# Materializing Transversal Potential: An Ecosophical Analysis of the Dissensual Aestheticization of a Decommissioned Missile Base

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the researcher maps the collective aesthetic practices of a community of makers who have transformed a decommissioned missile base into a residence and community space. The site of the missile base is framed as an assemblage of physical and temporal universes mixed and layered, where its previous uses and occupation have formed a subjective residue that expresses itself physically via objects and architecture and mentally through a kind of collective memory inscribed in the site.

Félix Guattari's (1992/1995) ecosophical approach to analysis is used to consider how subjectivity is produced through collective aesthetic practices, focusing on the potential of bringing communities together through anti-capitalist exchanges of time and skill. The concepts of transversality and dissensus are introduced to identify ways that art educators might work together across prescribed social groups and spaces to question habituated ways of thinking and acting, considering the revolutionary potential of art education to contribute to "a new art of living in society" (Guattari, 1992/1995, p. 21).

## Introduction

> Our survival on this planet is not only threatened by environmental damage but by a degeneration in the social solidarity and in the modes of psychical life, which must literally be reinvented. The re-foundation of politics will have to pass through the aesthetic and analytical dimensions implied in the three ecologies – the environmental, the socius, and the psyche. We cannot conceive of solutions…without promoting a new art of living in society. (Guattari, 1992/1995, p. 21)

In this article, I introduce a decommissioned missile base located in North Texas that has been transformed into an artist's residence and

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community space. I introduce the current owner, Mike, and his community of friends who assisted in the social and material transformation of the site. I analyze how subjectivity was produced through their collective social and aesthetic practices and how the materiality of its past resonates today.

Rather than simply examining the site's new use as an example of repurposing an abandoned space, the goal of the place-based research is three-fold: 1) to consider the life of the base and its broader implications for reordering the social and material structures of institutional spaces (Guattari's [1992/1995] environmental ecology); 2) to consider the radical potential of DIY practices and informal art education by exploring how Mike's process of coming to and transforming the site affected his subjectivity (psychic ecology); and 3) to provide an example of collective anti-capitalist aesthetic practices by examining the community of makers who have assisted him in repurposing the site (social ecology). These three goals relate to Guattari's three ecologies described in the quote that opened the article. I developed a methodological assemblage that combined nomadic inquiry with ethnographic methods to research the materiality of the base and social relations among its occupants.

To analyze the interrelated significance of the site's environmental, social, and psychic elements, I employ Félix Guattari's (1992/1995) ecosophical approach. As Guattari argues in the quote that opened this article, considering solutions to the increasing damage being done to our environment has to start with changes in our social and psychic life. We cannot consider nature or man-made environments apart from our individual and social relations on and with them. The concepts of *tranversality* and *dissensus*, explained below, are introduced to consider ways that we might work together across established social groups to change habituated ways of thinking and acting. Analyzing the political potential of the collective and anti-capitalist aesthetic practices of the owner and his community of friends may illuminate art education's revolutionary potential to contribute to "a new art of living in society" (p. 21).

## Becoming Curious

The following vignette describes how I discovered the missile base while working on a photographic inquiry into backyard underground shelters in my community.

> I had never really thought about bomb shelters before. The suburb I grew up in was developed in the late 1970s, so bomb shelters were not a consideration. In the spring of 2012, I worked on a project that required regularly driving around neighborhoods in my community. I was surprised how many houses had underground shelters in their backyards. I became curious about the characteristic rusted vents sticking out above cement slabs. Once I became aware of them, I found myself looking for underground shelters all the time. I would get out of my car and snoop around people's fences to photograph them where I could. I tried to capture their mystery in the photographs (see Figure 1).



*Fig. 1*      Image of underground shelter.

> I thought about the culture and mental climate of the U.S. in the 1950s, and how fear of war and natural disaster might produce the desire to install these kinds of structures. I talked about my new interest with friends and learned that there was an old missile base just north of

*town. It had been built in the early 1950s, and having live missiles so close to a residential area intimidated community members who built bomb shelters in response. I decided I would drive out to see the missile base first hand, hoping it might add to the series of photographs I was developing. I imagined the base as a shiny and minimal structure like something out of a science fiction movie.*



*Fig. 2    Exterior of administrative building*

*The following week, I went to find the base and passed what looked like an abandoned elementary school (see Figure 2). There was a chain-link fence with a gate that said "Keep Out." The gate was open, so I went in anyway. I drove past an empty guard stand and realized there was a group of buildings—all cement structures, few doors or windows remaining—overgrown grasses, and old equipment piled up.  I noticed a newer model car parked in the distance, so I quickly turned around and headed back out the main gate.*

*A few months later, I had been thinking about the missile base again, but I was afraid to go alone.  I asked a friend who was a photographer to come along, suggesting that he might get some good photographs out of it. As we approached the long chain-link fence, I noticed the gate was*



*Fig. 3    Guard stop in at entrance of missile base.*

*open again. I turned in and we started past the guard stop (see Figure 3). I could sense my friend's reluctance to drive any farther.*

*"Cala, maybe we really should 'Keep Out.' I think we've passed four of those signs so far."*

*"No, come on. Let's see what it is. It doesn't look like anyone's here. There aren't even any windows on the buildings. Isn't it creepy? It feels like a post-apocalyptic elementary school."*

*As I drove up past two more buildings, I noticed the car I'd seen before parked at the end of the driveway. It looked at least ten years old, so I told myself that maybe it had been abandoned there. We slowly walked up the hill towards a building without windows or a door. Old plastic chairs were sitting in a circle just outside the entrance to the building. I saw Tibetan colored flags and Christmas lights hanging inside (see Figure 4). I looked back at my friend as he looked up at me.  "What is this place?"*

*At that moment, the owner of the property, Mike, came out of another building.[2] I apologized for trespassing, and he explained that he lived*

2  A pseudonym has been assigned to participants out of respect for their privacy.  The owner of the base generously consented to allow me to share this research about his life and his work on the missile base.

*Fig. 4*    Interior of mess hall.    *there and that he and his friends had reno-
vated parts of the land to make the space a
community site for their group. He showed me around and agreed to
work with me on an inquiry into his process of transforming the site.
Over the next two years, I returned to the base many times to visit
Mike and attend the group's gatherings.*

## Place-Based Pedagogy

In addition to the photography project on bomb shelters, I was re-
searching histories of do-it-yourself (DIY) approaches to education
and preparing a research proposal that would focus on place-based
learning through an inquiry into social and material practices em-
bedded in domestic spaces. Narratives about homes and the objects
in them can illuminate residents' values, providing insight about
cultural history and significant social practices. The missile base was
a unique site, bridging my interests in the subjectifying effects of in-
stitutional power that I was exploring through the bomb shelters and
the radical potential of aesthetic practices in domestic spaces.

Pedagogies of place (Callejo Perez, Fain, & Slater, 2004; Ellsworth,
2005; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008) draw attention to the vitality of a

physical setting to instruct, oppress, structure, and inspire. In art edu-
cation, scholars using place-based inquiry are often focused on the po-
tential of learning beyond the institutional setting, on domestic spaces
(Ballengee Morris, 2000; Congdon, 2006), public places (Duncum,
2011; Trafi-Prats, 2006, 2009), and the natural environment (Blandy &
Hoffman, 1993; Garoian, 1998, jagodzinski, 1987), and through direct
engagements with built environments (Gude, 2004; Powell, 2008,
2010).

Environmentally conscious researchers in art education have ques-
tioned the hierarchy of humans over the environment (jagodzinski,
1987) and attempted to "demonstrate the interdependence of all
living and non-living things" (Blandy & Hoffman, 1993, pp. 24-25).
Others argue the potentially negative impacts of institutional environ-
ments across ecologies (Graham, 2007; Wallin, 2007). Through this
research into the missile base I contribute to place-based research in
art education by further probing the potential of informal modes of
art education, with a focus on domestic spaces, leading to a question-
ing of the production of individuals' subjectivity in relation to social
and material practices. The transformed missile base provided an
opportunity to link institutional space with domestic practices as an
aesthetic intervention. Moreover, I build on place-based scholarship in
art education by employing Félix Guattari's (1992/1995) ecosophical
approach to spatial analysis to map relationships between subjectivity,
social relations, and material environments.

## Mapping Ecosophical Assemblages

Over the course of two years, I visited the missile base approximately
fifteen times to engage with and document the material aspects of the
site, learn about Mike's interest in and process of transforming the
land, and discuss his and his community of friends' collective aesthet-
ic work on the base. In my research question, I asked how an ecosoph-
ical lens—though which I examine spaces as assemblages of social,
mental, and environmental factors in flux—might produce new ways
of understanding subjectivity.  This question related directly to my

understanding of Guattari's (1989/2000) work in *The Three Ecologies*, where he argues that subjectivity is produced through assemblages of social, mental, and environmental vectors (the "three ecologies").

To engage with and document these varied elements, I developed a methodological assemblage that combined nomadic inquiry (Braidotti, 2011; Coats, 2014; St. Pierre, 1997), cultural and historical research, and a range of ethnographic methods, including interviews, observations, audio recordings, written reflections, and photographic documentation.  Mike provided tours of different areas of the base. I photographed the spaces, and he responded to formal and informal interview questions during the tours. Mike discussed his perspectives on his experiences prior to and in the process of transforming the base. I documented what the base had become through photographs, looking both at its original structure and how it had changed through its various uses.

After my initial formal visits to the base, I began attending gatherings with his community of friends. I recorded what I learned through conversations with his friends through personal reflections. Data related to participants' subjectivity emerged from my analysis of their stories about choices, insecurities, sacrifices, actions, and values. I also researched the cultural history of missile bases to consider how the site was layered through temporal and physical changes, where historical artifacts such as architectural structure or material objects existed as a subjective residue, an idea I will develop further throughout the article.

I mapped my shifting understanding through a form of nomadic inquiry[3] that focused on curiosity, activated thinking, affect, and reflexivity. As in the vignette that opened the article, I created written and audio reflections along with photographs to develop narra-

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3  Inspired by "nomadology" (Deleuze, 1990; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) and nomadic methodologies (Braidotti. 2011; St. Pierre, 1997), I developed a form of nomadic inquiry in an attempt to map the activity or process of thinking by becoming attuned to ruptures in participants' and my own habituated ways of knowing.

tives and map my process of coming to know the space and people. I transcribed the interviews and reflections and coded them, looking for themes related to process, ethics, education, relationships, culture, and values. I analyzed how social and material practices together affected Mike and his friends' subjectivity as well as mine.

The concept of *assemblage* operates as description, methodology, and theory throughout this article.  I use the concept of an assemblage in its more common context as aesthetic terminology, where previously unrelated objects have been joined together in a new context. It also relates to my methodology as a composite of a number of different approaches pieced together. Theoretically, it relates to Deleuze and Guattari's (1972/1983, 1987) concept of the assemblage and Guattari's (1992/1995, 1989/2000, 2009) application of it in other contexts. Finally, I position the entire site of the missile base as an assemblage of physical and temporal universes mixed and layered, where its previous uses and occupation have formed a subjective residue that expresses itself physically via objects and architecture and mentally through a kind of collective memory inscribed in the site.

## The Three Ecologies

In this section, I will provide a general explanation of Guattari's concept of ecosophical analysis, and introduce two concepts: *tranversality* and *dissensus*. As stated in the introduction to this article, the three ecologies are the environmental, the social, and the psyche. Guattari's ecosophical concepts derive in part from the broader practice of *schizoanalysis* that he developed with Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972/1983). Deleuze (1990) explains, "Cartography can only map out pathways and moves, along with their coefficients of probability and danger. That's what we call 'schizoanalysis,' this analysis of lines, spaces, becomings" (p. 34). Unlike structuralist forms of psychoanalysis that Guattari argues are embedded in dual and binary relations, focusing on lack and aimed at representing and coding the subject, schizoanalysis positions all forms of relations in terms of machinic parts assembled to produce forces.

The machinic aspects of Deleuze and Guattari's (1972/1983, 1987) theories are critical to understanding a shift away from anthropomorphic-centered values to an understanding of the interrelated forces of materiality, expression, and thought. If we eliminate notions of diagnosis or coding that produce static beings, and instead consider that we are always in a state of becoming in relation to our environmental or *ecological* conditions, then every place, moment, and relationship provides the potential for change or becoming something else. Guattari's (1989/2000) objective was the "reconstruction of social and individual practices" (p. 41).

Guattari's ecosophical approach broadens more common ecological frames based in the natural environment to consider how spaces become what he called "territories of existence" (1989/2000, p. 35). For Guattari, environments operate as subjective assemblages through "a heterogenous complex of interlocking, conjugated, and transdisciplinary flows [where].... The environment cannot be thought outside these three overlapping mental, social, and natural registers" (jagodzinski, 2007, p. 342), where subjectivity is perpetually nascent. In this way, machinic registers produce environments or territories that are open to perpetual modulation and potential for social, mental, and environmental shifts.

### Dissensual Subjectivity

> The primary purpose of ecosophic cartography is thus not to signify and communicate but to produce assemblages of enunciation capable of capturing the points of singularity of a situation.... Like the symptom for Freudianism, the rupture of sense, the dissensus, becomes a privileged primary material. (Guattari, 1992/1995, p. 128)

Dissensus as "privileged primary material" relates to the recognition and dehabituation of naturalized ways of being. In the quote above, Guattari argues that the aim of ecosophic analysis is to assemble enunciative forces that express the lived specificity of a situation in the everyday. In other words, ecosophical cartography locates specific

ruptures in a broad field of practice, and dissensus is the active expression of becoming.

Guattari's interest in subjectivity is inherently tied to the effects of post-industrial capitalism, or what he terms "Integrated World Capitalism" (IWC) (1989/2000, p. 47).

> It is no longer possible to claim to be opposed to capitalist power only from the outside, through trade unions and traditional politics. It is equally imperative to confront capitalism's effects in the domain of mental ecology in everyday life: individual, domestic, material, neighborly, creative, or in one's own personal ethics. Rather than looking for a stupefying and infantilizing consensus, it will be a question in the future of cultivating a dissensus and the singular production of existence. (Guattari, 1989/2000, p. 50)

IWC is essentially Guattari's term for globalization or post-industrial capitalism. He argues that the decentralized nature of IWC makes it nearly impossible to locate any singular source of power. In response to the delocalized force of IWC, the production of a simultaneously collective and singularized dissensual subjectivity is necessary. In other words, we must act through individual or singular force with the awareness of a responsibility to our always-collective existence. While dissensus relates to singularization, tranversality privileges the "group-being." The notion of the "group-being" allowed me to better understand how aesthetic social and mental practices might produce a collective and simultaneously dissensual subjectivity.

### Transversal Relations

> Social ecology will consist in developing specific practices that will modify and reinvent the ways in which we live as couples or in the family.... It will be a question of literally reconstructing the modalities of "group-being" [*l'etre-en-groupe*], not only through "communicational" interventions but through existential mutations driven by the motor of subjectivity. (Guattari, 1989/2000, p. 34)

From his interests in the significance of shifting social relations and the "group-subject," Guattari developed the concept of transversality, which is critical to the potential for realizing a group subject in the social ecology. Transversality is rooted in Guattari's rethinking of the meaning of transference in psychoanalysis, challenging the privileged function of interpretation by the powerful and all-knowing analyst. Transversal relations, on the other hand, are an effort to overcome hierarchies of coding and interpretation, to produce maximum communication among actors positioned variously within social structures (Genosko, 2009).

This concept emerged early in Guattari's career, in part from his work at La Borde, a psychiatric clinic in France. In a description of Guattari's work there, Wallin (2013) explains how Guattari created a "transversal remapping of the institution" (p. 40) by reorganizing the subject position of the various occupants—between doctors, staff, and patients. As he explains, "Mobilizing transversal thinking against the overstratified routinization of the clinical model, Guattari would rethink the institution by drawing clinical staff into direct and non-heirarchical relationship with patients" (Wallin, 2013, p. 40).

Transversality is the degree to which established subject groups communicate across predetermined group boundaries and become open to one another (Elliott, 2012). This notion of thinking across relates to the concept of transversality in other disciplines, such as transverse lines, which are lines that cross each other. As a mathematics concept, transversality relates to points of intersection between lines and spaces. So if we apply this spatial notion to social groups, we might consider how a group may be initially defined by a social status, then identify what is produced from previously separated groups intersecting transversally. This idea is not about transcendence or a move beyond, but rather thinking across. Together, dissensus and transversality provide radical potential for communities coming together through collective singularization.

## Globalization and Abandoned Buildings

My inquiry into bomb shelters and the missile base stemmed from an interest in links between materiality and subjectivity. The photography project triggered a realization that bomb shelters installed in people's backyards could act as an index for homeowners' subjectivity during the Cold War era in the U.S., specifically highlighting ways that feelings of fear manifested in material objects. My shock at finding the missile base being used for what seemed to be creative purposes triggered a realization of new potential for institutional and manufacturing sites abandoned as a result of shifts to a Post-Fordist society. Post-Fordism relates to shifts away from a factory-driven economic model to networked systems of production in many industrialized nations during the last half of the 20th century. Hardt and Negri (2004) explain that,

> Beginning in the 1970s, … the techniques and organizational forms of industrial production shifted toward smaller and more mobile labor units and more flexible structures of production, a shift often labeled as a move from Fordist to post-Fordist production. (p. 82)

Globalization has also affected military structures. Hardt and Negri (2004) compare shifts from mass, state-organized armies to guerrilla forms of rebellion and parallel these strategic military changes to similar shifts in U.S. industrial manufacturing. Both roles, that of soldier and factory worker, have now been outsourced in significant ways to contractors or overseas manufacturing plants that can do the jobs using cheaper labor with less regulation and government oversight.

Over the last forty years, a post-Fordist economic model has expanded exponentially, leaving abandoned the physical structures built for military and manufacturing during previous eras. Across the country, examples of repurposed structures originally constructed for a Fordist model of institutional and capitalist production have been left vacant.

Some have become communal spaces developed from shared knowledge and a concern for environmental sustainability.[4]

## Project Nike and Production of Missile Bases

As a result of a Cold War military ammunitions program called Project Nike that began in 1944, 241 missile bases were constructed across the United States throughout the 1950s. The missiles developed through the Nike project were self-propelled, guided weapons directed by a computerized system, all of which were located on the bases. Missiles with similar capacities had been developed first in Germany during World War II. At the end of the war, the United States began to set up a long-term missile-based weapons system in North America.

The newly constructed bases had a uniform structural layout with three parts. The first area was the integrated fire control (IFC) that included radar with a computer system to control targeting. The second was the administrative area located next to the IFC with "the battery headquarters, barracks, mess and recreation halls, and motor pool" (Bender, 2004, n.p.). Approximately one hundred officers and men ran each base continuously. The third part of the base, roughly forty acres away, was the underground missile magazine. A magazine is a space in which ammunition or explosives are stored.  Missile magazines for Project Nike were constructed above ground in early bases and later below ground. They would hold eight to twelve live missiles.

In May of 1972, the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, that regulated the production of nuclear weapons for both countries (Hardt & Negri, 2004). The Cold War struggle was no longer based primarily on the singular threat of intercontinental ballistic missiles. Instead, a new form of war would be composed of ongoing, smaller conflicts. This move shifted or ended the condition of modern warfare, characterized by "unrestrained high-intensity conflict" (Hardt & Negri, 2004, p. 38). In this new

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4  Crew members from other bases return annually to see the base they occupied. Many other townships have used the spaces and buildings for recreational purposes and municipal services (McCrary, 1991).

context and twenty years after their conception, the U.S. government ended the deployment of the Nike bases in 1974. The Army National Guard offered bases to local municipalities and school districts rather than demolishing them.

## Becoming Community through Collective Production

Mike bought the missile control side of the base for $50,000 in 1995. It housed administrative buildings and the IFC on ten acres of land. During the mid-70s, the base had passed to the local school district after the Army National Guard moved out (Mike, personal communication, February 2, 2013). Mike spent three years cleaning out the buildings from the previous twenty years of being used to store the school district's furniture. Mike saw the missile base and land around it as a readymade community center. It was secluded but close enough to town to afford easy access for his friends. The open interior spaces and solid cement structures that had been designed to house a hundred soldiers would be ideal for a community of artists and musicians.

For the six years prior to buying the missile base, Mike lived far north of town in a place called Rainbow Trail (also referred to as Rainbow Valley) with a community of people who, together and without contractual labor, built homes using a ferrocement process with rebar support. Ferrocement and rebar are building materials used in sculpture and as prefabricated building components. They are lighter than other forms of cement, and one can learn to use them with little apprenticeship in building.

Over time, conflicting priorities developed, and by the mid-'90s, relations between the community members at Rainbow Trail had broken down. Mike moved from the community because he felt that the governing regulations of the homeowners group had become biased and possibly more concerned with financial interests tied to the land than communal living. While Mike wanted to leave the regulations of community membership there, he was still deeply connected to his friends there and in other local communities. He wanted to find

a place to bring them together without the codes that had begun to polarize social relations at Rainbow Trail.

Mike explained that after buying the missile base, he and his friends collectively repaired many of the utilities that had fallen into disrepair over the forty years since its construction. They bartered time, knowledge, skill, and other goods rather than relying on capitalist forms of currency and exchange. For example, he noted that he learned to refurbish the sewage system through guidance on plumbing from a friend, where the friend's knowledge and labor were bartered for future labor. Guattari (1992/1995) describes how, "in archaic societies, there was what they call 'participation,' a collective subjectivity investing a certain type of object, and putting itself in the position of an existential group nucleus" (p. 25). This kind of collective subjectivity embedded in participation is illustrated in the group work that Mike and his friends invested in the missile base. The community spaces of the base were developed not simply through good will but, more deeply, on interdependence.

**Transversal Potential**

While Mike owns the land, he expressed the importance that no single individual acts as leader there. Every building except for the small one in which he resides is considered communal, and friends, at times, live in some of the other buildings. As I met his friends, I learned that they felt a distinct sense of pride about and ownership over certain parts of the property because they had helped repair, construct, and adorn those areas.

Realizations of their subjective possessiveness emerged from two types of engagements: narrative and corrective. Narrative examples were typically information provided by friends on the base that accompanied Mike's stories. Corrective engagements, on the other hand, emerged from actions or behaviors I was doing that did not align with the understood rules of the base.

Narrative examples emerged during several visits to the base, where

I met people who supplemented Mike's stories with specific details about the length of time a specific area took to construct or challenges that they faced through the process. These anecdotes demonstrated, to me, a sense of ownership over certain areas of the base because they contributed time and labor. Their participation was not related to construction alone. I learned that regularly on weekends, his friends would play stick hockey at the base, on what was originally a basketball court. Players I met were a graphic designer, a mover, a farmer, a teacher, and an owner of a local coffee shop. Over time, I realized that those hockey games generated other collaborative efforts and bartering for skill and time beyond the spatial boundaries of the base.

As stated earlier, transversality is the degree to which established subject groups communicate across predetermined group boundaries and become open to one another (Elliott, 2012). The environment of the base provided a site of social and material engagement through labor and play. I learned through repeated conversations with Mike's friends that the group derived a feeling of community through blurred roles of owner and guest and through shared labor and mutual generosity that merged community-based social groups.

On other occasions, corrective engagements illuminated his friends' subjective connection to the site, for example when I was instructed about the rules of the base. For instance, I brought beverages in glass bottles to a winter party, and two separate people approached me to request that I take them back to my car because the community did not use glass containers for fear that they might break, leaving glass shards on the floor and ground outside. This was important because at other times of year, people liked to walk barefoot there and, annually, local belly dance groups performed at the summer solstice party.

Participation in the material and social modulation of the existential terrain of the missile base produced a collective subjectivity. In Guattari's (1992/1995) terms, the significance of such experience is the creation of "complexes of subjectification: multiple exchanges between the individual-group-machine" (p. 7). The residence illustrates how the social vector (community members operating transversally)

might affect physical structures (reconstructing, altering, and occupy-ing land and architecture) as an ecological assemblage that produces a collective subjectivity for many participants at once.

On the base, a transversal shift emerged for me, and I would argue for the other community members, through a process of direct encounters with material practices girded by shared values about a democratic use of time, skill, and knowledge operating outside of capitalist ma-chinic force. Guattari (1992/1995) explains that we cannot produce a pedagogy of values, and that instead,

> The Universes of the beautiful, the true and the good are insepa-rable from territorialized practices of expression. Values only have universal significance to the extent that they are supported by the Territories of practice, experience, of intensive powers that transversalize them. (pp. 129-130)

Collective work on the missile base recomposed subject positions that had been previously inscribed via social and spatial hierarchies. The physical structure of the base is no longer the subject of military structuring designed for routinized daily living and regimented hierarchal order. And unlike the collective subjectivity of the soldiers, where social relations are verticalized, the collective/group subject of the base-turned-community space is produced through a transversal sharing of knowledge, skill, and time.

## Subjectivity in the Making

I consider how Mike's DIY ethic, evidenced by his social and aesthetic practices, provide an example of a materialist approach to dissensus through direct relations through which capitalist forms of exchange are resisted by bartering time and labor rather than currency. I learned about Mike's childhood, education, and family, allowing me to better understand how his values emerged. Cement became an important motif repeated through decades of stories, revealing the significance of material practices throughout his life. Growing up, Mike poured concrete with his father to extend a patio. He described the simplicity

of mixing Readymix cement in a wheelbarrow and spreading it with a trowel. The experience became a node in his subjective development. He repeatedly described learning through need-based and informal approaches, developing a DIY ethic, with the example of pouring cement with his father as a kind of initiation. That ethic was further cultivated when he lived with the Rainbow Trail community, build-ing homes through collective bartering of time, labor, and skill, before moving to the base.

His stories of cement also highlighted his dissensual pragmatism. Living at Rainbow Trail, Mike's use of Readymix rather than the fer-rocement process made him an outsider. The community expected the ferro approach because it had been the tradition in similar com-munities, but Mike considered it unnecessary when Readymix was cheaper and easier for him. His pragmatism distanced him from the regulations of a group that thought of themselves as escaping capitalist-driven social regulations.



*Fig. 5*    Extended cement patio and school chairs in front of the mess hall.

In a feature of the missile base particularly impor-tant to his vision of its community-driven poten-tial and as a reference back to his experiences with his father, Mike extended the patio outside of the mess hall (see Figure 5) to make it possible for more people to stand near the build-ing. Along with friends, he removed the windows in the building to facilitate interaction from the inside

out.[5] Many of the structural and large-scale embellishments made on the missile base include cement.

Recognizing subjectivizing nodes, by which I mean experiences that produce a rupture in our habituated ways of being—such as Mike's experience with his father—is critical to the function of the ecosophic cartographies. The subjective rupture that formed through that experience developed an ethical and aesthetic line of flight that materialized in a variety of ways later in his life, such as his pragmatic approaches to production and environmentalism evidenced at Rainbow Trail and on the base, his ability to see potential of abandoned structures, and his willingness to work through collective production to transform the site.

## Modulating Expressive Assemblages

After settling at the base, Mike learned how to weld. He initially learned out of necessity to repair and alter structural elements throughout the property. He has applied that knowledge to an aesthetic practice where he makes welded sculptures of collected agricultural tools (see Figure 6). Various rooms on the property are embellished with steel objects, some left from the site's previous uses and others collected by Mike at flea markets.

In the building that once held a one-ton computer, Mike has



*Fig. 6*      Welded sculptures on the floor in administrative building.

covered all of the walls with machine parts and dismantled industrial elements to produce new visual designs with the steel objects (see Figure 7). Mike describes his visual assemblages as hieroglyphs. Some of the designs reference popular culture while others produce dynamic non-referential aesthetic combinations. He calls the room the ballroom because tables are set up inside to play handball.
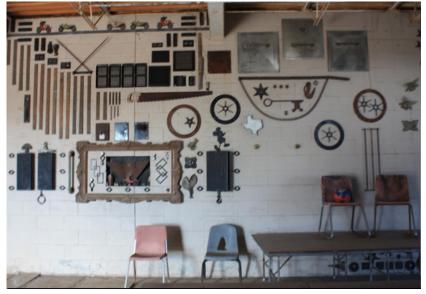


*Fig. 7*      Interior wall of the ballroom, which was one the IFC.

If we apply a Guattarian analysis to consider how the space expresses through its transformed material components and social function, we can see how Mike's aesthetic practice of reordering the objects on the wall to create a visual language and transforming the function of the room for play has modulated its enunciative registers. As explained earlier, the goal of Guattari's (1992/1995) approach is "to produce assemblages of enunciation capable of capturing the points of singularity of a situation" (p. 128). If we think of enunciation as the way expression is produced, the ballroom expresses differently through the reordering of its machinic parts into aesthetic assemblages. The restructuring of social practices from military preparedness to leisurely play highlights the singular force of Mike's aesthetic practices. The room that once held the computer, a military machine controlled by

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5 In Figure 3, the windows are covered with black wood that Mike installs every winter to block the strong winds during cold weather.

soldiers on the base whose purpose was to direct nuclear missiles, has been dismantled and composed differently as an aesthetic assemblage for playful interaction.

Guattari (1992/1995) describes "constellations of referential components" within existential territories that produce "Universes of Value." These referential components exist in the material and social ecologies. He goes on to suggest that these constellations can be "overtaken" but never wiped out as they reside in "the incorporeal memory of collective subjectivity" (Guattari, 1992/1995, p. 27). The missile base works precisely in this vein.

Instead of wiping out the semiotic registers of the military machinery, Mike has produced an intensive repetition. Elements such as the guard stand, the "No Smoking in Bed" sign that remains in the old barracks, and the institutional layout of the buildings strewn with colored plastic chairs (see Figure 3) are referential components that produce a subjectivizing residue of the site's virtual potential, where referential components are layered over time. Mike's changes and additions to the property modulate the previous semiotic registers to produce a new kind of incorporeal subjectivity among its occupants. The machinic modulation of the physical, social, and mental composed over time provide a glimpse into a future revolutionary force of this kind of territorializing activity. Again, this notion of the machinic is critical to understanding the significance of ecosophical analysis because its goal is not to code or privilege a subject position, but instead to understand how elements flow together to produce forces and territorial assemblages simultaneously.

## Cultivating Dissensus

Mike's material transformation of the missile base supports the emergence of a form of tactical environmentalism based on a posture of defiance, an outlook that may be examined through Mike's points of view on his own values. Mike does not see himself as an activist, and he goes so far as to call environmentalists petty, refusing what he sees as a blinkering consensus required to identify as such. This concept of blinkering is related

in part to the blinding or blinker hoods worn by horses to limit their sight. In terms of a consensual following, blinkering refers to blinding oneself to other perspectives in an effort to follow a singular ideology. In a Guattarian sense, blinkering functions in the institution "by constricting the image of institutional life along narrowly delineated routes of subjective expressions and enunciative potentials" (Wallin, 2013, p. 38).

Mike stridently refutes passive consumption, opting for his own methods of production through revitalizing antiquated technology. I came to realize the complexity of his dissensual approach each time I tried to interpret his actions definitively. His actions are often pragmatic and based in a relational ethics and a dissensual approach to capitalism and regulatory forces in the everyday.

At the highest point on his property, there is a strip of land lined with trees forming a path with cement columns at either end. The oak trees along that path were the first Mike planted (see Figure 8), and since then, he has added approximately eighty more throughout the property. Mike describes the trees as an act of defiance. He explained that the land around the missile base has been purchased for residential and commercial development. By planting 100 live oak trees on



*Fig. 8*     Cement seating area with planted trees.

his property, he has produced a challenge financially and logistically for developers to eventually build on his land. Removing live oak trees requires that builders acquire a separate permit for each tree, with a fine and a reforestation requirement for each tree damaged or destroyed. Mike imagines the visual potential of the trees when they have all reached maturity: "there's about a hundred trees, I'd like to plant a hundred more. It'll be my contribution" (Mike, personal communication, April 20, 2013).

Planting the trees is an act of resistance. Mike exploits environmental policies in tactical ways to mount a defense of his land in opposition to local commercial development. Similarly, when he moved onto the land, he also bought goats and sheep to gain the advantage of state tax policies for agriculture land use: "I cut my taxes and became a farmer and raised sheep" (Mike, personal communication, February 2, 2014). He further recognized the potential for a symbiotic relationship with animals. They could roam over a large area of land, and the tax break afforded by raising the animals saves him money. Constructing a tactical subjectivity in his defense of the land, Mike appropriated a federal site built for war to build a community center, created a population of farm animals supported by state government tax breaks, and planted trees as a way to protect the land by invoking environmental regulations.

Mike's ethics emerge from practical choices. Planting the trees was a tactical production using resources that benefit the land, and he bought the land in the first place because it already had a strong infrastructure. Mike brought together a community to develop the site, creating a communal investment in sweat equity:

> You can do it or pay someone else to do it. I mean you can physically do it yourself. I don't want to pay someone else to do it. It's not that it's a waste of money, but money you could spend a different way. And this place when I bought this it was already built. So just restore it. Fix the doors and windows, and a sewer system that runs across the street. (Mike, personal communication, February 2, 2013)

I recognized how an ethical frame and pragmatic approach flows throughout Mike's interpersonal relationships and productive practices on the property. He recognizes that change takes time and long-term personal investment.

Mike's tactical subjectivity was produced from an early age through direct engagements with people, objects, and nature. He resists the forces of consensual thought, predetermined morality, and capitalist development. Mike's work on the base illuminates the potential of mixing prescribed policies and exploiting juridical codes. The agricultural tools and machine parts welded together that are scattered across the site act as referential components talking across time. Material traces of the past sixty years including deteriorating architectural elements and old school chairs produced a sort of subjectifying residue on Mike's land, by which I mean that the remnants of the past serve as reminders of its previous uses, affecting the way occupants today relate to the space. He has created a space that holds a collective memory of U.S. history and local culture, and while the embellishments of the various buildings produce an aesthetically charged environment, the transversal relations among occupants generate a social vitality on the land.

## Art Education's Ecosophical Potential

By researching a specific site, where I could focus on aesthetic work as praxis, I saw the missile base as a unique place to explore institutional power and DIY practices. Art educators interested in critical pedagogy and visual culture have questioned inequality through aesthetic resistance with a social justice agenda (Ballangee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001; Bell & Desai, 2011; Darts, 2004, 2006a, 2008; Dewhurst, 2010, 2011; Duncum, 2010; Quinn, 2006; Sandlin, 2007; Sandlin & Milam, 2008). This study builds on that work. Questioning how the social and environmental ecologies of art education's spaces produce subjectivity is political work aimed at identifying how our places and practices produce our students. The significant anti-capitalist force of Mike and his friends' work on the base bridges art educators' interests in visual

culture, community, institutional settings, and socially engaged art. Below, I will introduce tactics learned from the research process that I hope will inspire art educators to consider their ecosophical conditions and their dissensual power to modulate environmental, mental, and social vectors.

## Stay Curious

This research started as photographic inquiry. Curiosity consistently drives my research, particularly in relation to photography. The affective materiality of the base realized through a corporeal engagement generated interests in a military and cultural history I had never considered. While initially trespassing on the missile base may have been dangerous, that curiosity-driven experience produced a new kind of subjective relationship with a geographic area I thought I knew well.

Moreover, the research with Mike allowed me to see the networked relations between my local community and the Cold War, globalization, and the international art world. As art educators, we must become and develop a community of inquirers with an experimental spirit. The material, social, and pedagogical potential of our local communities is limitless. Curiosity and inquiry push us into new worlds. We cannot know immediately where our formal and informal pedagogical events will take our students and us.

## Become Affected through Direct Engagement

Art education takes place in domestic, institutional, museum, and community settings through myriad formal and informal approaches. When planning educational spaces, we often think about design elements, resource organization, and seating arrangement. Through repeated visits to the missile base, I realized that the environmental ecology included such things as art objects that Mike created, but it also included grasshoppers leaping around me in the summer heat, children running during a party, deconstructed machine parts scattered over the land, and empty rooms with signage left from when they were used as a mess hall or barracks. All of these elements pro-

duced intensities that affected a spatial subjectification.

The missile base provides an example of how communities emerge from environments, whether we think about the base as military installation or the base as community center. Material and social elements are mutually constituted through direct engagement. The physical aspects of any space operate as semiotic machinery working in tandem with language and codes to produce components of subjectification. We must take into consideration all of the physical elements of a place and realize how they work with the social and corporeal forces intersecting them.

Sensory engagements with schools, homes, community, and natural settings are often ordered through perpetually planned movement and time, allowing students few opportunities to register how they affect the site and are affected by it. Bells, artificially controlled room temperature, directed movement, limited natural plants, florescent light—these factors affect the life of the space. As art educators, we need to recognize how the physical environment of our schools or other setting affects us. Becoming conscious through activated engagement with people and places is one step in dehabituating ways of thinking and being.

## Share Ownership

The social and environmental ordering of public schools is specifically designed to habituate students into certain ways of behaving. Educational environments are produced as coded territories, hierarchically ordering bodies, and directing physical engagement. With students educational spaces, how might we produce shared responsibility in these environments? While I realize that the large number of students in public schools and often mixed ages and social demographics in community education sites can make a certain amount of spatial ordering necessary, how can we create spaces of collective individualization through transversal relations? Guattari's transversal reordering at La Borde provides an example of ways that shared social responsibility and the removal of hierarchies through direct social and

material engagement produce a collective subjectivity.

As a material and later aesthetic practice for Mike, DIY projects with his father and friends highlight radical potential for informal modes of art education and direct engagement to produce desire for and value in collective efforts that affect our spatial relations. Mike and his friends illuminate the potential of a group subject through participants' ethical frame and ways of acting with and for a community. On the property, each person feels a sense of ownership. They have been asked to contribute time and effort; they were trusted to make material changes, and they expect new visitors to respect the property. What responsibilities can students take on in schools and community sites, and how might this produce a different kind of subjectivity in relation to those sites?

## Question Codes

Art education's transversal potential in the institutional spaces of public schooling holds enormous promise. Discursive formations, subjugating codes, and ordered environments become fertile terrain for intervention. Mike's environmental intervention with 100 oak trees inspires us to ask what codes we might exploit to benefit the natural environment of our communities. How are codes – written, spoken, or incorporeal – expressed in the social ecologies of our educational spaces?

The most pervasive coding instrument in schools currently is testing. Tests produce curriculum, behavior, affect, and subjectivity in the public school environment. We might begin to intervene in them by asking who has developed the tests and the policies that structure schools around them. How are the rules expressed and how might they be subverted? Mike's exploitation of tax policy and juridical codes might inspire us to consider what policies we might use to our students' advantage to change the subjectifying force of testing culture in the school environment.

Artists and art educators have been questioning pervasive codes

and naturalized cultural norms expressed through visual culture for decades. Art educators interested in public pedagogy and socially engaged art have intervened in public sites to question neoliberal capitalist policies and consider the potential of an art of living. How might we take that kind of subversive work and apply it to the corporeality of social structuring in institutional environments through collective aesthetic work in the form of material production and performative action?

Producing democratic educational spaces that are structured and organized collectively through shared knowledge, space, and time might be one step in transversalizing the fragmented strata of our field that are too often captured and structured by capitalist forces and neoliberal desires.

## Rethink Time & Production

Fordist social formations residually structure many educational spaces as assembly line factories based on production. Time is ordered to limit the possibility of thinking beyond the fragmented nature of organized education. Art teachers feel pressure to produce work within a class period to adorn hallways. Community art spaces are often driven by paid hours with the expectation of the production of discreet objects. So, how might we think time differently without falling into the neoliberal trap that has made all hours and spaces sites of production, where we are constantly working?

To rethink time, we have to rethink artistic production and pedagogy as vital processes. The difference needs to come with the realization that authentic learning takes time that cannot be accounted for in the confines of a lesson or unit and that time operates outside of capitalist currency. As Mike's lifetime of DIY work illustrates, sweat equity and real learning takes time and repetition, failure and trying differently. We might rethink art education sites as open spaces for experimentation and failure, where there is no beginning and end structured by units, lessons, or hours, but instead as places of material, corporeal, and intellectual engagement constituted through inquiry, practice, and play.

## Reinvent your Curriculum

What habituated hierarchies are performed through our curriculum, and how might we produce a dissensual pedagogy? For instance, how do we reify naturalized beliefs about identity, nationality, and capitalism through our discourse and the lessons we teach? Mike's aversion to adopting the identity of environmentalist was surprising to me until I realized how limiting identity politics could become. We should be mindful of ways we privilege individuality, for fear that we reinforce capitalist-driven beliefs about a productive citizenry or a consumerist morality.

Mike's work on the base was driven by necessity, and he learned through questioning and asking for help. Even his stories with his father were about collective production. He taught himself to weld on the base at first from necessity and then used those skills to make his steel sculpture assemblages. As we think about possibilities for art education, how can practical and need-based skills not mire us in just repairing broken elements, but push us to take those need-based skills and create art? On a very practical level, these questions might produce at least a momentary rupture in habituated ways of thinking art education beyond the predetermined confines of making and individual expression. How, instead, can direct engagement and skill development flow into new territories of practice to again think about a transversalizing of aesthetic practices?

From the models of praxis introduced at the missile base, we might consider dissensual interventions in the institutional ecology of our public schools, the too-often neoliberal spaces of museum art education, and the under-utilized political landscape of community-based art education. How can we modulate the ecosophical components of our existential terrains to produce new Universes of Value through dissensual practices and transversalized subject positions of student, teacher, administrator, staff, and community to produce "a new art of living in society" (Guattari, 1992/1995, p. 21)?

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