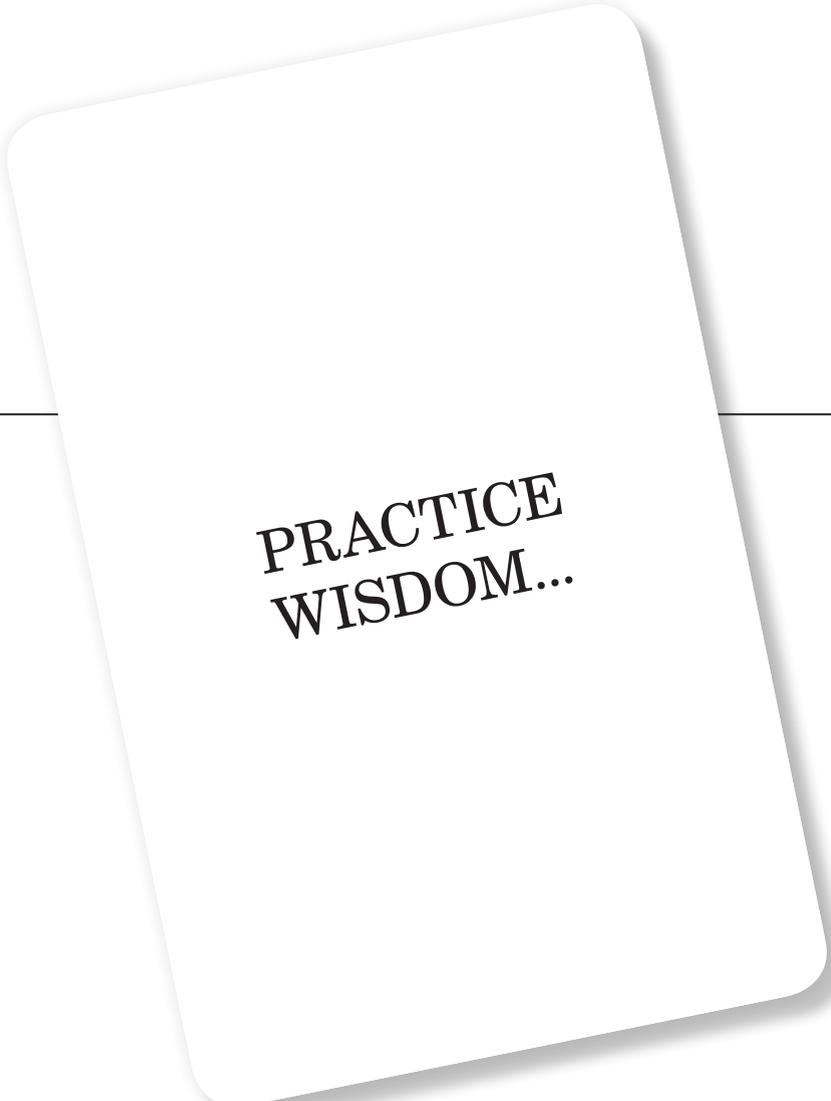

Chapter Eleven



Depart



**PRACTICE
WISDOM...**

**...AS YOUR
FRIENDS
REPURPOSE
YOUR PROJECT.**

**DON'T FORGET
THIS PROJECT
RELIEF'S UPON
DAY JOBS.**

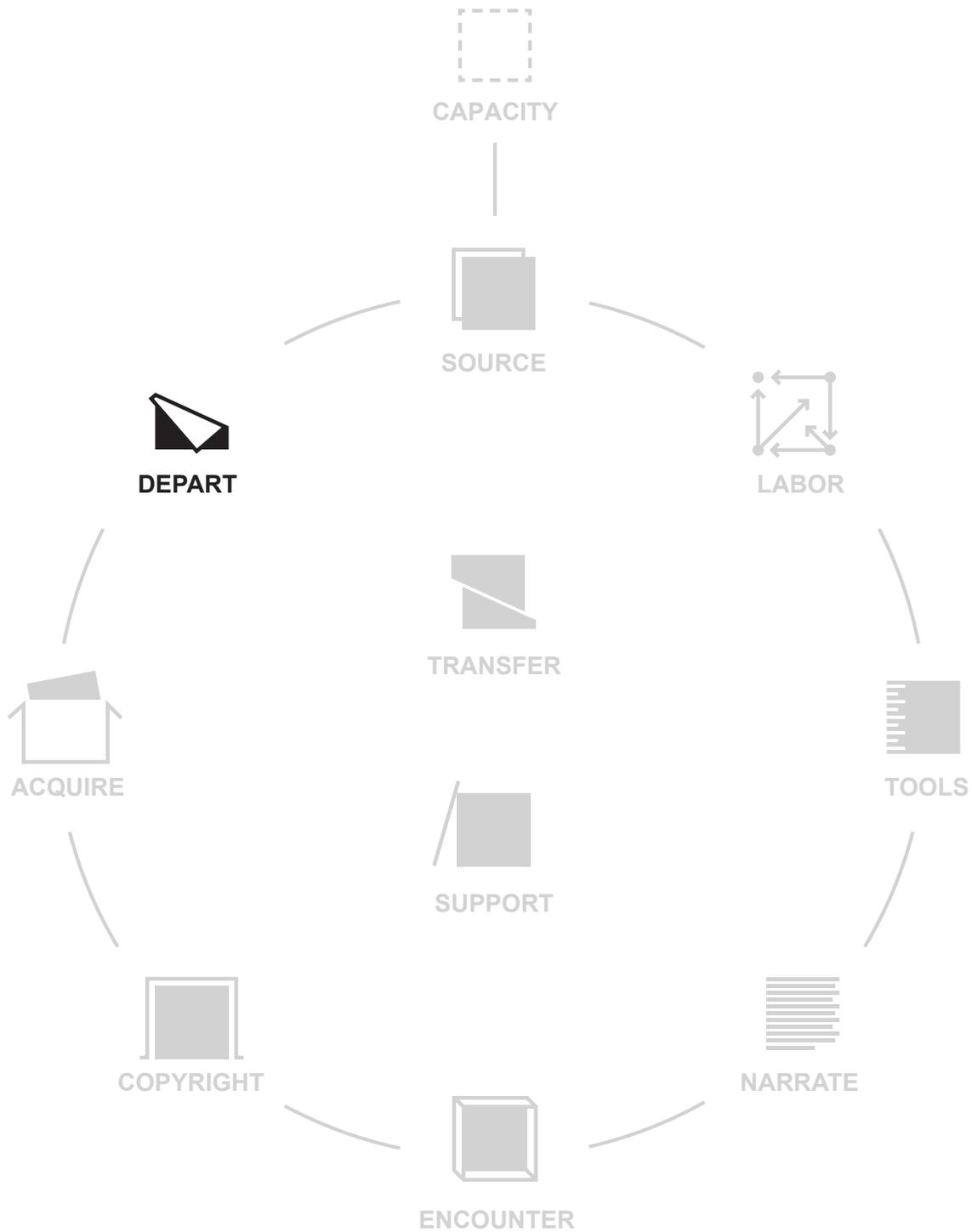
Depart: where materials from projects go when they are no longer of use, value, or interest.

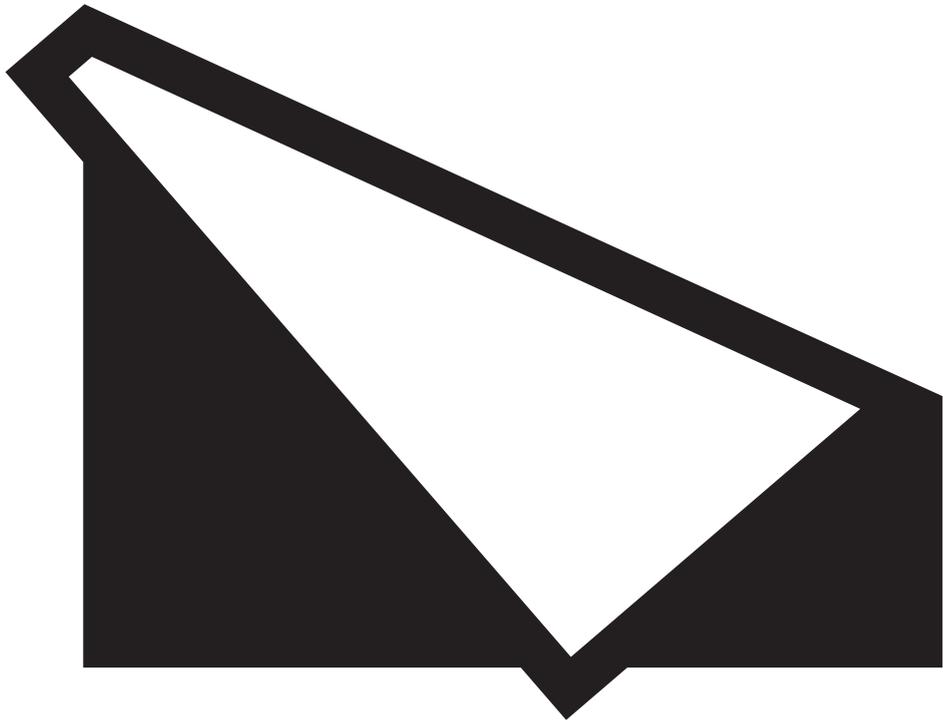
Examples of the departure of your materials include ingesting, burning, dismantling, repurposing, or throwing them out to end up in a landfill.

What if the departure of materials were integral to your project?

*

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.





Introduction

The phase of the lifecycle of any project that we refer to as “depart” considers the final resting places for the materials used in the project. Departure attends to the sites where materials from projects go when they are no longer of use, value, or interest.

The moment of departure is inevitable for all projects. Whether a project is thrown away, acquired by an institution and then deaccessioned, or destroyed as a political act, in war, or in a natural disaster, every project will depart at some point. When an artist dies, their family members must confront the departures of all of their projects that have not been acquired. In this case, the projects might be taken to a landfill where, if they are biodegradable, they will decay. We ask that you consider this final departure in relationship to the whole life of any project.

Story

Leigh Claire La Berge recounts the story of a willful departure by two artists who determined that the life of their project needed to come to an end:

Along with the Italian artist Blu, [artist Lutz] Henke produced two of Berlin’s most famous murals. As murals that have graced a thousand postcards and social media posts, these site-specific pieces had begun to star in a well-known story of urban spatial availability transformed into displacement.

As the Kreuzberg neighborhood has begun and no doubt will continue to host a revolving slate of ex-pats, as apartments have been transformed into investment properties and remediated back to an international, culture-consuming public through biennales and Airbnb, Henke and Blu made the decision to withdraw their images from public circulation.¹ They covered the building-wide murals with black paint, all the while being booed by onlookers who were unaware of their identity and who no doubt thought they were real estate developers. One of their images (left) presents the so-called golden handcuffs of bourgeois existence. Here those handcuffs are accentuated by the capitalist temporality of the wrist-watches. Too discomfited to be satisfied with their lot in life, yet too comfortable to risk changing it, those wearing the golden handcuffs wait and hope passively for a different scenario.

The pieces were created in 2008 as an antagonism and provocation; by 2014 Blu and Henke understood that their art anchored “a [Berlin] art scene preserved as an amusement park for those who

can afford rising rents.”² As anyone with a rudimentary knowledge of the avant-garde knows, the path from artist-based rejection of commodification to artistic commodity is a well-worn one, and Henke describes perhaps the only available assurance that their murals would not continue to travel down it: the work concludes through its destruction, and who better to conclude it than its creators?³

Under what conditions would you decide that your project needed to be destroyed or erased?

Discussion

Faculty members, technicians, art students, and janitorial staff are familiar with the dumpsters that overflow with paintings, sculptures, and unclaimed projects at the end of each semester.⁴ At many art schools, students have a “trash day” after finals where students wear dust masks and throw all of their projects into a collective dumpster. *What is trash? Trash is anything that is not recognized as a source material. Trash is what we do not want to think about.* Trash seems to belong in a hole: an exhaust pipe to pollution, a toilet bowl hole to a waste plant, a trash shoot to a landfill.

Why are there so many projects to throw out? In our experience, most art classes focus on ways of making that emphasize quantity and speed. You are asked to deliver as many projects as possible, as fast as possible, without concern for the future life of these projects. Why do we have so many neglected objects, art objects or otherwise? Capitalism relies on the ever-increasing sale and consumption of goods and this necessitates planned obsolescence—the planned premature departure of objects—so that increased consumption is possible. As Annie Leonard reports in *The Story of Stuff*, “the average U.S. person now consumes twice as much as they did 50 years ago.”⁵ A dilemma, or generative contradiction, arises: How much waste must be produced in order to learn a new skill or technique? Is it possible to be an artist who does not create more waste?

Negation

“This makes me feel as though I shouldn’t make anything.”

We will ask you to explore the phase of the lifecycle that we call depart, where a project goes when nobody can steward or care for it, and when the materials return to the earth. We do this to begin to think about where a project goes after it is made, and all of the questions that come up for artists that are rarely addressed in school: How might your materials return

to the earth? How will your projects be stored? Who will be the steward of your projects? Who are your projects made for? We recognize that considering the end of a project's life before it even comes into being might be paralyzing. While sound artist Robert Sember says, "let us begin by assuming that there are already enough objects in this world, more or less interesting," we are not trying to discourage you from making projects. We make projects all the time! We ask you to consider departure as we do not wish to deny this phase in the life of projects. Again, we offer introductions to the ten phases in the lifecycle framework so that you can prioritize one or two phases in your process. Perhaps a focus on departure is not something you want to focus on at this time.

We continue to make art because the process of self-directed making generates a sense of connection to ourselves, to others, to material, and to collective memory. Making art integrates our bodies and our thoughts. It requires patience and humility. We believe that the slowness required to refine any technique in the arts produces a care for objects. Artists often have a curiosity about and living awareness of the labor it takes to make any object. This leads to a desire to repair objects rather than discard them. The cultural theorist Barry Allen approaches the urgent need for repair instead of discarding. In his article, "The Ethical Artifact: On Trash," Allen says:

Repair is not necessarily a bad thing to have to do.... 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. It's like refusing to let a person die.⁶

Barry Allen refers to objects as assemblages that can be recovered or remade into other things. If not, these things have reached their limit and become trash; a state defined by neglect or the withdrawal of care. In cradle-to-cradle and community economies frameworks, waste is considered to be a source material.

Some artists believe that there are already enough objects in the world and work with materials and situations that already exist. Others aim to make projects that are ecologically sustainable. From the performances, ephemeral projects, and site-based environments of Dada, Arte Povera, Fluxus, Land art, and social practices, artists have made "art"

while de-emphasizing the importance of objects since at least the turn of the 19th century.⁷ The designer and educator Christina Xu writes in “Your Project Deserves a Good Death” that:

The unfortunate flip-side of a growth-obsessed culture is that we equate project endings with failures. We talk about project death with the same hushed tones and awkward euphemisms as we do death or broken relationships, which is to say that we try not to talk or think about it at all.... All of this means that we are generating a huge number of projects and entities that don't need to last forever without doing an adequate job of planning for these many inevitable ends. And so we avoid ending things altogether. We drag projects along well past their usefulness. We don't give them proper closure because thinking about them makes us feel guilty, and announcing them makes us feel weak. Instead they quietly disappear, un-memorialized and undocumented.⁸

For a discussion about the relationship between immaterial projects and their documentation and circulation, see Chapter 14: Narrate ☰.⁷

How might your projects change if you created them with the final departure in mind? What follows are two lists that describe what is challenging and also what is beneficial in planning the departure of your projects.

Why is it so hard to imagine the end of the life of a project?

- You might connect your identity with the art projects that you make; you might feel that you are erasing a fundamental part of your identity when, and if, you discard or repurpose your art projects. Confronting the loss and grief associated with the departure of your projects is terrifying.
- You might want to justify your choice to become an artist. You might believe that an artist without projects that can continue to circulate is not an artist at all.
- You might want to justify the amount of time, expense, and priority that you have given to your art practice by imagining that your projects will be of social or monetary value before you die, or after your death, and will support your children or extended family.
- You might hope that your projects will be “discovered” and acquired by elite institutions before you die, as it is in this phase that your projects might accrue both monetary and symbolic value. You might have spent or borrowed so much money (being trained to make it, making it, storing it, moving it) that you

- cannot imagine a departure without some form of compensation.
- Your projects might be acquired by museums or private collections and you will not be able to determine their departure. They may be deaccessioned (taken out of the collection) but you will likely have relinquished rights to their future.
- You might feel that because art institutions lack collections of projects by people like you, including women and People of Color, it is important to maintain and not enable the departure of your projects.⁹
- You might be afraid that the excitement surrounding a new idea that propels you forward will be thwarted if you begin a project by imagining its departure.
- What else?

You might plan for the departure of your project because:

- Your project only exists within the moment and place where it is created; you see your project as site- and time-specific, not able to be moved, preserved, or re-performed.
- You might see acts of making as part of a cycle of life and death, of a continuum of transformed but connected matter. *See Chapter 8: Understanding the Lifecycle Framework from Multiple Perspectives for what Robin Wall Kimmerer refers to as “a life for a life.”*
- You might work with materials that are ephemeral or biodegradable.
- You know that when you allow your project to depart you will no longer be controlled by an obsession with its acquisition or have anxiety about its departure.
- You might want to practice non-attachment to objects, in order to live in the present.
- If you make large objects, you might want to save money by allowing your project to depart early in its life, rather than moving, storing, and maintaining it for years.
- You might believe in an afterlife or a haunting for your project that requires its careful departure. For example, if your work involves a highly charged image, perhaps you want to think through the ways that viewers will let that memory go at a dinner or ritual.
- The conditions which enabled your project to make meaning are no longer present. For example, you made an anti-capitalist mural in a site that has gentrified and the mural is now used for luxury advertisements and tourism.

Although you might plan to incorporate the final departure into a project itself, many questions remain about how to ethically dispose of what is no longer wanted. Being aware of these questions can help you confront the fantasies of immortality inherent in what it means to be a cultural producer. In conclusion, the questions raised by the lifecycle phase depart are complicated and on-going for artists.

- How might your projects change if you created them with the final departure in mind?
- Would you create your project for a specific landfill, compost site, shredder, meal, or burning event?
- What would change in our spaces of learning if we discussed the consequences of making fewer projects or making projects with a specific lifespan?

Quotations

Very few artists practice an intentional departure of their projects or write about it. Please send us quotations if you find any, so that we can add them to the next edition of this book.

“It is an extraordinary gift for you [Barbara Hammer, to talk about death] because we don’t think about these things.... I refuse to let go of you, but I will let go of me, when the time comes.”

—Shelley Silver, 2018¹⁰

“When you die you will forget your own birthday. When you die you will stop watching the block. When you die you will reach the peak of self-improvement. When you die you will find a permanent solution. When you die you will never feel the pain of unrequited love. When you die you will have plenty of alone time. When you die you will lose all your wrinkles. When you die you will stop searching. When you die you will break down. When you die you will be always there. When you die you will not be scared to die.”

—Lindsay Tunkl, 2015¹¹

“One of the things I talk about is to look at the ways in which this work can live in the world. Once the show is over, once I leave town, and once these partnerships or relationships are developed, we can begin ... does it make sense to develop other projects and other kinds of connections?” —Sekou Sundiata¹²

“I am also interested in impermanence, at directing our attention to what is compelling within a state of decay or disintegration. The sculptures that are gradually lowered into the pool of ink will collapse, sink and flake apart slowly while the remaining sculptures will dissolve almost instantly when we walk them out of the museum and directly into the bay at the close of the exhibition.”

—John Grade, 2015¹³

“Cut out the eye from a photograph of one who has been loved but is seen no more. Attach the eye to the pendulum of a metronome and regulate the weight to suit the tempo desired. Keep going to the limit of endurance. With a hammer well-aimed, try to destroy the whole thing at a single blow.” —Man Ray, 1932¹⁴

“Art which contains within itself an agent which automatically leads to its destruction within a period of time not to exceed twenty years. Other forms of auto-destructive art involve manual manipulation. There are forms of auto-destructive art where the artist has a tight control over the nature and timing of the disintegrative process, and there are other forms where the artist’s control is slight.”

—Gustav Metzger, 1959¹⁵

“I’ve done many works but now, my work has shifted toward the transformation of that landfill into safe, public space. That has focused, after all these years, on a project called, Landing.... And you know, I have come to feel that that will be the conclusion of my work at the Sanitation Department. I actually feel very good about that. I’m ready for the end of my relationship. I’ve gone through I think seven or eight Sanitation Commissioners. I mean actually feel very good that we’ve worked out a way for this to turn into a permanent work. It’ll be the first permanent artwork at this park, which won’t be ready to be completely open for the next 20–30 years, so it’ll be like a first piece there. And that’s enough, I’m really ready. I’m really ready for this to be concluded. And the Sanitation Department feels the same way. We’ve spoken about it. I hope they continue to bring in many artists, it’s just a great place. I love them, but that’s it for me. It’s ready to be finished. I feel it’s ready to be over, and they feel that way also.” —Mierle Laderman Ukeles, 2017¹⁶

Here are more artists, groups, and projects that come to mind when we think about depart: Dee Hibbert-Jones / Sibyl Kempson / Michael Landy / Connie Mabelson / Gustav Metzger / Nelson Molina / MycoWorks / Dennis Oppenheim / Claire Pentecost / Christopher Robbins /

The Salvage Art Institute / Daniel Spoerri / Celeste Wilson / David Wojnarowicz. What artists, groups, and projects come to mind for you?

Reflection

1. Looking at the list of reasons that you might be terrified of or in support of imagining the end of the life of your projects, which ideas are you drawn to, and why?
2. Under what conditions would you decide that your project needed to be destroyed or erased?
3. * 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.*⁷
4. 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. For a summary of the cultural neoliberalization of Berlin, see Quinn Slobodian and Michelle Sterling, "Sacking Berlin," *The Baffler*, no. 23 (August 2013), <http://www.thebaffler.com/salvos/sacking-berlin>.
2. Lutz Henke, "Why We Painted over Berlin's Most Famous Artwork Graffiti," *The Guardian*, December 19, 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/dec/19/why-we-painted-over-berlin-graffiti-kreuzberg-murals>.
3. Leigh Claire La Berge, "Introduction," in *Wages Against Artwork: Decommodified Labor and the Claims of Socially Engaged Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 2–3.
4. 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=uL17q6bj10>.
5. Annie Leonard, "Story Of Stuff, Referenced and Annotated Script," 2018, <https://storyofstuff.org/wp-content/uploads/movies/scripts/Story%20of%20Stuff.pdf>, 10. Leonard references "Why Consumption Matters" by Betsy Taylor and Dave Tilford, in *The Consumer Society Reader*, 1st ed, eds. Juliet B Schor and Douglas Holt, 463–487 (New York, NY: The New Press, 2000) 467.
6. Barry Allen, "The Ethical Artifact: On Trash," in *Alphabet City Magazine II*, ed. John Knechtel (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 201–202.
7. For example, see Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: the Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972: A Cross-Reference Book of Information on Some Esthetic Boundaries* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1973); Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," *October* 8 (Spring 1979): 30–44.
8. Christina Xu, "Your Project Deserves a Good Death," *Medium*, May 19, 2015, <https://medium.com/chrysaora-weekly/your-project-deserves-a-good-death-f345026b6e77>.
9. See Mary Carole McCauley, "Baltimore Museum of Art to Sell Works by Masters such as Andy Warhol, Will Aim to Improve Artist Diversity," *The Baltimore Sun*, April 13, 2018, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/entertainment/arts/bs-fe-bma-sells-artworks-20180413-story.html>.
10. Shelley Silver, "The Art of Dying Or (Palliative Art Making in the Age of Anxiety)" (at the Whitney Museum, New York, NY, October 10, 2018), video, 56:36, available <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMeoAx9dZkl>.
11. Lindsay Tunkl, *When You Die You Will Not Be Scared to Die* (Berkeley, CA: California Parallax Press, 2018), 11.
12. Sekou Sundiata, *The America Project: A Teaching Method for Collaboration, Creativity and Citizenship*, dance and be still arts, 2009, 30, available, https://issuu.com/buscada/docs/the_america_project_teaching_method.
13. John Grade, "Interview with John Grade," by The Blind Architect, *Empty Kingdom*, May 18, 2015, <http://www.emptykingdom.com/featured/ek-interview-john-grade/>.
14. Man Ray, *This Quarter* 1 (September 1932), 55, quoted in Tate's description of *Indestructible Object*, 1923, remade 1933, editioned replica 1965, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/man-ray-indestructible-object-t07614>. This quote refers to the *Indestructible Object*, 1933.
15. Gustav Metzger, "auto-destructive art manifesto," 1960, republished on *Radical Art*, <http://radicalart.info/destruction/metzger.html>.
16. Mierle Laderman Ukeles, "Interview with Mierle Laderman Ukeles," by Renee Piechockie and Norie Sato, *Public Art Dialogue*, January 26, 2017, <https://publicartdialogue.org/newsletter/winter-2017/interview-mierle-laderman-ukeles>.