Chapter Eight

Understanding the Lifecycle Framework From Multiple Perspectives
In Chapter 7: Lifecycle Phases and Framework, we defined the lifecycle and its ten phases.

In this chapter, we will describe the ways in which the lifecycle framework draws upon the work of contemporary cultural theorists, art historians, feminist economists, philosophers, and engineers and designers. Specifically, we will touch upon three fields of inquiry—cultural theory, engineering, and philosophy—to provide entry points from which you can pursue further research.

While this approach is cursory, we are providing these brief introductions to create a shared understanding about the lifecycle from multiple perspectives.

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.
The lifecycle framework asks you think about an art project as more than an object or experience. What if any art project were actively perceived as a system of relationships? For example, when you look at a painting or a sculpture, or watch a video or a performance, think about all of the people who labored to get that art project into the place where you encounter it and of all of the materials that were sourced to create the work. How might this change the way you make projects? Adrian Piper created her own “Conditions of Production,” or rules for the production and circulation of her work. See Chapter 7: Lifecycle Phases and Framework for a reminder of Piper’s work.

The idea that “art is a system of relationships” has a long history, ranging from art historian Otto Karl Werckmeister’s Marxist historical materialism to Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of art. This history suggests that culture is always produced in relationship to political and economic conditions. The contemporary cultural theorist Martin Irvine has created a list of reasons that someone might value “an institutional approach for understanding the cultural category of Art,” including that this approach:

- “Provides a way of describing the social and economic conditions that make art possible today;
- Opens up analysis of the artwork itself as being constituted by a complex field of forces that are not visible in the art object itself, but are the grounds of possibility for art to appear for us at all;
- Allows for a constitutive, contingent, and interdependent view;
- Situates art, artmaking, art exhibition, and the art market in a large social and economic field of interdependent communities of social actors, whose exchanges and working agreements constitute the art world as such; and
- Removes solitary individual agency (artist, art viewer) from the question of art (what is art? how does a work become art? does it have to be good to be art?).

While institutional theories of art resonate with Adrian Piper’s “meta-art,” philosophers, theorists, and historians, rarely consider how artists—like Piper—might create art that is always already fully aware of the systems it circulates within. The lifecycle foregrounds art as a system of relationships. If you think of art as a system of relationships, what will change about the ways that you make art? We hope that the lifecycle framework might help you to explore both who you are becoming as you make projects and also what the project is becoming as it takes shape and circulates in the world.

In her recent book, *Wages Against Artwork*, the critical theorist
Leigh Claire La Berge adds to W. J. T. Mitchell’s already expansive “definition of medium, to include ‘not just the canvas and the paint but the stretcher and the studio, the gallery, the museum, the collector, the dealer-critic system’” ... [but also] a condition of possibility for the creation and circulation of artworks, namely the cost of training as an artist. If you understand art as a “system of relationships,” as George Dickie and many other art historians posit, you can create projects while “zooming out,” considering “meta-art,” or taking a holistic approach to making and thinking about projects. In 1982, the cultural theorist Howard Becker wrote that “the artist thus works in the center of a network of cooperating people, all of whose work is essential to the final outcome.”

**Solidarity Economies**

Artists are familiar with the invisibility that arises from working all day in order to make art without pay. Sculptor and printmaker Oscar Rene Cornejo described his father’s reaction to his desire to be an artist, rather than an architect, in an interview with us:

Dad would be like, “are you gonna eat the drawing? How are you gonna make a living?” He’s been working on plantations since he was four, five years old. Same with my mother. He only went up to second grade. So I lied [and said,] “I’m going to Cooper [Union], I’m gonna get an architecture degree. Once I get in with art I’m gonna transfer to architecture, and I’m gonna build, get the houses, and, you know, roof all of them.” ... so that was a lie to get ‘em off my back.

Oscar has the capacity that we refer to as “engage and persist,” or “I challenge myself to embrace my artmaking problems and to develop a distinct focus within my work.” Your daily practices of engaging with your imagination, making art, and refining your skills without immediate remuneration are often not legible to the people around you whose only register for legitimate work is through a wage, an employer, and a business.

When someone asks you, “What do you do?” and you answer, “I’m an artist,” they often ask, “But what do you really do?” This follow-up question implies that being an artist cannot be a real job, meaning that being an artist is not a wage-earning enterprise. This is similar to the question “What does your mother (or primary caregiver) do?” and the answer, if your mother (or primary caregiver) feeds and raises children, is, “Nothing,” because your mother (or primary caregiver) is not paid. See Chapter 12: Transfer for more.

This question (What do you really do?) and the answer about housework (“Nothing”) denies all of the ways in which people and communities
meet their needs together, reproduce the workforce, and produce culture on a daily basis. The theory of social reproduction describes how the production of life and living at home and the production of goods and services in capitalist markets are interconnected processes. In order for workers to return to work each day, they need care: food, a place to sleep, and a sense of emotional well-being. See Chapter 9: Support for a more detailed description of social reproduction. The Community Economies Collective, an international collective of feminist geographers, uses an iceberg to describe the aspects of our daily practices (including making art) that are made invisible by questions like “What do you really do?” They visualize all of the necessary but often uncompensated practices that are made invisible, including caregiving, raising food, oral traditions, the arts, and gift-giving. They write:

A vast and varied array of economic practices support lives in the world. We have used the Diverse Economy Iceberg as one way of representing how substantive economic practices are far more diverse than what is captured by mainstream economics. Economies involve a wide range of people, processes, sites, and relationships. What is usually referred to as “the economy” is just the tip of this diverse economy iceberg. The language of the diverse economy allows us to identify actually-existing spaces of negotiation and to demonstrate how saying that we live in a capitalist world or a capitalist system is to negate the ways that other possible worlds are already all around us. Within a diverse “more than capitalist” economy, we can discern multiple pathways that are being used to build these other possible worlds. We approach these examples, not with a judging stance, but with an open stance to the possibilities they contain.

Which aspects of the “underwater” section of the iceberg diagram are important to your daily needs, and the needs of the people around you, and why?

What might be called a “diverse economy” or a “community economy” by the Community Economies Collective or an “alternative” economy in the United States is known in many countries—in Brazil, Argentina, Spain, and Canada, for example—as the solidarity economy. The term “solidarity economy” emerged in the Global South (as “economia solidária”) in the 1990s and spread globally as an interdependent movement after the first annual World Social Forum, which was held in Brazil in 2001 and which popularized the slogan “another world is possible.” The solidarity economy is recognized as a way to unite grassroots practices like lending circles, credit unions, worker cooperatives, and
Community Economies Collective Economy Iceberg by Topos Graphics for BFAMFAPhD. Variations of this diagram have been used by artists and arts collectives ranging from William Powhida to Katherine Böhm, from Temporary Services to the Precarious Workers Brigade.
community land trusts to form a base of political power. In the United States, the solidarity economy is sometimes referred to as the community economy, the workers’ economy, the social economy, the new economy, the circular economy, the regenerative economy, the local peace economy, and the cooperative economy. Simply stated, the solidarity economy is a system that places people before profit, aiming to distribute power and resources equitably.\(^\text{13}\)

In Brazil, Argentina, Spain, and Canada, many artists and arts collectives make their work in direct relationship to the solidarity economy. For example, Fora do Eixo (translated as “Out of Axis”) in Brazil began as a “collective of collectives” during the first World Social Forum with a desire to restructure the music industry to be more equitable and self-sustaining. The group now operates as a social movement with goals for policy change and shared technology across initiatives throughout Brazil. Felipe Altenfelder of Fora do Eixo describes the start of the group with a local currency, or complementary currency system, in the following way:

As we systematized the partnership, it became clear how the solidarity economy works. Imagine you need a poster to communicate something from your work and you also have an amplifier. If you have a friend who is a musician and a designer, he needs the amplifier to play music with his band. So you two can trade a certain amount of hours of the amplifier for a new poster. Or, even if you don’t need anything right now, you have “credit” with that person. The exchange happened without anyone taking anything from the wallet.\(^\text{1}\)

I think what made us get here with such force—strength which will continue—is the notion that, if your goal is to arrive at some specific place, when you do get there, you’ll forget your origins. We don’t want that. Thus, the goal becomes much more about collecting and systematizing new ways and solutions, which means we are interested in the HOW to act and make social interventions much more than WHERE we want to reach. In terms of numbers, the cultural circuit that we are part of today consists of a network of over 200 collectives, involving 2,000 people, 130 festivals performed annually, upwards of 5,000 shows, and the promotion and circulation of 30,000 artists per year, at least.\(^\text{14}\)

This way, a set of social struggles finds in the cultural field an environment of connection and articulation, and a communication source that renews—even aesthetically—social movements and political debate. Agendas and goals of other movements gain notoriety from the systematization stimulated by Fora do Eixo.\(^\text{14}\)
Chapter Eight: Lifecycle Phases and Framework

The Lifecycle Framework: Lifecycle Framework.

Solidarity Economy Diagram by Topos Graphics for BFAMFA PhD. Adapted from Ethan Miller’s Solidarity Economy Diagram.

Solidarity Arts Economy

Wisdom
Earth, soil, water, air
Culture
Collective Ownership of Land

The commons

D.I.Y.
Collectives
Worker Co-ops
Producer Co-ops
Not-for-profit

Gift
Barter

Community Currency
Sliding Scale Pricing
Solidarity Markets
Fair Trade

Consumer Co-ops
Collectively run galleries and spaces
Community supported arts (CSAs)
Ethical Purchasing

Co-op Banks
Rotating Savings
Composting
Community Reinvestment
Credit Unions

Use

Exchange

Production

Surplus
The Lifecycle Framework

Chapter Eight: Lifecycle Phases and Framework
A number of artists in the United States directly connect their practices to the global solidarity economy movement. For example, New York-based artists Gabriela Ceja and Fran Ilich, who founded the Diego de la Vega Coffee Co-op, state that their work on solidarity economies came about because, “we decided that we need another culture, another production.”15 Like Fora do Eixo, Ceja and Ilich connect their work both to the field of art and to ongoing struggles for economic justice. Oakland-based artist Stephanie Syjuco reminds viewers that contemporary art cannot be separated from global labor markets. Syjuco describes her 2007–2018 Counterfeit Crochet (Critique of a Political Economy) project, in which she created a website soliciting crocheters to join her in hand-counterfeiting designer handbags, as “an ongoing global project, with makers in from all over the world accessing downloadable PDFs and instruction sheets ... in 2007 the project travelled to Manila, Beijing, and Istanbul for exhibitions and counterfeiting workshops.”16 The Antwerp-based artist Otobong Nkanga, who often visualizes global material flows in sculptural installations and performances, included the following text to describe a sense of global interdependence in her 2017 exhibition The Breath From Fertile Grounds, at Temple Bar Gallery + Studios in Dublin:

If I connect to you  
If I am consumed by you  
If I crumble with you  
Then what do we call us?  
What can we become?17

The solidarity economy diagram and the lifecycle framework visualize solidarity economies, showing the ways in which human and non-human resources flow. They allow us to see the range of practices that nurture life, support and sustain relationships, and build direct democracy. The ten phases that we focus on in this book (and that we explore in the life of any project) are inspired by the Community Economies Collective member Ethan Miller’s diagram to depict the “solidarity economy.” Notice that the Solidarity Economy diagram starts with creation and moves into production, exchange, consumption, and surplus allocation. This mirrors our emphasis on source, and labor, then transfer, and encounter, and the final emphasis on depart in our lifecycle framework.

We use the terms “solidarity economy” and “community economy” rather than the “new economy” or “alternative economy” throughout this book because this framework connects the “production” of culture to a grassroots theory of social change that honors the power of interpersonal action and interdependence. Like the Community Economies Collective, we aim to participate in “theorizing, representing, and enacting new
visions of economy” rather than seeing our actions as insignificant or irrelevant. J. K. Gibson-Graham, founder of the Community Economies Collective, as well as Jenny Cameron and Stephen Healy write in *Take Back the Economy* that “reframing the economy is a critical step in building community economies. By seeing the economy not as a machine but as the day-to-day processes that we all engage in as we go about securing what we need to materially function, it’s clear that the economy is created by the actions we take.”19 Our process makes us and our worlds, as much as our process results in new projects.

Again, art is a system of relationships. We believe that your actions have an impact on the network of friendships, institutions, organizations that your projects move through. You (and your projects) will interact with hundreds of people as you (and they) move through institutions, even though you might not ever meet the people who help those institutions function. On the following page, see a diagram of institutions and organizations that might be involved in your project in some way:

While many artists implicitly focus on one phase in the lifecycle of their project, the visual arts lack a common vocabulary and framework that makes a holistic approach to production explicit and open to discussion. As the visual artist Kate Rich says, “Artists are extremely good at playing with form in the area of content, I suggest it is time we get our acts together with an equal attention to the containers in which the art work takes place. That includes getting equally creative with the often overlooked art materials of administration, regulation, transactions, organisational form, etc.”

**Engineering and Design**

While the concept of a lifecycle or of a community economy in visual arts education is rarely discussed, closed-loop systems design and supply chains are familiar concepts in schools of engineering and design. William McDonough and Michael Braungart popularized “lifecycle analysis” for designers, engineers, and manufacturers in the early 2000s, referring to the lifecycle as a closed-loop system that flows in a circular way from “cradle to cradle” so that waste can become a source material.21 McDonough and Braungart’s work popularized environmentally conscious production, altering the ways designers and engineers think about supply chains. This is often called the “circular economy,” because it moves from the linear, industrial model of “take-make-waste” to a model of “make-consume-enrich.” We borrow the term “lifecycle” from the fields of engineering and design because they both have an established discourse around systems of production that attempt to prioritize ecological sustainability. As the cultural theorist Barry Allen writes in his article “The
Circular Economy by Topos Graphics for BFAMFAPhD. Adapted from William McDonough and Michael Braungart.
Ethical Artifact: On Trash, “Works can be made to recycle, designed to cooperate ... instead of being made (as they increasingly are) with indifference to reuse ... the best trash is trash we are prepared to care for.”

We know that for many artists this is challenging, but also a priority. With the rise of autoimmune conditions, many people have chemical sensitivities to materials and want to make projects that are healthy for their bodies and the bodies of others. Many people want to create projects that support the slowing of climate change and the restoration of a healthy planet. At the same time we also recognize that many projects cannot be repurposed or taken apart to create source materials for new projects in a closed-loop system. Again, we use the term “lifecycle” to focus on the entire “life” of a project, but we do not use it to mandate zero-waste art production.

Negation

“That is craft or design education, not arts education.”

The historical divide between craft, design, and art in higher education in the United States continues to create formal and cultural divides in art school today. Rather than focusing on whether our framework is best aligned with craft, design, or fine art, we encourage a discussion about how something becomes art, craft, or design, rather than if it is art, a discussion of method rather than of ontology.

You might have a strong reaction to the vector diagrams, illustrations, and graphics that we use in this book. The framework that we have created might feel too rigid, like a design method rather than the uncharted process of artmaking. Concepts like cradle-to-cradle production and systems-thinking are familiar to designers, but are mostly unknown to artists.

The idea that your production process might be a site of inquiry is familiar to craft pedagogies where processes and techniques are privileged. For example, many craft traditions are taught by sourcing the materials and growing them. From ceramicists who use local clay, to fiber artists who have dye gardens, to woodworkers who go out in the woods to select the tree that they will use in their project, the emphasis on process is well known to many craft artisans. While a distinction is often made between the pedagogical approaches in craft, design, and fine art classes, we draw from all three, allowing these approaches and disciplinary discourses to fluidly interact.
The lifecycle framework draws from Indigenous philosophies that account for matter and land as never separate from the body. While “new materialism” and “cradle-to-cradle” theories are often spoken about as new in relationship to European philosophical traditions, Indigenous scholars Eve Tuck, Marcia McKenzie, and Kate McCoy remind readers that “scholars of the indigenous will attest to the survival of alternative intellectual traditions in which the liveliness of matter is grasped as quite ordinary, both inside, and at the fringes of, European modernity.” European philosophical traditions’ practiced ignorance regarding Indigenous philosophy goes hand in hand with the erasure of Indigenous bodies and land. As authors, we recognize contradictions in this book—presenting European philosophical traditions alongside Indigenous philosophical traditions—as contradictions that we hope can be generative. See Chapter 6: How Are You in the World and How Is the World in You? for more about generative contradictions.

How might these contradictions lead to transformative action? Eve Tuck reminds readers that decolonization is not a metaphor; it is an everyday practice of recognizing the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples and struggling for Indigenous demands for repatriation. A commitment to decolonization includes active and ongoing struggles with Indigenous colleagues, artists, and activists. This is intersectional work which acknowledges that all suffering and all human dignity is interconnected. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

In Chapter 3: Who Do You Honor?, we honor Robin Wall Kimmerer, the scientist, writer, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, who shares a practice from the Citizen Potawatomi Nation that speaks to the profound capacity of reciprocity to build community with all living things. Dr. Kimmerer writes that, “in order to live, I must consume. That’s the way the world works, the exchange of a life for a life, the endless cycling between my body and the body of the world…. I am not the vibrant leaves on the forest floor—I am the woman with the basket, and how I fill it is a question that matters.” We bring Kimmerer’s teachings into our contexts, where they warn us against our own extractive, individualistic, and competitive tendencies in the arts and in the academy. By asking you to consider what you are taking, and how to give gifts, she might guide you toward an economy of mutuality.

The philosopher Jane Bennett challenges the dualisms in European philosophical traditions—between mind and body, human
and nonhuman—writing that all matter is alive and has agency. Bennett writes, “How would political responses to public problems change were we to take seriously the vitality of (nonhuman) bodies? By ‘vitality’ I mean the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—to not only impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own.”29 She suggests that a latent history of “vitality” exists within European philosophy. While Bennett presents all matter—from rocks to plastic cups, cars to people—in dynamic relationship, actively shaping our present and our future, she omits Indigenous scholarship. Art historians and scholars Jessica L. Horton and Janet Catherine Berlo insist that we learn from Indigenous “intellectual traditions in which material agencies have historically been integrated with notions of the human (as opposed to threatening or superseding the human, as suggested by recent discourses of the ‘posthuman’).”30 This approach may lead to an ethical rethinking of how political economies are organized around relentless growth. These scholars suggest that you pay attention to your production processes. Can you find different ways of making that don’t support overconsumption? How will you engage with the existing agencies of the vibrant matter around you? See Chapter 10: Source and Chapter 11: Depart for more.

We welcome additional negations as you work through this process. Let us know what comes up.

**Reflection**

1. Which of the researchers’ statements above—those of contemporary cultural theorists, feminist economists, philosophers, and engineers and designers—are you drawn to, and why?
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.

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.

The ten chapters that follow will provide an in-depth exploration of the ten phases of the lifecycle. In each chapter, we will introduce you to key discussions surrounding the phase, share quotations from interviews with contemporary artists who engage with that phase, and end with activities, assignments, and a reflection that relates to that phase. See Lifecycle Framework Diagram on p. 658.


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


23. “New materialism” is a term coined in the 1990s to describe a theoretical turn away from the persistent dualisms in modern and humanist traditions whose influences are present in much of cultural theory. See Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin, eds., “Interview with Karen Barad,” in *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies*, 48–70 (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2012), 48.


