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# Chapter Sixteen

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## Tools




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**PRACTICE  
ENVISIONING...**

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**DON'T FORGET  
TO EAT.**

**...AS YOU MAKE  
A TOOL FROM A  
FOUND OBJECT.**





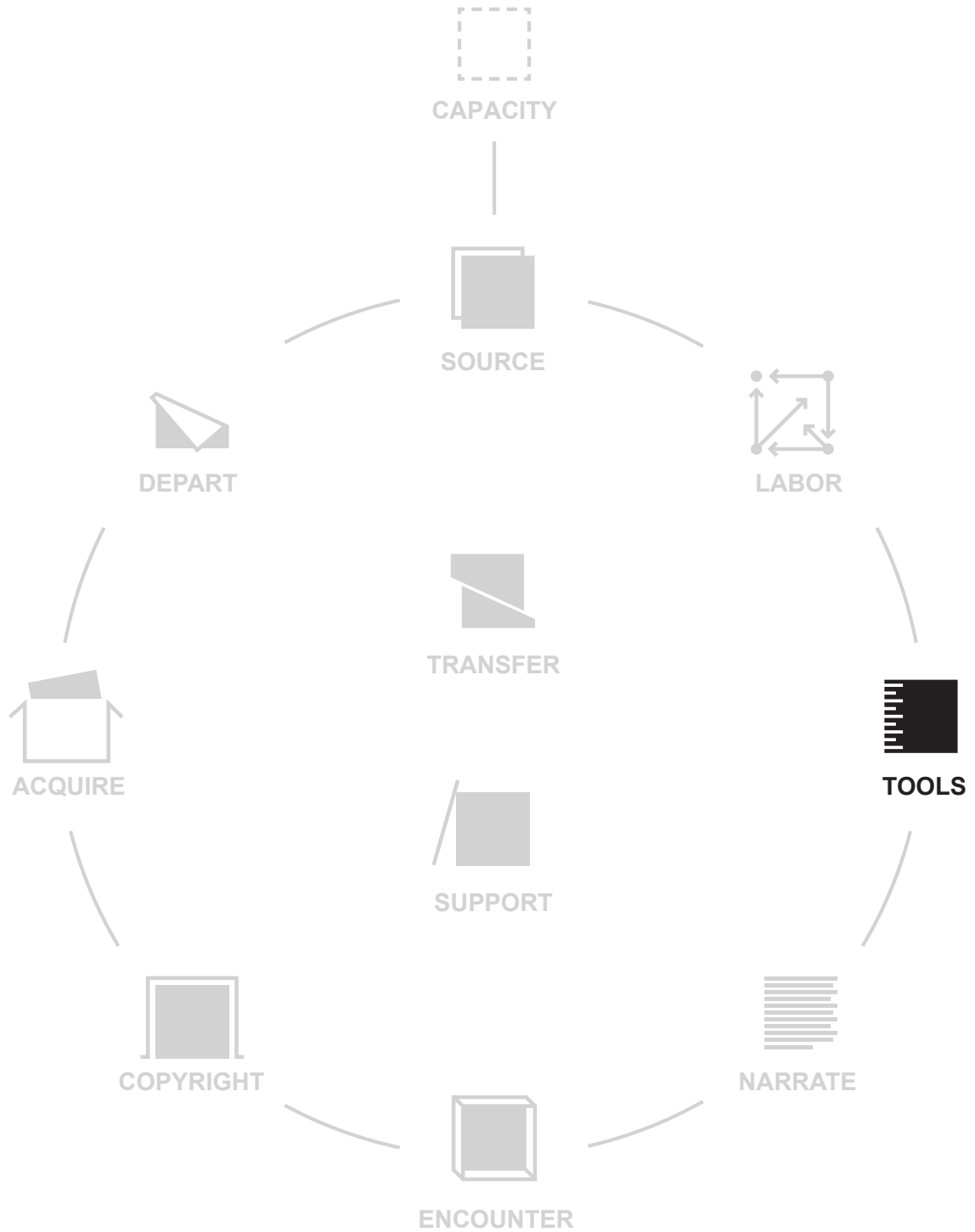
Tools: the devices or implements used in your project.

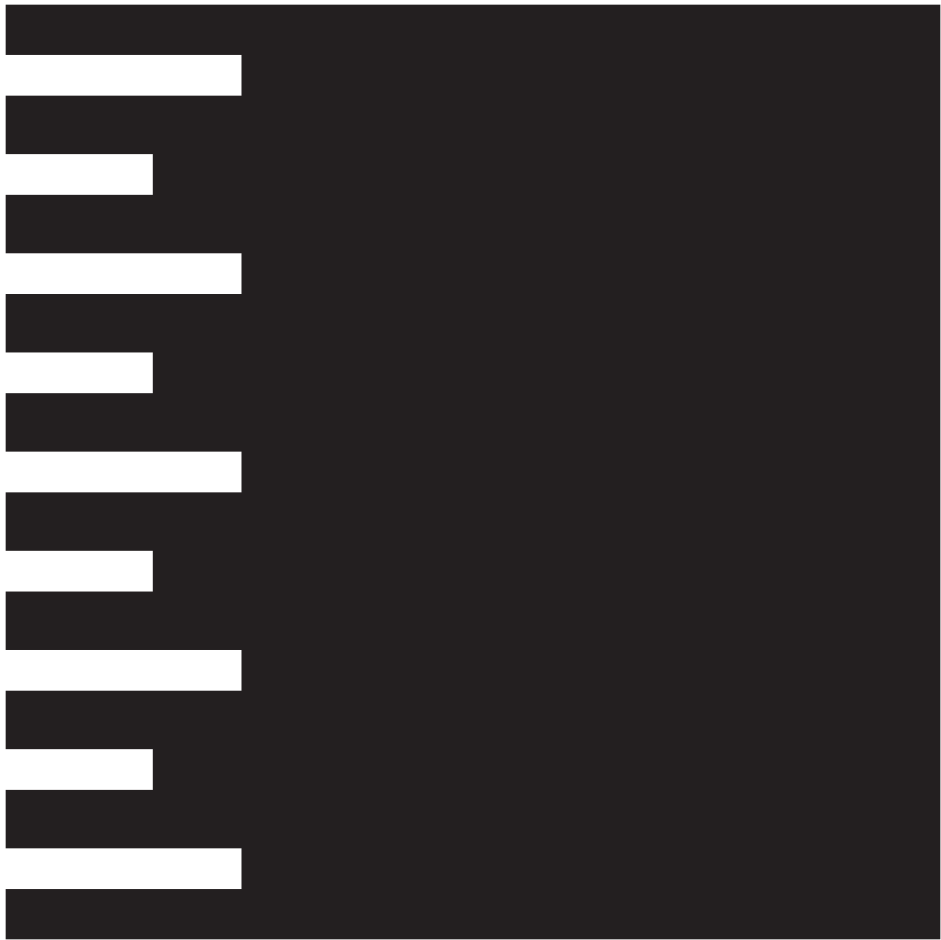
Examples of places to access tools include: a school, your studio, tool libraries, maker spaces, and artist-run studio spaces.

What if access to tools 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 “tools” considers the devices or implements used in your project. Tools determine the scale, quality, and formal constraints of your projects. If you are a painter or a filmmaker, and your projects are medium-specific, you will get to know your tools intimately. For example, the collaborative duo Ryan and Trevor Oakes create their own paint brushes and easel-helmet-drawing-machine, inspired by historical camera lucida devices, for their drawing and painting. They have said that “the paper needed to be spherically concave so that the length from your eye to the paper was equidistant for all points on the surface of the paper. We had all these grand ideas of what we could do with it, and the natural course of things led to building our first easel, in May of 2004.”<sup>2</sup> If your medium changes with each project, and you are a project-based artist, your tools might range from graphic-design software to sewing machines to paint brushes. Project-based artists often rely upon work-for-hire contractors or fabrication companies—in these cases the tools are not available to the artist because they are used by the fabricator.<sup>3</sup>

## Story

Oscar Rene Cornejo makes sculptures with traditional Japanese joinery techniques and woodcuts with Japanese printmaking techniques, that require chisels, hand saws, and wooden mallets. An understanding of painting techniques has given him flexibility in creating pigments and dyes from surrounding plants and earth, using nontoxic binders such as milk, eggs, honey, and gum arabic. Cornejo travels for residencies, self-created opportunities, and workshops, and has created a working method with hand tools. As he says, “I like that idea of not needing electricity, and just using manual labor to create things.... It gives agency to me. I’m not relying on a power tool.”<sup>4</sup> In being present with materials and tools, often on his own for days in the studio, Cornejo embodies the capacity that we call “calmness” or “I am able to practice grounding, centeredness, a sense of ease of being, and equanimity.”<sup>5</sup> See *Chapter 5: Capacities*  and *Chapter 10: Source*  for more on Oscar Rene Cornejo.

## Discussion

Think about the tools that you currently have access to at work, at school, or in a space of learning. Now think about how these tools shape the projects you make? When you graduate from school, or leave that job or space of learning, what tools will you miss? You will likely have to adapt

your practice in relation to the tools available to you. If you are a sculptor, you may have to go from building large objects that require large tools to creating performances in public spaces that do not require any tools at all. You might decide to get together with your peers to collectively purchase expensive and large-scale tools for experimentation. Many artists seek jobs at schools with good tools because they cannot access them otherwise. You might choose a future job, internship, or volunteer position with specialized tools precisely because:

- You will be able to access tools that would otherwise be prohibitively expensive to rent or buy,
- You have a desire to have less environmental impact,
- You have a desire to adhere to alternative economic models and philosophies, enabling many people to have access to collective tools,
- You want to have a range of skills,
- They ensure that you can follow through on the capacities you have committed to. *See Chapter 5: Capacities* for more.<sup>7</sup>

You might want to share your tools while you are in spaces of learning to follow an open-source ethos, make your process visible, or cultivate friendships so that you can continue the practice of sharing. The Public Lab<sup>6</sup> is a group of artists, designers, and citizen scientists that share and adapt open source tools, following the Free Culture Movement<sup>7</sup> of the 1990s “permission culture” mandate to distribute creative projects openly. As the Public Lab founding member Jeff Warren says:

We aim to demystify science. So our Public Lab spectrometer has a DVD inside it which is the core element of the spectrometer. The fact that we use a DVD instead of a specifically made refraction device from a scientific catalog anchors this object in everyday materials. You can just cut it with scissors. It’s so regular that it is very powerful.... Public Lab is a community where you can learn how to investigate environmental concerns using inexpensive DIY techniques. We seek to change how people see the world in environmental, social, and political terms.<sup>8</sup>

The Public Lab emphasizes the phase of the lifecycle that we call tools. They invite the general public to use tools that are readily available to them to collect data according to their community concerns. By working with tools that are accessible, The Public Lab engages the capacity that we call “Coordination / Collective Action,” defined as the ability “to take powerful, life-affirming actions rooted in shared values and



vision in teams, partnerships, and alliances. I remain responsive to evolving conditions.”<sup>9</sup>

If the tools that you and your peers might want are prohibitively expensive, you might be interested in the model developed by the group Publication Studio.<sup>10</sup> This international collective of artists uses budgets from short-term exhibitions to purchase materials *as well as* expensive printing, cutting, and bookbinding equipment that then becomes available to members of a local Publication Studio chapter at the end of the exhibition. When they are invited to an exhibition, for example, with a \$5,000 production budget, they buy equipment and then keep it at the end of the exhibition. Meerkat Media Collective has created a co-working space in Brooklyn with shared camera equipment that members can access for a fee. *See Chapter 5: Capacities* □, *Chapter 6: How Are You in the World and How Is the World in You?* and *Chapter 13: Labor* ▣ for more on Meerkat Media.<sup>7</sup> Many artists who collectively share a studio space also share tools within those spaces. What tools are collectively important to you and your peers and for what reasons have you chosen to work with them?

## Quotations

“Printmaking is a very social art medium because you need a lot of equipment. You need presses, you need large wash out stations, you need fans if you’re using solvents and that kind of thing. It’s a bit of an outlay of resources to have a print shop, so that’s why most print-makers work collaboratively and have a studio they share.”

—Linda Jules, 2016<sup>11</sup>

“I was so excited to share how Colorado technologies are being used in Colorado libraries. Our partnerships with local robotics, circuitry, and 3D printing companies have greatly increased the services we provide to youth and their families. Many of these technologies aren’t financially accessible for individual ownership within our service population, so the library acts as an access point for instruction and use. It’s incredible to see the level of creativity and collaboration that results from these partnerships!”

—Amber Holmes, technology support staff, Loveland Colorado Public Library, 2016<sup>12</sup>

“The finger gloves are made from such a light material, that I can move my fingers without effort. I feel, touch, grasp with them, yet keep a certain distance from the objects that I touch. The lever action of the lengthened fingers intensifies the sense of touch in the

hand. I feel myself touching, see myself grasping, and control the distance between myself and the objects”. —Rebecca Horn, 1997<sup>13</sup>

“I’m a watercolor and colored pencil kind of guy. Because I draw on the street, I keep my materials very small. I have a tiny watercolor set with few choices of color. I have to mix like crazy to get other shades. I would love to have more choices, but I just can only lug so much around with me.” —Tommy Kane, 2012<sup>14</sup>

Here are more artists, groups, and projects that come to mind when we think about tools: Ruth Maxon Adams / Appalshop / Alicia Constance Austin / Berkeley’s Tool Lending Library / DeeDee Halleck / Fab Foundation / Farm Hack / Matthew Friday / Charlotte Perkins Gilman / Gowanus Print Lab / The In-Sight Photography Project / Judith Leeman / Zoe Romano / Reinhold Martin / Paper Tiger / Community TV Station / The Public Lab / Paul Ryan / Oscar Schlemmer / Spurse / Superflex / Noam Toran. What artists, groups, and projects come to mind for you?

## Reflection

1. What tools are collectively important to you and your peers and for what reasons have you chosen to work with them?
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. Fab Labs, "Fab Central," <http://fab.cba.mit.edu/>.
2. Trevor and Ryan Oakes, quoted in Damien James, "The Magic Easel," *Chicago Reader*, October 23, 2008, <https://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/the-magic-easel/Content?oid=1105930>.
3. Art programs are in the midst of debates around the necessity of maintaining and resupplying craft tools like looms and ceramic kilns. Other discussions involve thinking through the pedagogical implications of theme-based classes versus sequential learning.
4. Oscar Rene Cornejo, interview by BFAMFAPhD members, BFAMFAPhD, at the artist's studio, Bronx, NY, April, 2018, transcript by Ruby Mayer, Poughkeepsie, NY.
5. Capacity from Daniel P. Barbezat and Mirabai Bush, *Contemplative Practices in Higher Education: Powerful Methods to Transform Teaching and Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014). Adapted in dialogue with Maia Duerr and Carrie Bergman of The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. See *Chapter 5: Capacities for more*.
6. Public Lab, "Methods," Public Lab, <https://publiclab.org/methods>.
7. Free Culture Wiki, s.v. "Free Culture Manifesto," [http://wiki.freeculture.org/Free\\_Culture\\_Manifesto](http://wiki.freeculture.org/Free_Culture_Manifesto).
8. Jeff Warren, personal conversation, at the University of Hartford, February 27, 2018.
9. Capacity adapted with the permission of Alta Starr and Staci Haines, from Generative Somatics, Somatic Transformation and Social Justice, "Courses," <http://www.generativesomatics.org/content/courses>. See *Chapter 5: Capacities for more*.
10. Publication Studio, "Publication Studio," <http://www.publicationstudio.biz>.
11. Linda Jules, quoted in "Printmaking Is a Very Social Art Medium Because You Need a Lot of Equipment," *Kamloops This Week*, October 28, 2016, <http://www.kamloopsthisweek.com/entertainment/printmaking-is-a-very-social-art-medium-because-you-need-a-lot-of-equipment-1.23216872>.
12. Amber Holmes, quoted in Rebecca Cruz, "COLab: Making at PLA 2016," Public Libraries Online, May 23, 2016, <http://publiclibrariesonline.org/2016/05/colab-making-at-pla-2016/>.
13. Rebecca Horn and Carl Haenlein, eds., *The Glimpse of Infinity* (Zurich: Scalo Publishers, 1997), 58.
14. Tommy Kane, "Blog Post," *The Tools Artist's Use*, 2012, <http://thetoolsartistsuse.com/2012/08/tommy-kane/>.