Chapter Ten

Source


...AS YOU GET MATERIALS FROM A CONSTRUCTION SITE.
PRACTICE APPROACHING CONFLICT AS GENERATIVE...


DON'T FORGET
THAT THIS
PROJECT
RELIES UPON
GRANTS.

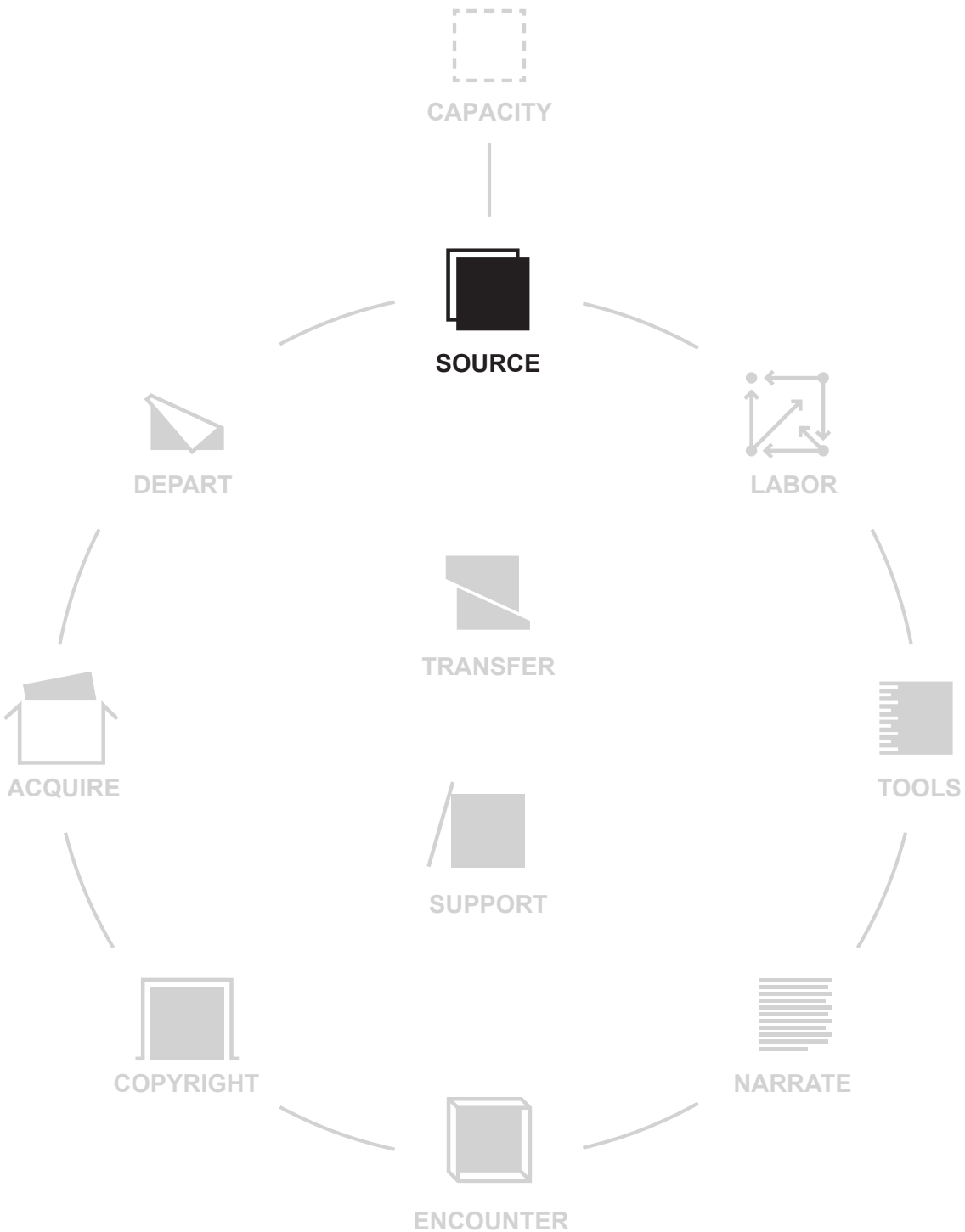
Source: the location where you obtain materials for a project.

Locations to source materials can include: your kitchen, a digital archive, a business, the street, or the ocean.

☀

We suggest that the following section be shared with the group as best suits your context, either read aloud—in whole or in part—or assigned to be discussed in your space of learning. Before you begin to read, we invite you to ground yourself in the space: notice the air on your skin and your feet on the ground. What are your feelings and sensations at this moment? What are you bringing to this text? Take a moment to become aware of this. We invite you to notice what comes up for you, as you are reading this chapter. We will ask you to reflect upon this at the end of this chapter.

What if sourcing materials were integral to your project?


CAPACITY
SOURCE
LABOR
TOOLS
NARRATE
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ACQUIRE
DEPART
TRANSFER
SUPPORT

Introduction

The phase of the lifecycle of any project that we refer to as "source" considers where you obtain materials for a project. Materials could be sourced directly from the earth, like pigments that are sourced from rocks, or from bodies if you are using body hair or your voice. Other places for sourcing could be an art supply store, the internet, or an archive, depending on what your project requires. If you are working with plywood, for example, you could trace it back to yellow poplar from the Mississippi River, aspen and white birch from Canada, and Douglas fir and lodgepole pine from the Northwest of the United States.[1] Or the plywood could be traced to the place where you obtained it—your local lumber yard or a chain store. How does the location where you source your materials connect to the capacities you wish to embody?

Story

Alice Sheppard is a dancer and choreographer who attends to the complex intersections of disability, gender, and race by exploring the societal and cultural significance of difference.[2] Sheppard spoke about the balance of the phases that we call source, depart, transfer, and labor when thinking about sourcing materials for her recent collective project, *DESCENT*. In *DESCENT,* an evening-length dance work, a sculptural ramp creates an architectural stage on which Sheppard and Laurel Lawson dance. In an interview with us, describing choices around the materials for the ramp, Sheppard said:

> The primary frame that I am putting on [choices around sourcing materials for the ramp] is artists' safety. So, insofar as I have a politics of environmental sustainability, and might want to do things differently—the thing that I have really worked to think about is artists' safety. So, for the construction of the ramp, would it be nice to use sustainable resources? Yes. How environmentally sustainable are my sources? Maybe the thing that I've come back with is, what materials do I need to be able to guarantee [the ramp] will last the life of this project, that can be built in ways to support the work? So, the way I've compromised on that is to understand that the shops that I work with might not source their materials in ecologically and environmentally sustainable ways, but I try to work with artist-supported small shops. Balance, and that's a trade-off that I'm making. So, as much as I'd like to have a found materials approach, for this project that hasn't been there. For the next project, which is really about a different kind of materials, I think that I can pretty much

> work with recycled materials. You know, but there again I have to buy a new marley [dancers' material] for the floor. So, even though we can work with recycled materials or found materials for props, I'm going to have to invest in new flooring to sustain that over the long term. So, it's not an environmentally conscious way, but I'm trying to think about it in a sustainable manner.[3]

Sheppard zooms out to consider the whole life of a project while sourcing materials. She has developed the capacity that we refer to as "develop craft and skills," or "the materials and tools I use are chosen intentionally and applied with care."[4] She also highlights some of the contradictions you might have to consider when obtaining materials. How would you balance sourcing with sustainable materials and local production with hired labor? While a wooden ramp can be more easily recycled, Sheppard wants to work with local shops, and therefore she cannot control exactly which wood shops will use. In the future, when making a ramp with more metal elements, Sheppard will prioritize encounter over source or depart, using metal to prolong the encounter with the ramp in public performances. What phases will you prioritize, and why, when making a project?

Discussion

Where do you currently source your materials? In considering where you will obtain your materials, you may need to "zoom out" to consider where materials from projects or practices go when they are no longer of use, value, or interest, the phase we call "depart." In the following section, we will write about found objects, synthetic materials, and organic materials, and ask you to consider how these materials might return to the earth. Found objects can be composed of synthetic or organic materials.

Found Objects

Readymades, or everyday consumer objects that are found, repurposed, and recontextualized as artworks, make their first appearance in the early 20th-century movement Dada. Artists in subsequent art movements like Arte Povera, Fluxus, and Pop Art also relied upon used, recycled, found, or discarded materials. In 1914, Marcel Duchamp displayed a bottle rack as a work of art, saying: "The idea of choice interested me in a metaphysical sense, at that point. And that was the beginning, and that was when I bought a bottle rack at the Bazar de l'Hôtel de Ville and brought it home. And that was the first readymade."[5] André Breton wrote in 1938 that a readymade was "an ordinary object elevated to the dignity of a work of art by the mere choice of an artist."[6] The Fluxus artist Yoko Ono continued

the tradition of the readymade by creating instructions for participants to implement or for readers to imagine in their minds. Ono said, "I discovered, that by instructionalizing art, you did not have to stick to the two-dimensional or three-dimensional world. In your mind, you can be in touch with a six-dimensional world, if you wished. You can also mix an apple and a desk."[7]

Negation

"I'm not an environmental artist." / "These materials may be toxic, but they are necessary for the result that I want to achieve."

Since the 1960s, environmental art has encompassed a range of artistic practices, from an emphasis on earth and land as a formal material in projects to an emphasis on ecological justice and bioregions as the primary context for projects today. By 2050, it is projected that there will be more plastic than fish in our oceans. Exposure to chemical toxins can lead to autoimmune conditions; chronic illnesses which produce inflammation and "brain fog" around paint, plastic, and artificially scented products.[8] We believe that it is urgent to consider the toxins artists use in their projects, as the health of the planet, and of all non-human beings, is tied up in the health of our bodies.

The artist Eva Hesse died at age 34 from brain cancer and the artist Gordon Matta-Clark died at age 35 from pancreatic cancer. Both deaths are suspected to be the result of exposure to polyester resins and fiberglass used in their art practices without adequate protection and ventilation.[9] Still, many artists do not wear respirators and work with toxic materials without proper protection. We reject heroic tales that romanticize the sacrificing of life for art.

Dee Hibbert-Jones asks teachers and students to consider the moment at the end of every semester when the studio becomes a dumping ground and all unwanted projects go to the landfill.[10] If every material comes from the earth, and the earth has finite resources, how can artists begin to consider the materials they work with more carefully? When will business models, based on infinite growth, collide with the reality of a planet that has finite resources and capacity to sustain itself? Our focus on intentional production aims to foster dialogue about the ecological sustainability of art and design education and production.

Discussion

Synthetic Materials

How do the materials you use impact your body, the earth, and all living beings? Duane Hanson, who makes hyper-realistic human figures with polyester resin, connects his unsafe application of resin in his early art projects to his eventual development of lung and lymph node cancer. Hanson said, "I'd lay the stuff up with bare hands … and I think that did more damage than breathing it, you know, going right through your skin."[11] Many plastics seem durable today but have not been tested for their longevity over decades. Mid-century plastics, including resins and polyurethane developed by the military and used by furniture designers like Gaetano Pesce, are now dripping and exploding in collectors' houses, fifty years later. As one collector said, when looking at what used to be his furniture collection, "It was like a nuclear explosion in our living room—foam had ripped through the skin … the whole top of it, just boom!" When the collector tried to donate the remnants to a museum, "no one was interested."[12] *See Chapter 11: Depart ↘ for more.↗*

Organic Materials

If you use materials that are obtained from the earth and can also be easily returned to the earth, you might be drawn toward environmental and feminist art projects from the 1960s until today. Ana Mendieta, a performance artist, used the earth itself and natural materials for ephemeral, site-responsive projects. Mendieta said in 1989, "I have been carrying on a dialogue between the landscape and the female body (based on my own silhouette)…. I am overwhelmed with the feeling of having been cast from the womb (nature). My art is the way I re-establish the bonds that unite me to the universe."[13] Mendieta's projects draw upon Indigenous wisdom that acknowledges the connectivity of all matter.[14] Robin Wall Kimmerer, a plant ecologist, shares a practice from the Citizen Potawatomi Nation that speaks to the profound capacity of reciprocity to build community with all living things. As we mention in *Chapter 3: Who Do You Honor?*, Kimmerer writes:

> The guidelines for the Honorable Harvest are not written down, or even consistently spoken of as a whole—they are reinforced in small acts of daily life. But if you were to list them, they might look something like this:
> Know the ways of the ones who take care of you, so that you may take care of them.

> Introduce yourself. Be accountable as the one who comes asking for life.
> Ask permission before taking.Abide by the answer.
> Never take the first. Never take the last.
> Take only what you need.
> Take only that which is given.
> Never take more than half.
> Leave some for others.
> Harvest in a way that minimizes harm.
> Use it respectfully. Never waste what you have taken.
> Share.
> Give thanks for what you have been given.
> Give a gift, in reciprocity for what you have taken.
> Sustain the ones who sustain you and the earth will last forever.[15]

Many artists choose materials for conceptual, ontological, or spiritual reasons. Oscar Rene Cornejo, a painter, printmaker, and sculptor living in New York City, is very particular about the wood he sources and how it connects to other wood, fabric, and fresco in his sculptures. As Cornejo said to us in an interview:

> It became very important to custom-make things from scratch. So, pine has its relationship to construction, but it also has other metaphysical properties, whether religious or philosophical.... I started using cedar a lot more. It has spiritual healing properties, but it also has a practical aspect, as it prevents mold growth. Depending on where I live, I will be in direct relationship to the agricultural production of that site. For example, the harvesting of pine or cedar ... maybe I won't have access to a specific cedar anymore if I'm living in Central America. But perhaps I can find the equivalent. Every material has a heart or a mind, and it has a core potential. I try to activate that.[16]

See Chapter 5: Capacities ⬚ and Chapter 16: Tools ▀ for more on Oscar Rene Cornejo.↗ You might make the *how* and *where* of sourcing materials central to the content of your project. Your decisions about sourcing materials might be based on one or many of these approaches:

- FORMAL: How do the physical properties and qualities of the material, regardless of historical or social context, create the visual impact that I want?
- CONCEPTUAL: How does the history of the use of this material in art contribute to the meaning of my project?

- POLITICAL ECONOMY: How does the extraction, circulation, and distribution of this material contribute to the meaning of my project?
- ENVIRONMENTAL: How does the extraction, refinement, and possible recycling of this material align with my intentions for ecological sustainability and regeneration?
- CULTURAL/SOCIAL/SPIRITUAL: How does the material make meaning in my cultural/social/spiritual community?
- PERSONAL MYTHOLOGY: How does the material relate to a mythology I am creating about myself?
- ONTOLOGICAL/PHENOMENOLOGICAL: How *am* I in relation with the materials that I am working with? What is my impact on them and what is their impact on me?[17]

Acknowledging the contradictions of production, we realize that you will not be able to change the manner with which *all* the materials you are using are sourced, or trace *all* of your materials back to their origins, but you can begin to investigate the locations in which you obtain materials and determine whether these are aligned with your intentions.

Quotations

What formal, conceptual, economic, environmental, mythological, or ontological rationales do you see for working with in the quotations below?

> "I'm looking at [the] displacement [of the kolanut][18] as a nut from West Africa entering into the Americas, looking at it as a product of colonial times. I'm looking at the way it's used in ceremonies, in sealing contracts and how it's entered into all kinds of social lives.... I went to Namibia in 2015 to visit the Green Hill [a former minerals mine in Tsumeb] which is now a big, deep hole. I was looking at places where things are taken out of the ground, where things are constantly shifted and broken. When we make a product, we don't even understand it anymore, it could be [made of materials] from different mountains.... When we talk about people coming into another land, people moving into another place, what makes it possible for someone to feel connected to that space or not? There are certain things linked with memory that all of a sudden lock together and make a place become bearable. I'm interested in where it's bearable; where it's possible to question. That's where that possibility of a work starts taking place." —Otobong Nkanga, 2016[19]

"*PIG 05049* is a book that shows 185 endproducts that are made of a single pig. They are categorized under the chapters Skin, Bones, Muscles, Blood, Internal intestines, Fat and Other.... [I think] we should know more about the products we consume and the materials they are made of. I think a simple interest in them, what they are made of, who makes it and how, would already be a great step forward.... One of the most surprising products is a bullet. [If] it is made in the USA, gelatine from the pig is used to transport gunpowder into the bullet smoothly. So the pig is not actually inside the bullet, but it is used in the production process.... The strangest encounter was with a director of a company that makes heartvalves for human hearts out of pig hearts. A beautiful high-and at the same time low-tech product. He told me he didn't want his product—pig's heart valves—to be associated with pigs."
—Christien Meindertsma, 2008[20]

"Somebody mentioned that there was this infestation of bamboo in Brooklyn and Queens and we thought we could use it as a frame," Gauthier said. They headed off to Douglaston, Queens, and asked one of the local churches if they could harvest some bamboo from their property, Gauthier recalls with a laugh.
—Dylan Gauthier, 2013[21]

"I mean, you could see a pollen piece [that I've made in an installation] and you could have a visual experience. It's an incredible color, like you can't see anywhere else, but if art would be only a visual thing, or a color, or a pigment, I wouldn't be an artist, I wouldn't want to be an artist. A milkstone is not a white painting, and a pollen field is not a yellow painting, like Rothko's. It's something much, much more. And it's also not a blue painting. It's like the blue sky." —Wolfgang Laib, 2013[22]

"At the time, I was curious to understand more about how color informs our relationship to place. As I collected [pigment from rocks], I became aware of how much of our experience of the built and designed world is mediated through chemical color. While synthetic color is a relatively recent, modern invention—one that happened in 1856 with the discovery of Mauve—indigenous communities have been processing, trading, and using material pigment for practical and ritual uses for at least 100,000 years."
—Jennifer Brook, 2014[23]

"Lisa asked me to come to Baltimore to look at all the institutions and pick the one I wanted to work with. I looked at a lot of them and chose the [Maryland] historical society because it seemed the archetypical museum that hadn't changed. New thoughts in museum display had not affected that institution for one reason or another. I thought it would provide the right raw material for me to work with. I originally felt completely alien in [that museum] environment—which intrigued me. I wanted to know why, which is another reason I chose it. Before going in I had no idea what I was going to do. I didn't know it was going to be African American history. I just wanted the paintings and objects to speak to me, let them tell me what I should do. And they did. That is pretty much how I go about working with these institutions: I go in with no script, nothing whatsoever in my head. I try to get to know the community that the museum is in, the institution, the structure of the museum, the people in the museum from maintenance crew to the executive director. I ask them about the world, the museum, and their jobs, as well as the objects themselves. I look at the relationship between what is on view and what is not on view. I never know where that process will lead me, but it often leads me back to myself, to my own experiences." —Fred Wilson, 1993[24]

"Just as our ancestral mothers braided seeds of rice and okra into their hair before boarding slave ships, believing in a future of harvest in the face of brutality, so must we maintain courage and hope in these terrifying times." —Leah Penniman, 2017[25]

"The source and the stream are metaphors for life. Waterfalls were used very often by artists like Duchamp, Bruce Nauman did a self portrait as a fountain, Ingres pictured a nymph holding a jar from which the water is falling … drinking from the stream shows a relationship to the basic aspect of our life. When I say 'from the stream' or 'from a source' I show that stream is a word I can use in many ways. The water is in us, I drink it, I piss it out again, it streams through me and it's participating in a stream. When I take it from the source, it comes from the origin of the stream, which goes through me. 'Stream' can also be used for the great process in which we are participating." —herman de vries, 2015[26]

"It is good to live in a world that can be repaired, in which artifacts are worth repairing. A world where things are well made is likely to be in constant need of upkeep. A world where things are badly made, where nothing is worth repairing, is a throw-away world of

indifferent replacements. The gesture of repair is a refusal to admit that art and knowledge have reached their limit, that no more can be made, no more done, with a thing." —Barry Allen, 2006[27]

Here are more artists, groups, and projects that come to mind when we think about source: Alejandro Aravena / Azita Banu / Nick Cave / The Black Lunch Table / Pascale Gatzen / Basia Irland / Lamia Joreige / Yuki Kimura / Simon Leung / Winifred Lutz / Materials for the Arts / Tiona Nekkia McClodden / RAIR (Recycled Artists in Residency) / Michael Rakowitz / Kate Rich / Zoë Sheehan Saldaña / Seed Library of Los Angeles (SLOLA) / Maayan Strauss / Miriam Simun / Juana Valdes. What artists, groups, and projects come to mind for you?

Reflection

1. Do you have formal, conceptual, economic, environmental, mythological, or ontological rationales for your own sourcing of materials? Why is this?
2. ☀ What feelings and sensations came up for you while you were reading this chapter? For example, did you feel surprise, frustration, or excitement? How did you hold these in your body? For example, did you sense these emotions in your shoulders, neck, and back while reading this chapter? *See the Social-Emotional Intelligence Project Reflection activity in Chapter 4: Teacher/Facilitator Guides.*↗
3. What would it mean to understand artmaking as a site of interdependence, both locally and globally, rather than as a site of individual use and exchange? Remember, art is a system of relationships. We understand from the long history of economically oriented critical theory that behind any object exists a system of extraction, of production, and of circulation whose very histories are hidden at the moment in which the object appears as free-standing, as individual, as a thing, often a commodity. For us, in this book, that "thing" is the art object.

1. See Grace Jeffers, "See the Trees: Where Does YOUR Plywood Come From?" *Interiors + Sources,* October 25, 2011, http://www.interiorsandsources.com/is-interior-design-blog/entryid/10/columbia-forest-plywood-products.aspx.

2. See Alice Sheppard, "About," http://alicesheppard.com/about/.

3. Alice Sheppard, interview by Susan Jahoda and Caroline Woolard, BFAMFAPhD, 2016.

4. Capacity adapted from Ellen Winner, Lois Hetland, Shirley Veenema, and Kimberly Sheridan, *Studio Thinking 2: The Real Benefits of Visual Arts Education* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2013). See also Harvard Project Zero, "How Do Artists Use The Studio Habits of Mind?" Artcore, 2015, http://www.artcorelearning.org/studio-habits-of-mind; *See Chapter 5: Capacities for more.*

5. Marcel Duchamp, "Entretiens avec Marcel Duchamp," by Georges Charbonnier, *RTF*, Paris, December 6 1960–January 2 1961, radio, 99:15, republished and translated in the notes of "The Unfindable Readymade," ed., Hector Obalk, *tout–fait* 1, no. 2 (May 2000), https://www.toutfait.com/issues/issue_2/Articles/obalk.html.

6. André Breton and Paul Eluard, eds., *Dictionnaire Abrégé du Surréalisme* (Paris: Galerie des beaux-arts, 1938), 23. Republished in "Chapter 1. The Traditional Definition of a Readymade," in "The Unfindable Readymade," ed., Hector Obalk, *tout–fait* 1, no. 2 (May 2000), https://www.toutfait.com/issues/issue_2/Articles/obalk.html.

7. Yoko Ono, "Mix a Building and the Wind," interview by Hans Ulrich Obrist, *e-flux*, 2002, http://projects.e-flux.com/do_it/notes/interview/i002.html.

8. See Johns Hopkins Medicine Pathology, "Autoimmune Disease, Clarity & Facts for Patients," https://pathology.jhu.edu/autoimmune.

9. See Jessica C. Kraft, "Toxic Art," *East Bay Express*, March 23, 2011, https://www.eastbayexpress.com/oakland/toxic-art/Content?oid=2533379.

10. Dee Hibbert-Jones, "Too Many Things? Creating Sculpture for the 21st Century," (Sculpture Symposium, Claremont Graduate University, Santa Cruz, CA, October 19, 2013), video, 10:50, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLl71q6bj10.

11. Duane Hanson, "Oral History Interview with Duane Hanson," by Liza Kirwin, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, August 23–24, 1989, transcript, https://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-duane-hanson-11643#transcript, quoted in Dylan Kerr, "Art Is Beautiful. It Could Also Kill You. Here Are 7 Deadly Art Materials to Watch Out For," *artnet News*, September 14, 2017, https://news.artnet.com/art-world/7-deadly-art-materials-to-watch-out-for-1081526.

12. Dr. Al Eiber, quoted in Eve M. Kahn, "No, Your Furniture Shouldn't Drip or Burst," *New York Times*, March 2, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/02/style/design-plastics-midcentury.html.

13. Ana Mendieta, "Vierge Ouvrante, Thirteenth Century," in *The Once and Future Goddess: A Symbol for Our Time*, ed. Elinor Gadon, 208–329, (New York, NY: Harpe & Row, 1989), 278.

14. See "Ana Mendieta—The Important Art, Cuban-American Performance Artist, Sculptor, Painter, Photographer and Video Artist," The Art Story, https://www.theartstory.org/artist-mendieta-ana-art-works.htm.

15. Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Honorable Harvest," in *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, 175–204 (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 183.

16. Oscar Rene Cornejo, interview by BFAMFAPhD members, BFAMFAPhD, at the artist's studio, Bronx, NY, April, 2018, transcript by Ruby Mayer, Poughkeepsie, NY.

17. In Maurice Merleau-Ponty's essay "Eye and Mind," he explores the paradox that the human body "simultaneously sees and is seen. That which looks at all things can also look at itself." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *The Primacy of Perception*, trans. Carleton Dallery, 159–192 (Chicago, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 162–167.

18. A fruit that figures prominently in the customs and culture of West Africa.

19. Otobong Nkanga "Displacement Fuels Questions in Artist Otobong Nkanga's Performances," Interview by Sarah Hotchkiss, *KQED*, May 11, 2016, https://www.kqed.org/arts/11569322/displacement-fuels-questions-in-artist-otobong-nkangas-performances.

20. Christien Meindertsma, "Pig 05049, A Conversation with Christien Meindertsma," interview by Regine, *We Mak$$$ney Not Art*, August 10, 2008, http://we-make-money-not-art.com/christien_meindertsma_what_is/.

21. Dylan Gauthier, quoted in Lorraine Boisoneault, "Whatever Floats Their Boat," *Narratively*, January 9, 2013, http://narrative.ly/whatever-floats-their-boat/.

22. Wolfgang Laib, "Beauty and the Bees: Q+A with Wolfgang Laib," interview by Ross Simonini, *Art in America*, February 25, 2013, http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/interviews/wolfgang-laib-moma/.

23. Jennifer Brook, *What Color is Earth*, 2014–ongoing, http://jenniferbrook.com/work/what-color-is-the-earth.

24. Fred Wilson, "Making the Museum Mine: An Interview with Fred Wilson," by Donald Garfield, *Museum News* 72, no. 3 (May–June 1993): 46–49, available, https://msu.edu/course/ha/452/wilsoninterview.htm.

25. Leah Penniman, "Uprooting Racism: Seeding Sovereignty," *Food Solutions New England*, The Sustainability Institute at the University of New Hampshire, https://www.foodsolutionsne.org/blog/uprooting-racism-seeding-sovereignty.

26. herman de vries, "herman de vries Interview in the Dutch Pavilion at the Venice Art Biennale," by Judith Jockel, *Design Boom*, May 13, 2015, https://www.designboom.com/art/herman-de-vries-dutch-pavilion-venice-art-biennale-05-13-2015/.

27. Barry Allen, "The Ethical Artifact: On Trash," in *Trash: Alphabet City Magazine II*, ed. John Knechtel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 201-202.