

ADDENDUM

NILS NORMAN ET TILO STEIREIF

NILS NORMAN

“My main use of utopia as a tool is to use it to show what isn’t there, to use it in a critical way. I have no intention for these utopias to be realized. They are meant to show what cannot be realized. I use them to try to develop a consciousness for myself as well as also for whoever might come into a discourse with me about them. It is about why these things aren’t possible and then it opens up discussions on capitalism, urbanity and so on.”

Nils Norman in conversation with Mark Dion, “Mission Impossible“, 1998.

Nils Norman is a London-based artist who – through his work on projects that often feature a collaborative dimension – incorporates a broad reflection on education. In his study of the public space, he was particularly interested in children’s playgrounds, as a true counterpoint to traditional school education. As well as studying their history and conducting a photographic survey of “adventure playgrounds”, he also developed utopian plans – using models and graphic illustrations – for how to transform certain existing places into playgrounds. These proposals pay particular attention to ecology, to the privatisation of towns and to the notion of the “common”.

For Utopia and the Everyday, he has co-authored a project with TILO STEIREIF.

THE EXPLODING SCHOOL 2000-2007 / THE SCHOOL OF WALLS AND SPACE, SINCE 2007

In connection with the various contexts in which he has taught, Nils Norman has created, since 2002, an Exploding School. Each teaching situation gives rise to a different project, conceptualised and developed together with students. Taking inspiration from the book *Streetwork* by Colin Ward and Anthony Fyson, the school is nomadic and uses the city as its classroom. It studies new artistic strategies in public spaces, the gentrification of towns, city planning and projects that favour a social dimension.

In London in 2000, he developed a leaflet with a proposal to transform an exhibition space called Top Room into a hybrid learning space, to permit education in collaborative art that takes account of the context in which it occurs. The project took the name of: Educational facility No:1. The topology of a proposal for a phantom experimental free school leaflet.

In 2002, working with artists Scott Constable and Ene Osteraas-Constable for an exhibition entitled *Utopia Now (and Then)* at the Sonoma County Museum in Santa Rosa, California, Nils Norman organises a bus tour for the Exploding School based on meetings with regional organisations involved in ecology and farming. The tour, which is called *The Ecology/Art Expedition Survey, Phase 1*, takes place over a whole day. A local historian and scientists take part, and give their own points of view.

In 2005, fifteen students from different faculties at the University of Chicago meet regularly to take part in visits around the city, events, meetings with social or environmental organisations, and discussions with artists. A reading list is provided in advance of each session.

In 2006, working with students from the CCC study programme in Geneva, he conducted a reflection on public space and the gentrification of certain districts of the town.

Since 2007, the Exploding School has become part of the School of Walls and Space, Nils Norman’s new project, based at the Royal Danish Academies of the Visual Arts in Copenhagen.

TILO STEIREIF

Tilo Steireif is an artist with a particular interest in resistance tactics and discussions of autonomy; he also questions the role of the intellectual in public life.

He is also a teacher at the Haute Ecole Pédagogique in Lausanne and, through his collaboration with the project *Utopia and the Everyday*, is linking his research as a teacher to his artistic work.

trafo.K AND GABU HEINDL

It was important for us to see our work not simply as an educational concept, but also as a contribution to the existing public debate.

Nora Sternfeld and Renate Höllwart (Büro trafo.K), “Es kommt darauf an, Einige Überlegungen zu einer politischen und anti-rassistischen Pädagogik“, 2004.

trafo.K

trafo.K is a collective of female educators, art historians, curators and researchers who work on the boundary between education and cultural production. Its members create projects which blend contemporary art, art education and a re-reading of history. As independent educators, they are appointed by local authorities, cultural institutions and other organisations. They favour long-term projects, undertaking studies that give substance to the artistic activities, projects with young people and workshops. They set up multi-layer partnerships, adopting a critical approach and a political position. Each project is approached with a desire to deconstruct existing codes and enhance marginalised narratives, particularly by occupying the public arena.

Since 1999, the trafo.K collective has led over thirty projects on themes as varied as feminism, public space, contemporary history, racism, social movements, town-planning, contemporary art, law and privatisation.

When the collective agreed to work around “Utopia and the Everyday”, trafo.K members suggested that they develop a specific project, comprising a collaboration phase with a group of local participants and a “transcription” of this partnership in the exhibition space. The collective invited architect Gabu Heindl to give shape to the fruit of their work within the space.

The project is dedicated to Charlotte Martinz-Turek, who died in an accident in the course of the project.

FLIC-FLAC, since 2008

For several years, trafo.K has worked on the development of a kit of material on questions of gender, to be used in schools. The kit was conceived with students of vocational colleges in mind and is constantly reviewed and improved in collaboration with the Vienna Pädagogische Hochschule (Training School). It contains a glossary of words linked to gender and feminism, fact-sheets on works of art, artists’ videos and instructions for games.

The tools enable a link to be drawn between the students’ daily lives and political and activist debates, the history of feminist struggles, and artists’ work, which is documented in the kit. Artist Evi Scheller worked on the graphic design of the kit while linguist Persson Perry Baumgartinger contributed to the texts.

GABU HEINDL

Gabu Heindl studied architecture at the Vienna Fine Arts Academy, at Geijutsu Daigaku University in Tokyo, and at Princeton University. She has worked in architects’ practices in New York and Amsterdam.

Since 2003, she has worked for herself in Vienna and Amsterdam, and opened her own bureau in Vienna in 2007, where she works, very often in partnership, on the conception and development of public buildings, cultural centres and social housing.

In her projects and publications on the urban environment, she has developed a particular interest for the links between architecture and the history of women’s work, as well as for architectural models in film. She designed the video projection device for the Austrian pavilion at the 2009 Venice Biennale.

DAMON RICH AND OSCAR TUAZON

“We believe that civic engagement requires a new kind of civic education, one that explains how important decisions actually get made, what is at stake, and how residents can be involved. Our projects use art, design, and technology to draw the connections between everyday life and the decisions that give it form.”

Center for Urban Pedagogy’s website

“The most important thing I learned, though, is to see things in a broader way. Because whether you’re aware of it or not, what’s going on in our city can deeply affect us.”

Elizabeth Sanchez, City-As-School High School

DAMON RICH

Damon Rich is a designer and an artist. He currently works as city designer for the town of Newark. In his artistic work, he is interested in the built environment and the development of policies related to public space.

He is founder of the Center for Urban Pedagogy, of which he has been artistic director for ten years.

OSCAR TUAZON

Oscar Tuazon is an American artist who lives and works in Paris. His artistic practice could be described as a re-shaping of utopias. He works with modest materials and found objects, which he assembles to build structures that evoke minimal sculpture as much as utopian architecture.

CENTER FOR URBAN PEDAGOGY

The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) was first invited to participate in *Utopia and the Everyday*. It suggested a project with Damon Rich, the center’s founder and artistic director. Oscar Tuazon, another regular CUP associate, then joined him. A CUP project is shown here to illustrate the methods and commitment of the Center for Urban Pedagogy.

CUP is a Brooklyn-based nonprofit that uses art to increase grassroots participation in urban planning and community design. The Center for Urban Pedagogy carries out educational projects on the way in which places change, evolve and transform, involving artists, graphic designers, town-planners, lawyers, researchers, service providers and politicians. These partners work with CUP to set up projects: with schools (by encouraging pupils to leave classrooms and interact with the city), with professional groups, distributing educational publications and taking part in exhibitions in an artistic context. CUP’s work is developed around the idea that the power of the imagination is central to the practice of democracy and that political action should take into account citizens’ dreams and visions. What can we learn by observing the world around us? In learning how to survey our situation, we are training ourselves to change what we see.

GARBAGE PROBLEMS, 2002

The Garbage Problems project brought together an architect, a film director, a policy analyst, and eight students from New York’s City-As-School, an experimental alternative school founded on learning in the outdoors, which uses the resources of the city of New York as teaching material.

The group conducted research into the state of the waste management system in New York City with a project that asks the question: “Where will the trash go?”, in the context of the planned closure of the city’s main garbage dump. In an attempt to answer, experts, workers and activists were interviewed and waste management plants visited. The group then creates a series of educational posters, a proposal to rehabilitate the dump, and a video.

TO STANDARDIZE ? Plato's Academy

Raphaël's School of Athens (1510-11), which is considered the artist's masterpiece, is part of a series of frescoes commissioned by the Vatican. The frescoes' theme is knowledge, and the various disciplines associated with it (music, theology, philosophy...).

Plato and Aristotle feature at the centre of painting, while other thinkers and artists occupy the steps of the academy. Raphaël depicts an idealised school, with Roman rather than Greek architecture, and makes reference to the first Academy, founded by Plato.

Plato developed his Academy like a school but also as living quarters for those who taught and studied in it. Life in the school was run according to strict rules and organised around intellectual and physical activities.

Conceived along the lines of the Pythagorean communities, Plato's Academy is sometimes considered to be the founding model for modern universities. Because it was designed according to a model, and then it became one itself, this Academy is a fitting symbol for this module.

MAKING A PROFIT ? The owl

The owl is a well-known symbol for knowledge and wisdom. The nocturnal bird is in fact associated with the idea of reflection – in reference to the lunar orb that reflects the light of the sun. The owl is also associated with Athena (Minerva in Roman mythology), goddess of wisdom, artists and craftsmen, among other attributes.

A more modern representation of the owl depicts it on books, linking reasoning and intelligence with the accumulation of knowledge. In addition, its round eyes are often associated with spectacles, the indispensable accessory for the stereotypical image of a wise man or intellectual.

Here, an owl is perched on a tall pile of books and loses its balance. This raises the question of the capitalisation of knowledge and the concern for profitability that emerges in all human work.

DE-SCHOOLING ? The trees from Mario Bros.

Mario is the hero of numerous video games and is the image of the Nintendo brand. He was born in Japan in the 1980s and has been a recurring hero ever since. A real icon of video games, he was endowed, by his creator, Shigeru Miyamoto, with instantly recognisable physical characteristics, which have remained unchanged.

The trees from the Mario universe were the obvious choice as symbol for the question "To de-school?", as it might be associated with the idea of playing truant. These trees, borrowed from the world of video gaming – an activity often blamed for the dumbing-down of young people – prompt us to reconsider the education potential in society as a whole and in all types of cultural products.

EMPOWERING? Alice's mirror

In "Through the Looking-Glass", sequel to "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland", Lewis Carroll (real name Charles Dodgson) gives his heroine a more complex dimension.

At the start of this second volume, Alice is contemplating the reflection of the room around her in the mirror, when suddenly she discovers that she is able to pass right through the mirror. Once there, she discovers a back-to-front world where she must undergo various adventures and improbable encounters. Inspired by the strategy of chess games, the complex weave of the narrative will lead Alice to become a queen, whereas in the first opus she was simply a pawn.

A mathematics teacher who was enthusiastic about leading his pupils to deepen their understanding of a specific subject through an exploration of their own interests, Lewis Carroll throughout his career published books and games of maths and logic, designed as innovative teaching tools, in addition to his novels and poetic works.

GUIDING? Moses guiding the Jewish people across the Red Sea, as in to The Ten Commandments by Cecil B. DeMille

Moses, prophet and founder of Judaism, is also a central figure in Christianity and one of the principal prophets according to the Koran. He is the one chosen by God to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt, where they were reduced to slavery, and towards the Promised Land of Israel. When God speaks to him for the first time, Moses is keeping watch as his sheep graze.

The exodus lasts for 40 years, during which Moses carries out a number of supernatural acts, proof that he has indeed been chosen by God. Among these “miracles”, one of the most spectacular is the one in which he divides the waters of the Red Sea to allow the Hebrews to cross, while the Egyptian soldiers who are pursuing them will be covered by the waves as the waters close over them. Moses fulfils his mission but will never reach the Promised Land himself, as he dies on its threshold at the age of 120.

The image is drawn from the film *The Ten Commandments* (1956) by Cecil B. DeMille, which recounts the life of Moses, with actor Charlton Heston playing the prophet. Choosing the representation of Moses as popularised by Hollywood as a symbol is a double wink to the notion of pastoralism.