be interested in this report a group of volunteers has been working on for the past year, on student debt and arts education, and the impact of expensive art degrees and future work prospects.

BFAMFAPhD is about to release a written report, animated video, and interactive site about the lives of working artists and arts graduates nationally. This coincides with our work in Crossing Brooklyn, now on view at the Brooklyn Museum.

If you are interested in our work, please see the media below, and do not hesitate to contact us for more information. We ask that you do not share this media until 2pm this afternoon, when we are ready for web traffic.

Watch *Artists Report Back*, Animated:
<https://vimeo.com/108889437>

Read *Artists Report Back*, here and attached:
goo.gl/4kLF1x
 Interact with national data:
censusreport.bfamfaphd.com

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WHY DID WE MAKE THIS REPORT?

Loan officers insist that art students can afford art school tuition, repaying student loans over time by working in the arts. This is not our experience. We decided that it was time to make our own report. Connecting our lived experiences to national trends, we wanted to know: What is the impact of rent, debt, and precarity on working artists and arts graduates nationally?

HOW DID WE MAKE THIS REPORT?

Artists Report Back uses data about artists' demographics, occupations, educational attainment, field of degree, and earnings as recorded by The Census Bureau's 2012 American Community Survey (ACS) to make statements about the current conditions and contradictions of working artists and arts graduates.

WHAT DID WE FIND?

In the United States, 40 percent of working artists do not have a bachelor's degree in any field. Only 10 percent of arts graduates are working artists. Though arts graduates may acquire additional opportunities and [skills](#) from attending art school, arts graduates are likely to graduate with significant student loan debt, which makes working as an artist difficult, if not impossible. Given the discrepancy between working artists and arts graduates, as well as the rising cost of tuition at art schools, the report ends with recommendations for policy makers, administrators, and educators.

See the written and animated report for more findings, including findings about the occupations that arts graduates work, the degrees that working artists hold (if any), and the predominance of [white](#), non-Hispanic and male working artists.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for more information.

I've also attached the image that goes with our [key](#) finding: "Out of 2 million arts graduates nationally, only 10 percent, or 200,000 people, make their primary earnings as working artists."

Caroline, Blair, Susan, Julian, and Vicky
BFAMFAPhD

info@bfamfaphd.com

The story spread quickly. I am good at thinking on my feet, and, in my twenties, I would often prioritize meeting new people in the arts rather than developing and supporting deep friendships. This led to a wide network of contacts, which was helpful for projects, but often made me the primary contact and gave less attention to other collective members. Susan and I began to work on my tendency to jump forward, and to celebrate when it was helpful, in the following way:

To understand our [collaborative dynamics](#), we engage in the process of "[Threeing](#)." [Threeing](#) is a method for group work that was developed by the video-artist Paul Ryan between 1971 and the end of his life, in 2013. [Threeing](#) is "a voluntary [practice](#) in which three people take turns playing three different roles: initiator, respondent, and mediator."⁴⁵ By practicing [Threeing](#) in groups of five, three, or two with members of BFAMFAPhD, we are able to experience the positions of Firstness (the initiator), Secondness (the respondent), and Thirdness (the mediator). We also use the vocabulary from [Threeing](#) to understand and describe our collaborative dynamic with one another, even when we are working as a group of two. [Threeing](#) has become such a common part of our vocabulary that we have a spreadsheet that lists every task that has to be accomplished for our group to function, using the roles: firstness, secondness, and thirdness.

Study

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Paul Ryan, "[Threeing](#)," Earthscore, 2006, http://www.earthscore.org/New%20Format/Curriculae/threeing_curriculum.html.

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Recently, we were emailed by a person who offered us an exciting opportunity. We knew that if both of us spoke with this person at the same time, the conversation could wander. Caroline is very good at thinking on the spot, and asked Susan if she could take the first calls, to determine the scope of the opportunity, alone. Susan said yes, “be in firstness,” and Caroline was able to move the project forward and loop in Susan once the opportunity had been solidified. No big decisions were made without Susan’s consent.

formation and maintenance of groups could be a site of investigation in and of itself.

While working on *Artists Report Back* in 2014, I realized that I had been in collectives for over seven years, and that the formation and maintenance of groups could be a site of investigation in and of itself. I felt that I could do this work—learning about how to collaborate—for life, and enjoy it. I also knew that I wanted to keep making objects, and thinking about what objects can do to support group process. With these interests, The Study Center for Group Work^{see chapter 2} was born.