

Ballad of Nobody

- Who belongs in a museum?
- Somebodies. Famous, important, professional, somebodies.
- Really? - Uh, yeah. Ever been to a museum, dumbass?
- You're a dumbass. - No, you're a dumbass.
- How about a Museum of Nobodies?
- Recluses, weirdos, amateurs, students.

Nine random college kids from Utah found the thirty-odd contributors to this show. They found them literally on the side of the road in one case, or online, or at work, or in the next seat on Trax, or through friends of friends of a friend. There were no common criteria about good or bad among the group. Each student curated his or her own contributors and received show space without judgment. This is the result.

No name tags. No price tags. Here artwork doesn't matter as work. There's no goal beyond engagement, pleasure and sharing pleasure. And thinking about it.

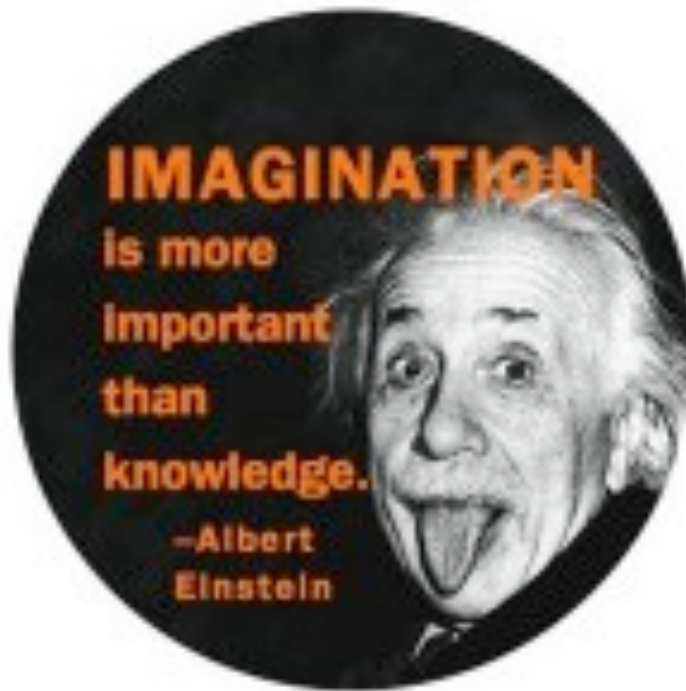
We are glad you're here.

So is it all good?
Decide for yourself, dumbass.

2013-2014 Honors College
Praxis Lab,
University of Utah

Creativity on Center Stage:
New Collaborations in
Classroom and Community

Professors Stephen Brown
and Bruce Dain



Einstein also said, "If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales. If you want them to be more intelligent, read them more fairy tales."

From Richard Nixon's White House tapes (<http://nixon.archives.gov>, discovered by Taylor Almost, a student in our class):

NIXON: You look at one of these creatives, these people, they're all the same. Either they're an animal with one of those rods through their goddamm noses, or they have a father that didn't hit them enough as a kid. That's what I'm really saying here: they never get straightened out. It leads right into all of this.

HALDEMAN: Agreed.

NIXON: - nonsense.

EHRlichman: No question. That's absolute.

HALDEMAN: Oh, they're - well - some of the universities are encouraging it too. Utah, Georgia, Buffalo, they're teaching courses on the subject.

NIXON: Subject?

HALDEMAN: On creativity. How to be creative.

NIXON: Christ, what's the matter? These people - it's a sick culture they have. It's how we get those people with the power fist &*!\$ in Mexico City. They - they go to school to find other smokers - and not tobacco, it's always some other drug, the animals. The university gives them a degree when they've been taking courses with junkies.

HALDEMAN: Exactly.

NIXON: We need more people on the inside. Talk to some Deans - hell, presidents - and get them to encourage real artists. Not creatives - artists. Tchaikovsky. That's what gives people a thrill. He's famous for a reason. He would've gone to Duke, no question.

HALDEMAN: Right.

NIXON: And gotten a law degree. Law degree, and a pianist. No question.

Our class agreed with Einstein that in most cases, formal education not only ignores creativity, but suppresses it. Hard facts, not fairy tales. No question. In both universities and communities, the "arts" are increasingly walled off in their own perennially underfunded or unfunded domains. Too many classrooms, offices, and laboratories foster an atmosphere that denigrates collaboration and selflessness. While achievement is too often understood as springing not from love of productive and thoughtful work, but from narrow personal ambition. Or fear of failure and rejection. This Praxis Lab addressed what might be done to put creativity at center stage in classrooms, communities, and lives.

A huge topic. Too big. Especially since it quickly became clear that nobody, not students, professors, artists, scientists,

engineers, software designers, or politicians, can agree about what creativity is or whether it can be measured. Much less how to foster it.

The class responded to this problem in two ways.

GUEST SPEAKERS: We invited or visited various experts in the fields of creativity and education, heard what they had to say and wrestled with their definitions of creativity and its obstacles.

PITCHES: Every other week, individually and in groups, students themselves pitched possible creativity and education class projects.

Here we share our experiences with you, presented in terms of defining creativity and zeroing in on our final project, The Museum of Nobody.

THE PROBLEMS

INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF RISK



Honors College Dean Sylvia Torti came the first day to boost our spirits and relate her own experiences of education met with creative drive. She argued that risk taking, as well as failure and learning from mistakes, are a fundamental lesson of the arts. A lesson that is unfortunately becoming less and less available to most university students, who face constant resume and scholarship pressure to succeed. And to professors and administrators, who themselves must increasingly measure, justify, and market everything they and their students do.

The rules of our class:

You have permission to take risks: failure is definitely allowed

When someone takes a risk, it is your obligation to support them

You should challenge each other constructively-- don't criticize unless you are willing to propose a solution

SAMPLE PITCH, FROM A MONTH INTO THE COURSE: "Fail Hard and Fast"

"What if it wasn't just okay to fail but we actually cultivated failure? Of course, we don't mean pervasively. We mean for a single class assignment. In every class on campus. Students convince teachers to add one Fail Hard and Fast project to their curriculum. Projects are posted to the FH&F and enter competition for the biggest failure on campus and nationwide.

"Every class can take a different approach. For example, an instructor might set up an unsolvable problem. Similarly, students or teams can pursue their own solutions. But: 1) Aim high with your vision; 2) Be fearless."

POLITICS, CREATIVITY, PROTEST

At the University of Utah Museum of Fine Art, 9/12/13, the class attended a presentation by Guerilla Girls. An anonymous collective of anonymous women artists, they have with real success protested the exclusion of women and the classism and sexism of museums for thirty years.

Although now part of the arts establishment, their anonymity and gorilla masks struck us as elegant and still meaningful model gestures.



Their advice framed our thinking for the rest of the course, especially the final project:

- Be crazy! Use humor to hook those who might not agree with you.
- Be anonymous! Keep attention on the issues themselves, not the people.
- Be an outsider! Even if you are an insider, act like you're not.
- Keep trying! Never give up. It will be hard.
- Make cheap art! Art doesn't have to be expensive.
- Complain! But be a creative and professional complainer.

Use the F-Word: Feminism!

A CREATIVE PUBLIC SCHOOL

On 9/19/13, we visited the Salt Lake Arts Academy, where we were hosted by Amy Wadsworth, founder and principal.



She said that the biggest challenge in K-12 public education today is accountability and metrics. Public K-12 has become a giant system based on an industrial model—bus availability, football games--and seeks to achieve a base level of test scores rather than excellence or real creativity.



We were flabbergasted by the thoughtfulness and openness of the entire school, from the music room to science class (above). Made us all want to go back to Junior High. But it all also seemed to center on Amy's and her terrific, hand-picked teachers' resourcefulness, dedication, and drive. Could SLAA's system survive without her? Could it be copied elsewhere?

CAN YOU TEST FOR CREATIVITY?

01 Myths about Learning_1.avi

Size: 209 MB Video format: DX50 Video bitrate: 885 kbps
Resolution: 640x480 Frames per second: 30 Audio bitrate: 160 kbps
Length: 00:27:36 Aspect ratio: 4:3 Audio rate: 44100 Hz



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Later in the year, we heard from the other side: researchers who think that creativity can be measured. Prof. Monisha Pashupati, from the U's psychology department, spoke to the class on 1/9/14, about how psychologists have tried objectively to define and test for creativity. We found Monisha brilliant and fascinating, but the metrics she described limited and confining. She didn't disagree.

IS CREATIVITY A FORM OF PROBLEM SOLVING?

On 10/10/13, we met with Professor Emeritus L. Jackson Newell, who spoke to the class about his experiences as president of Deep Springs College, one of the most innovative and selective educational institutions in the world.



Jack stressed encouraging students not to critique or complain at a distance, but to try to solve every problem that they see, to test their ideas and ideals against the world bravely and resiliently.





CREATIVITY, BELIEF AND PASSION

In the first few weeks, the class wrote (and drew and painted and recorded) “What I believe” statements and “My Passion is” statements. To examine how individual beliefs and passions relate to creative work and activism. Some examples:

“I believe that calling something scary, evil, is disregarding the lesson behind it.”

“All sound is music. Not all sound can BE music; all sound IS music. The actual physical vibrations that create the sound of traffic are no better or worse than the sound of a violin.”

“I believe that there is not a single good reason that I am here in this moment.”

“My passion is acting and I am a professional. I play a grateful daughter, a lazy student, a dramatic friend, a “homegirl” and I like to pretend I am an author . . . But humor is my greatest form of acting. I learned it young and it has carried me, shielded me, guided me, and held me.”

“Logic and reason. I love analyzing the arguments of others and critiquing them so they are more persuasive.”

“I believe Flaubert was right that you can seduce anyone if you are willing to listen to them complain until four in the morning.”

“Full, active engagement, senses, body, and mind, that’s creativity and that’s my passion. That’s all life is: and everyone does it in their own way. Even faced with death and dissolution. My art expresses this.”



“If I really want to know someone, I dance a duet with them. If I feel disconnected from someone, it is because their movement is unnatural compared to my own. My passion is trying others on for size. My art expresses this”:







CREATIVITY AND OBSESSIVENESS

To show how much focus is required both to do and to appreciate anything original, the class was asked to experience two landmark works of avant garde performance from the 1970s--Pina Bausch's version of Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring" and Patti Smith's nine- minute song, "Horses" (about creativity, sexuality, and Robert Mapplethorpe's awakening as a gay man)--break them down, and produce their own creative responses. Some examples:

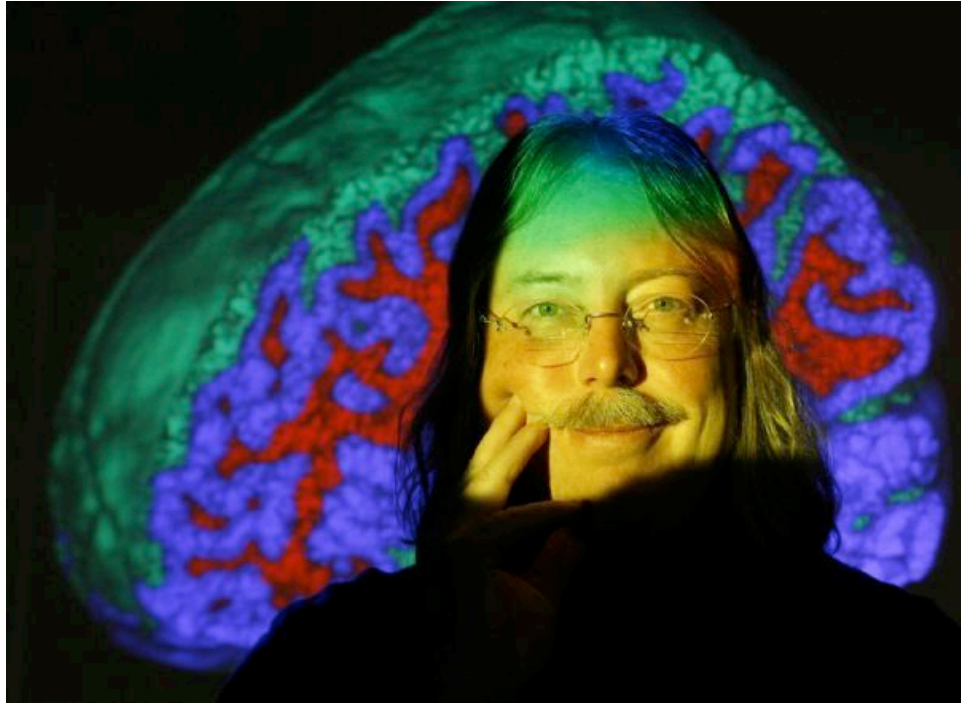


Stephen ultimately created a new dance performance based on “Horses” and Patti Smith’s memoir of her relationship with Mapplethorpe, *Just Kids*.



CREATIVE INSTITUTIONS: FINDING THE BEST AND THE NICEST

On 10/03/13, we were visited by Prof. Chris Johnson, director of the world-renowned Scientific Computer Imaging center (SCI) at the U of U:



Chris mentioned research that looked at the lack of success in the careers of accomplished scientists when they were lured away from the strong culture where they thrived. He and the earlier leaders of SCI have consciously cultivated an open, fun culture of problem solving and innovation with a “No Assholes Allowed” rule in hiring.

CREATIVITY AS STORYTELLING

On 10/7/13, award-winning composer, Honors professor, and politician Phil Bimmstein spoke to the class about his career and how he integrates music, creativity, and politics.

COMPOSING A COMMUNITY

Want to take a class from former punk-rocker turned Mayor Phillip Bimstein? This course will explore music as dialogue, thought, identity, ideology, a mirror of government, and its evolutionary role in human development- Let music be the vehicle that brings you into this student centered, community cultivating course!



M & W in the
MRSC 11:50-1:10
Fulfills Honors
Elective and Fine
Arts Credit

"I believe the feelings in my head and heart can touch some people. I think radicalism is too self indulgent, I'd rather communicate to a larger audience. Story is the hook! Remember, the next generation will be shaped by the storytellers however we must remain critically aware that people who lie can tell stories too. My music tells stories about what makes life worth living to me and others."

OUR STORIES

On 10/13/31, we met at the Rose Wagner Theater to watch rehearsals for Stephen's Halloween show, *Of Meat and Marrow*, about being trapped in Hell.



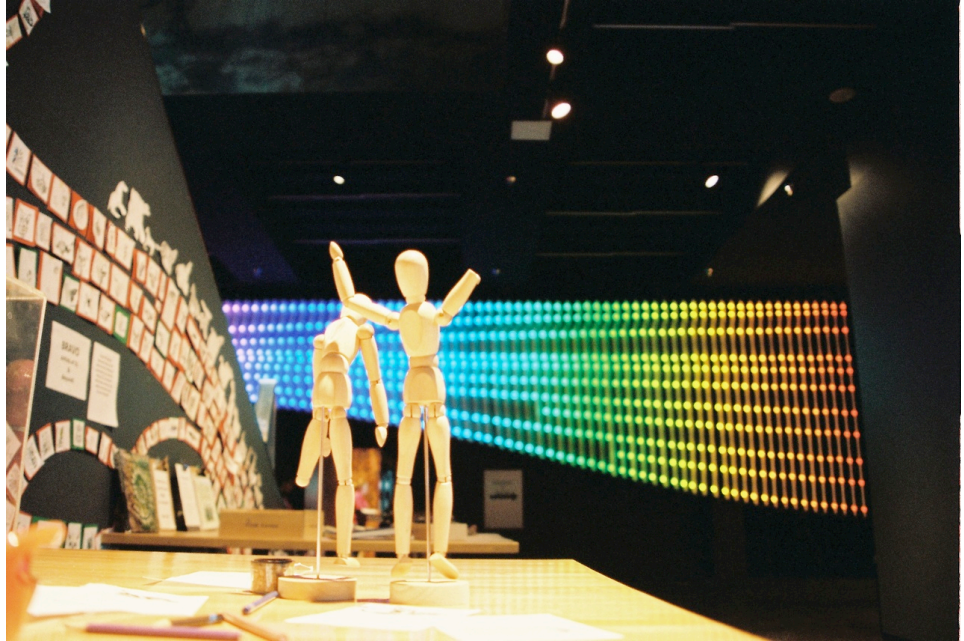
Before the rehearsal, the class began what would become almost a weekly ritual: an intense exercise from the theater, "Unpack a Person," where you stand before the group, empty your pockets, wallet, or purse and answer any question about the contents, nomatter how intimate or direct. Uncomfortable at first, this exercise helped turn the class into a group of friends.

CREATIVE SOLITUDE AND CREATIVE COLLABORATION

On 12/5/13, the class met at the Leonardo to visit with its new creative director, Jan Haworth, perhaps Salt Lake City's most distinguished artist, and the designer of the Beatles' album cover for Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts' Club Band. Jan led a stimulating class discussion about creativity, instinct, and life. She said that the most original moments of her creative life came when she had the luxury to isolate herself with creative problems. Then bring them into the world and collaborate with others.







THE SOLUTIONS

As an example of political creativity in education, Bruce collaborated with an undocumented immigrant student from another class in an hour-long presentation of a sample project, "MEET THE CRIMINALS".

Like the Guerrilla Girls, the student wore a mask:



“What will you say to a human being in front of you who’s anonymous, over whom you have no power and who isn’t afraid of you? But who can’t get a good scholarship and until recently couldn’t even apply to most graduate schools. You’re a criminal for wanting a better life? Is an unjust law any law at all? What would you do in my shoes? If I took off the mask would you arrest me?”

In this proposal, undocumented students and their families in masks, would share the

stage of Kingsbury Hall with a few profs and various local lawyers, activists, and politicians. Also some citizen students and their parents onstage, some with poverty issues and some not.

MEET THE CRIMINALS: THE BLACK BOX SHOW

“Meet the Criminals” became the title of our first class show:



The show took place during the Sundance Film Festival and drew a surprisingly good crowd.

There was a dance performance with local performers and choreographed by one of our students, three art installations by local artists, and a piece of video art by two Honors students recruited by the class.



THE FINAL PROJECT: THE MUSEUM OF NOBODY

CREATIVE DEMOCRACY: WHAT WE LEARNED FROM THE BLACK BOX SHOW

THE IMPORTANCE . . . OF VULNERABILITY:

About a hundred people came, which was great. But the show looked like a rave, a dark, stark, sexy party.

Because we did what we knew. We the students have been parties, clubs, and quasi-concerts.

But between us all, we'd seen fewer than ten major art museums, and almost no major symphonies, opera or theater--in sum, the class had little national or international arts establishment anything.

The paradox of the class became clear from the Black Box show. We were being asked to critique and oppose something--the "creative industrial complex"--most of us had never quite experienced at its best/worst.

But, just maybe, that vulnerability turned out to be the strength of the class. The most interesting, experimental, and legitimate thing. We saw that we weren't really reacting to an oppressive regime we knew. We realized that we were imagining creative democracy by ourselves, almost in a vacuum. That's interesting.

. . . OF DEMOCRACY AND MEANINGFUL CURATION:

We learned not to let one person or two people do most of the recruiting and the work, with the rest of the class as support and production.

Meaningful curation versus "let's put on a show."

Following the 3/6 class, a group of us discussed the need to direct content so that the assembled work says what we wanted it to say: that creators can be found throughout our community, not just in museums or similar expert-

approved institutions. To accomplish this, each Think Tank student would be responsible for "curating" 1-2 installations. In this case, curation meant nuts-and-bolts logistics. But it also means communicating how the installation fits into the notion of the Museum of Nobody.

. . . OF NEW COLLABORATIONS:

Ideally, we didn't just want to represent the unseen or unheard, tell untold stories.

We wanted to make new stories. Have each contributor collaborate with at least one other contributor and/or with one of us, to make new work, new crossroads, new connections looking forwards. This turned out to be impossible in most cases because of time pressure. There were only three new collaborative works in the final show.

Over the next two months, MON evolved continually. We had to address a series of problems involving ideas, marketing, and nuts and bolts production.

IS "NOBODY" OFFENSIVE?

Someone who was asked to nominate MON participants declined the invitation. He said that he was "uncomfortable" because an invitation to be in the MON could be perceived as "condescending". We decided that we didn't agree but that his concerns meant that we had to explain our language more clearly and carefully.

Solution: "We're not asking participants to be "nobodies". The MON is a way of showing that the system of somebodies does not serve us well because there are many somebodies that are never recognized (for many reasons--tried and failed, don't fit in, don't care to play the game). "Nobody" in the name of the museum provokes reconsideration of the system."

We were saying everyone is somebody. Or everyone is nobody. Half full or half empty--you be the judge. But in either case, we brought attention to the politics of elitism. Leading us to the next issue:

PROVOCATION: HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

We came up with a slogan:: “Fuck somebody, love nobody.” An elegant gesture in all ways, but was it too much? It morphed into a complex pitch, provocative but hopefully not over the line.

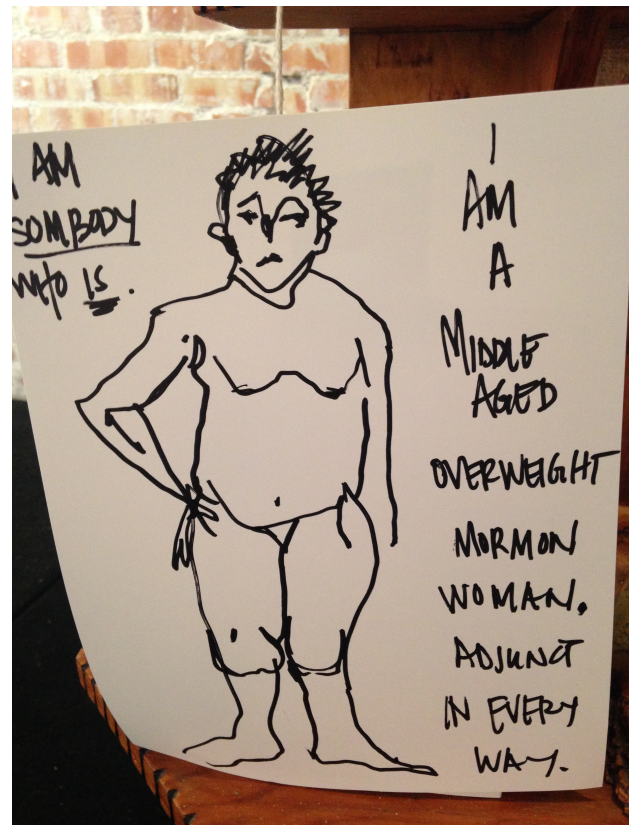
Solution: the MON website main page (museumofnobody.com):

ANONYMITY VS. RECOGNITION.

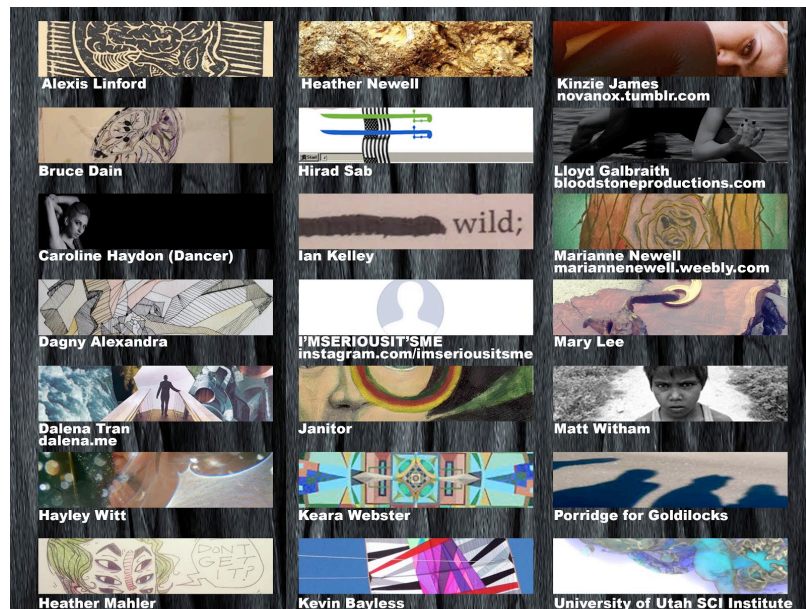
We couldn't remake the creative politics and economics of our society at a stroke.

Because works of art are seen as individual property, creators naturally crave recognition, exposure. Several of our contributors had never shown before and might pull out if they weren't identified somehow. On the other hand, using name tag captions went against the point of the show. And how could we get that purpose across elegantly anyhow? We needed to stress that the artworks were created by people in unexpected roles, that those were more important and interesting than names or prices.

Solutions: THE PLACARDS.
Instead of name tags and/or prices, we decided to ask each contributor to produce a placard with an “I am” statement about who they are and how they want to be known, not their name.
Our favorite example:



THE PROGRAM. We produced a program for the show with names attached to pictures of a sample work from the show. That way, interested viewers could find out who did what, but without names being anywhere in the show itself.



All culminating in a single “mission statement,” THE BALLAD OF NOBODY, a few sentences that it actually took six months to write:

Nine random college kids from Utah found the thirty-odd contributors to this show. They found them literally on the side of the road in one case, or online, or at work, or in the next seat on Trax, or through friends of friends of a friend. There were no common criteria about good or bad among the group. Each student curated his or her own contributors and received show space without judgment. This is the result.

No name tags. No price tags. Here artwork doesn't matter as work. There's no goal beyond engagement, pleasure and sharing pleasure. And thinking about it.

THE FINAL SHOW.

www.museumofnobody.com



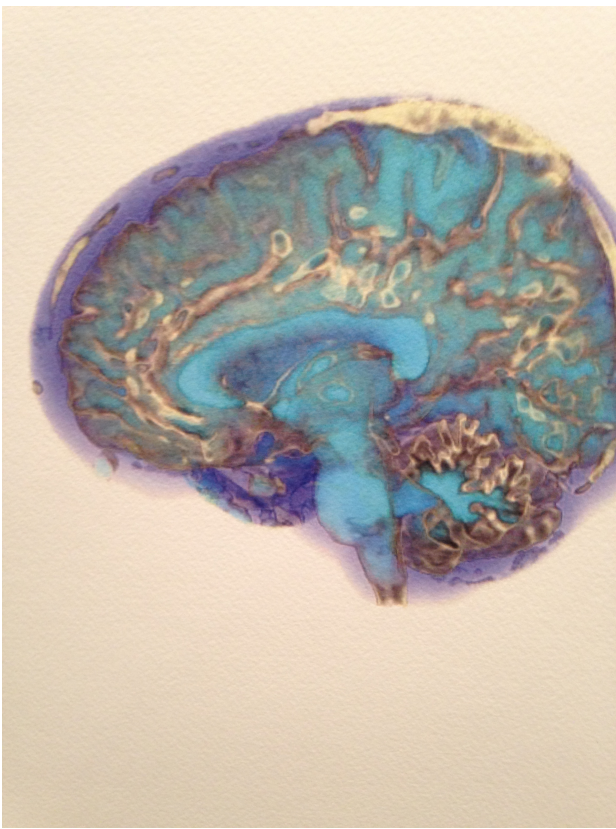




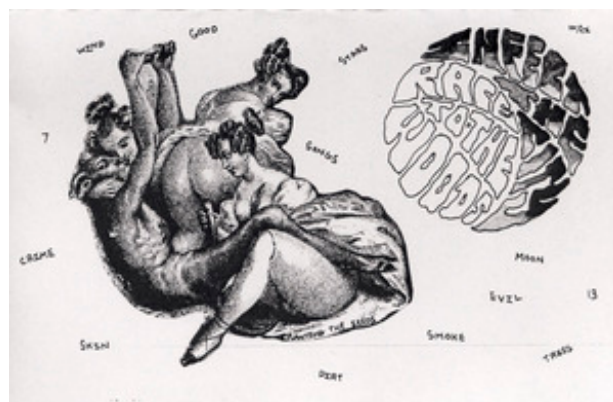
















AFTERMATH

PEOPLE AND REFLECTIONS

From the class site on Tumblr (<http://babymashpotato.tumblr.com>):

Our class decided to curate and implement the “Museum of Nobody” because it is a multi-faceted concept that implicitly addresses creativity in more than one way. Classroom discussions and presentations from elementary principals, computer scientists, psychologists, music artists, and college deans all indicated that creativity is complex. To address this complexity in our final project, we integrated a “meaningful” curation component into the implementation Museum of Nobody. This process honored each member’s understanding of creativity, and allowed him or her to seek and curate individuals representing that understanding. Our desire was to seek out creatives in the Salt Lake City community, and to find a way to communicate that creativity to an audience. The Museum of Nobody was an opportunity for us to connect individuals from different disciplines to create and expand on their areas of expertise.

The Museum of Nobody played a versatile role as a venue to display unknowns such as a janitor who disappeared, and disciplines not traditionally recognized as “creative” such as computer science. Essentially, each part of the exhibition played an integral role in holistically addressing our different perceptions of creativity existing in the Salt Lake City community.

The Museum of Nobody will continue as a sustainable annual project, and will be curated by volunteers from the community as well as students from the University of Utah.



Creativity on Center stage was by far the most fulfilling class I have taken at the University. Being an Honors College member the entirety of my collegiate career, I've never seen a Think Tank that I was truly interested in until this one. The cherry on top was it being taught by one of my favorite professors here.

This class was challenging in ways that I never could foresee. Especially when we started the year off with Pina Bausch's *Rite of Spring* and listening to *Horses* from Patti Smith. Who would have thought that by the end of the year I would have curated an art show.

Working so closely with so many different personalities in the class was challenging. We all saw things in a different color and experienced art and creativeness in our individual senses. It was rough at times and the volume of a class full of voices talking over each other turned to an inaudible hum. Yet, I gained so much from these people and learned to love each of them. It was a seemingly insurmountable task to bring such smart, strong personalities together as a team but I believe Museum of Nobody was a success.

In our eyes, everything didn't go perfectly, but how could it? It's a fucking art show. The people involved in such things are crazy and spout rainbows from their fingers. But pulling together an art event with four bands each night, DJs, dance performances, and sharing of each showcased artist's creativity was a success to me. I even got offered to curate an art show outside of class.

This whole experience gave me a newfound love of events with a purpose. It brought me immense joy to see my talented friends recognized, to realize that our class could in fact get our shit together and put on an amazing show, that most local artists do it for the pure love of their medium, and how much our class loves masks. . ski or otherwise ;)

-Kinzie James



My name is Meagan. I am a dance major and disparate academic, who sought taking Creativity on Center Stage to try and reconcile some of these ideas surrounding creativity within the larger academic setting. Ultimately, I did get to experience what it was like to tackle some of these issues from

inside the classroom, but instead of that being the subject of our research; it became the method by which our projects got done. So while not explicitly being a subject of the Think Tank, my interests were fulfilled by the experience of taking the class.

Our actual project focused on the definition of creativity more broadly. Since we discovered we had so many working definitions of what "creativity" could look like, we tried to make a project that could encompass many of those options, and perhaps promote a kind of creativity somebody isn't used to seeing.

Stereotypically, our Think Tank experienced the successes of many people coming together for a common goal. However, we experienced many real bumps because everyone had *fundamentally different* ideas of what the course was supposed to fulfill. It was unlike any other Think Tank to be able to choose how to reconcile everyone, and I think it was more true to life to deal with several people who had conflicting and diverging opinions. While I don't think we were successful in reconciling opinions, I think it was all the more valuable to work this way. It was not horrendously frustrating like you might imagine - on the contrary - working with radically different players was refreshing, eye opening, and satisfyingly difficult.

Ultimately, and perhaps too late, we agreed to disagree on "creativity" and whatever made-up qualms we had with it. We should have recognized our strengths in the beginning to be a completely vast skill set, and the desire to work together. If I have gathered anything, it is that plunging into the unknown can be indefinable, but that does not mean it isn't damn worthwhile.

-Meagan Bertelsen



For an entire school year, I was a participant in the Creativity in Education Think Tank in the Honors College at the University of Utah. While our purpose was to find the role of creativity in education and our community, our work extended far beyond all that. We spent months discussing what creativity is and its place (or lack thereof) in schools, businesses, communities, and our own personal lives. We met with elementary school teachers, computer scientists, musicians, and research psychologists. In these interviews and discussions, there was only one thing we could agree on when it came to creativity: we could not agree on what it was.

Our definitions and understandings of creativity rapidly changed from day to day. Our focus transitioned from defining creativity to understanding barriers to it. This is where our concept for the Museum of Nobody emerged. We wanted to combat the problems we saw in the system. Some of these were the elitism within museum culture, the seemingly impenetrable borders between creators from different fields, and the static nature of museums, which we believed made it unlikely that any viewer would connect with the work.

My work in the Museum of Nobody sought to combat the latter two obstacles. The Snowflake was a mobilesque piece featuring an octagonal pvc

frame suspended 12 feet in the air. Strings of yarn hung from the frame to the floor with an entrance cut into the yarn so an individual could stand within the canopy of yarn, directly in the center of the frame. Pictures of snowflakes, captured by a research scientist at the University of Utah, hung from the strings, causing one to stand within their own personal snowstorm. Within the canopy, a viewer could cut out a snowflake with paper and hang it themselves, thereby participating in the work.

The purpose of this piece was to bring together art and science. The scientist's snowflake pictures are used by atmospheric scientists around the world, as a means of understanding hydrometers in freefall. Bringing this scientific work into a museum in a creative way brought two seemingly different fields together. Inviting viewers to participate by standing within the work, as well as making their own snowflakes broke the cliché of museums as quiet mausoleums of art and artifacts.

-Jeremy Lofthouse



I began this Creativity Think Tank course without knowing what to expect. As the weeks progressed, my initial assumptions fell apart until they

disembodied completely, dissolving into an acidic mush of uncertainty. I witnessed the same reactions occur to my classmates. Only in this state of vulnerability could we all have come together as we did.

The biggest challenge in this course was recognizing all the skillsets I do not have. It was easy to pawn off projects onto a more talented classmate because time was always limited. Had I another opportunity I would want to learn the skills of my peers. If I had minimal graphic design skills, skills that I learned in a workshop in class, then I would have loved to design. With more prominent skills and resources, it is easier not to take the easy way out.

Ultimately this course has tested my abilities in unorthodox ways. I have found weakness and turned them into strengths. The people I have met in this class will be my allies. My experiences are invaluable and will be cherished always.

-Liz Espinoza



Creativity on Center Stage appealed to me because of the professors, and the arts-centered nature of the course. I'd heard amazing things about Bruce Dain and Stephen Brown, and working with them over the course of a year seemed to be the perfect way to end my experience with Honors. I learned so much from the process of building an event with the same team of students, from the first art show to the end final project. I felt very lucky to be working on something I cared so deeply about, and to be connecting with members of the local community, all for the purpose of creative exploration. It was a struggle, at times, to keep cool and continue pushing forward. Putting on the final show, Museum of Nobody, was absolutely both a success and a failure. Small details the class had spent a lot of time in to get perfect were completely disregarded, bands fell through, late nights were spent doing damage control, but for me, the event was successful in more ways than I could have thought possible. An arts collective and production company I'm a part of, called Bloodstone, received offers to put on yet another show with the same vibes we produced at Museum of Nobody, with a backer paying for the venue/equipment/art supplies. As an artist, ending the year with offers for future projects like this one, including some others to curate different shows, produce dance pieces next fall, and requests to make musical mixes for other performance events...I was thrilled. The show couldn't have gone better if it means me, and other members of the course, get to continue to exercise our creativity and throw events in the community that highlight this common value. Even through the worst of times in the course, creativity stayed the one uniting factor each and every Honors student valued—and in the end, I believe the focus on creative work is the only thing that held us all together. Exercise your imagination, you won't regret it.

-Gina Crow



I enrolled in Creativity on Center Stage because it sounded open-ended and exciting. I'd heard a lot of positive feedback about Think Tanks from fellow Honors students, and was thrilled to discover that there was an arts-related option the year I was able to take one. Though I didn't know exactly what to expect, it sounded much more related to my areas of interest than any of the other Think Tanks.

Creativity on Center Stage turned out to be total mayhem, and for me, that was awesome. Was it frustrating sometimes? Yes. But was it interesting and useful? Absolutely. This was a crash course in how to collaborate with people you wouldn't necessarily choose to work together on a project with, which is how it often works in the post-college world. We didn't always see eye-to-eye, and that's exactly the point. We used our differences to come up with something that either made sense to a wide population or didn't make any sense at all, both of which are fascinating outcomes. We learned from the successes and mistakes of our first show, *Meet the Criminals*, to make a stronger finished product for the Museum of Nobody, and in the end, even that was light years away from perfect.

Through participating in this course, I became a more assertive communicator and learned a ton about curating and organizing the logistics of a large gallery and performance event. I also learned that just because you put a ton of hours into a project and it doesn't turn out the way you expected doesn't make the project a failure. I'd strongly urge other U of U students to recognize the value in taking advantage of opportunities like this one.

-Sam Katz



Taylor Almond is a quack, who relied on his new friends ("[who] are great") and professors ("[who] are great") to make something out of the 2014 Praxis Lab on Creativity he participated in ("[which] was great.") Born in 1994, Taylor took the course at age 19. By the end of the course Taylor was still 19. His major changed twice during the course, settling on an HBA in History and Writing.

After "four days of recovering from the final project," Taylor released the following statement:

"It was great. Especially failing. Knowing that we could really fail, really hard, was so great. In my other courses I could half-ass a paper, things would work fine. 'Hi, Taylor? About your paper... you forgot to capitalize your sentences and it's four pages under the required length. I'll give it an A minus' - that's facetious, but you see what I mean. As an undergraduate you don't have to care about a class to get a good grade or to 'succeed'. That wasn't true here. Here I felt personally challenged. I cared about our final project - the Museum of Nobody - and wanted it to succeed. And that's because we were allowed to flail for the full year. When we tried to figure out the project, we all flailed - not in a chaotic way or a lost way... it was more like reaching. Creativity is slippery - hard to define, hard to find, and traditional notions of it are hard to flip. Especially for me. I hadn't made much art, I didn't know art history. I had a tertiary familiarity with creativity studies. But I still had to grasp those topics, and do make something good with them. That's what I mean by reaching - it feels like flailing if you're reaching for something that's just out of reach.

Luckily, we were a good group. I ended up finding a lot more people to learn from than the two great professors - excellent guest lecturers, excellent classmates, and by the end of the course, excellent artists contributing to the museum.. That's what I really got out of the course - other people, and how to work with them.

Which is why I want the next museum to mirror that. Contributing artists can collaborate and display something unique, just like we did. Same goes for the audience - they need to be committed. At this years museum, people came and left, saw something they came to see and often didn't look at the art upstairs or the art they didn't like. I want to change that - make next time an event. You make a night of the Museum of Nobody - stay the full six hours, get excellent food from trucks and carts parked right outside the venue. I did that and felt how strange it was to see performance art and folk bands and photographers and kites and sculpture side by side."

At time of publication, Taylor resided in Salt Lake City.



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Is there any difference between love and fury? The capitalist and the curator?

The third dimension does not exist without the first two.

Flow

Stop.

The human species is complex but predictable. Each a different fractal, grating.

Sometimes you catch one dangling a manDRAKE over her feet, spitting salty saliva into its roots, and catching the runoff between her toes.

Silence is poison in the machine.

-

I drank root beer out of a generic plastic cup and it made me feel like a kid.
(Again?)

Where is the dirt that used to occupy the space between my finger and it's nail? I thought I'd find my snare by this point in my life. I thought my hair would be red by now.

But my hair is long and blonde and I have 5 years until I'm 27.

- Nate Witham



My membership in the "Creativity on Center Stage" think tank was the most chaotic, complicated, and frustrating experience of my academic career at the University of Utah. As an elementary education major, I am disciplined to create structure and order for my learners. Due to the ambiguity of our class topic, I had to learn how to operate without definitive structure or a predictable end-goal. Furthermore, I had to learn to collaborate with individuals amidst the chaos who had extremely different views and work ethics from my own. Our group would take ten steps backwards for every

step forward we made towards realizing our final project. Often, arguments erupted, debates between students lasted half of the class while others sat shaking their heads in sheer confusion. More often than not, I was that student sitting in my seat with a wide-eyed look of puzzlement on my face, and completely unaware of how to contribute to the discussion at hand.

Call me a masochist, but these are the reasons I selected this class. I recognize the rigid structure of my future profession, and that I can comfortably operate within those structures. However, I have never been tested to work without organization. Essentially, this class presented itself as a challenge, and I accepted. I learned how to communicate with people I didn't agree with, how to recognize my strengths and weaknesses, how others can supplement my limitations, and last, (and hardest of all) to respect the vastly different work ethics of my classmates. This experience demonstrated the power of working as a team player, and acting in the interest of the collective. I am pleased that against all of our setbacks, the group was able to put aside our differences to successfully collaborate and implement our final project—Museum of Nobody.

-Aalia Fields



Hey Folks,

It was my pleasure spending the past 7 months with you all. Believe it or not, I looked forward to every meeting. Mix a smart, opinionated bunch of people with a wiggly subject and that's a recipe for rich and rowdy discussion. (I guess I'm past the age where I like it neat and tidy.)

Good job on the final project. The Museum of Nobody concept was a swing for the fences. You did it without proper resources, time, experience, or structure. It was an original solution to a muddy problem. Yes, there were problems and it's human nature to focus on them. But it achieved much of what it set out to do-- consider the contributions by Nate's brother, Mary the high school student, and many others. Viewers showed up and enjoyed themselves. Believe you me that's easier said than done.

Looking back, it'd make much more sense if Think Tanks were centered on and titled according to the final project (decided in advance). This is not insignificant hurdle that you also leaped.

More generally, congrats on the entire 2-semester experience. Some of you might be left frustrated or unsatisfied or even uncertain about what the hell happened. Welcome to the world of creativity. It's messy and it's nothing like the Game of School. For myself, I'm still processing the lessons.

Please keep me in the loop. I'd be delighted to help out where I can.

--Stephen Brown

Everybody,

I feel the same way as Stephen about all of it.

Except that to me, what both he and many of you sometimes experienced as weaknesses or frustrations were our greatest strengths--and MON's. Wrangling, anxiety, lack of focus, lack of a clear problem/approach from the getgo. I wouldn't trade those for anything.

Please read the "Ballad of Nobody" again.

Think about it. Random. No common criteria. No judgment. Only engagement, pleasure, and thought.

More focused direction would have ruined all that--the value of the show and the experience. The best way to discover the issues clearly and create the basis for future focus, for doing it again. I think the Museum of Nobody can be a fixture in SLC. You all did that, and it will be by far the better in the long run for the messiness of the first try. The "mud".

Doesn't matter if some of the show was weak or clique-y or overly hip or didn't address some clear need of some particular community. Or that there was no time for consistently great curation. Or thoroughgoing cohesion. Or state-wide publicity. Listen, you might not see so much strong work in a major group show in LA or New York, from kites to calligraphy to janitors' sketches to retro psychedelic rock to found object trees. Seriously. Plus, like Stephen said, most people who came had fun.

That's almost unheard of for "art". A direct result of the "mess."

We got creativity right.

That's what sucks about museums and most education. How they make breakthroughs--new elegant gestures/solutions--look so clean, neat, realized . . . unworldly.

On the walls or in the textbooks, you don't see the messy, convoluted crap, say, Picasso and Braque endured and did to create cubism--the years of frustration, poverty, stealing (literal and artistic), the futile anger and rebellion. You just go to New York and stand before "Les Demoiselles D'Avignon" at the Metropolitan Museum and think, hey, that's creativity: elegant and clear, born fully formed from the brow of Zeus, Pablo or Georges. Hindsight and a lie.

Success in school is unfortunately much the same. Why Stephen calls it a game. Why I agree with the poet who said "I believe passionately in education, but I hate school." For my money, we fulfilled the stated class mission.

We got creativity and education right too.

Random, improvised, sometimes half-assed, and without much grounding in recognized expertise, the show and the class were huge wins. It meant a lot to me and I'm going to miss it and all of you.

Have a wonderful summer.

--Bruce Dain

THE FUTURE

DOING IT AGAIN

Will the Museum live on? Yes.

Is the project sustainable? We don't care.

"Sustainability" is a buzz word of our time: sustaining the environment versus pollution, technology, and globalization. Sustaining cultural practices against the same. Surviving traumatic changes.

We don't care about survival. We are not refugees. Our idea was never really to represent or somehow preserve or expose existing stories, works, or communities that had no public voice or weren't recognized as "creative."

It was to make new stories, new works, and new communities.

Exposure as transformation and new experience, not representation and preservation. A "museum" as a place of new realities. Not some supposedly neutral, clear, timeless window onto what already exists or once existed. An anti-museum.

Next year, there will be another "Museum of Nobody." At the Black Box at the Rose Wagner Theater for three weeks in January and February during and surrounding the Sundance Film Festival. Other instances of the Museum will exist across the Valley during the year.

Funded by Stephen Brown's grants and including substantial stipends for contributors.

Next year's Museum will stress collaboration. Putting together different people and communities that wouldn't typically interact to produce new creative work. This was the biggest lack of this first MON, mostly because of time pressure. There were really only three fully collaborative and commissioned pieces made just for the show. Next year, most of what's shown and performed will be. A series of

creatively curated collaborative project shows/installations/activism.
An approach with originality and potential in almost any direction, from pure "art" to educational policy to political activism.

Hopefully, next year's Museums will also be connected to the University of Utah Honors College again. Perhaps as a new regular course, with Community Engaged Learning status. For students interested in creativity and community issues or applications. Providing a collaborative practice component to students' Honors theses or to the work leading up to their theses. 27 students have already signed a statement of interest in this prospective course.

Peace.