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Unknown Unknowns (a Collection of ephemera from Deep Time University)

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Author
Ano, Michael

Publication Date
2017

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

UNKNOWN UNKNOWNS
(A collection of ephemera from Deep Time University)

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

in

Visual Arts

by

Michael Shigeya Ano

Committee in charge:

Grant Kester, Chair
Ricardo Dominguez, Co-Chair
Michael Trigilio
Brian D Goldfarb

2017
The Thesis of Michael Ano as it is listed on UCSD Academic Records is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Co-Chair

___________________________________________________________

Chair

University of California, San Diego

2017
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UNKNOWN UNKNOWNS (A collection of ephemera from Deep Time University)

by

Michael Shigeya Ano

Master in Fine Arts in Visual Arts

University of California, San Diego, 2017

Professor Grant Kester, Chair
Professor Ricardo Dominguez, Co-Chair

UNKNOWN UNKNOWNS (A collection of ephemera from Deep Time University) contemplates the role and effectiveness of the university and the museum in citizen making, specifically: the University of California, San Diego and the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego. It explores the ways a para-institution can cull the resources of each organization in hopes of creating more equitable distribution strategies and diverse curriculum. Focusing on two projects -- Deep Time University: All Syllabi and Intersession -- UNKNOWN UNKOWNS reflects on alternative and collaborative possible solutions.
PROLOGUE: THE HISTORY OF DEEP TIME UNIVERSITY

Chapter 1: The U

Eon continues "...but why?"

Trimalchio draws close to Eon.

"At the dawn of the millennia The U was not what we know today. It stunk, a rotting carcass. We thought them prized racehorses - but they had been doped up. Legs taped, shot full of testosterone, amphetamines, and steroids. Strange powerful beasts mutated by decades of incest and decadence.

Each region with their own iteration. With bizarre hierarchal systems expanding from our most inner circles to our furthest temporal reach. Providence, realm, township, corporation, and bazaar. Each selling paper. Some far more precious than others. Emblazoned by each officiant. Stamped in gold and weighted by its societal importance."

Trimalchio pauses for a moment. Sips his water and continues.

“You see it was as our draft. All were conscripted. Served our time at the factory. We trained in obscene conditions - through archaic methods. Labs, forums, massive coliseums built to indoctrinate us for the coming war.

Tribes sold their homes to send their young, from villages and created new ones. Many could not afford the cost and took on great amounts of debt. Asking bankers for funds that would allow their families to survive generations - but instead returned to what would be The U."
It was a strange time. No one questioned the process and we often reflected on our greatness. We had mastered information transmission and access. But there was a peculiar cancer growing within our great citadels.

It began with The U expanding. Creating outposts. Eventually converting former churches and great temples. The U's reach was endless and their message simple:

*You must be trained by The U to be a citizen.*

*You must graduate The U to work.*

*You must go to The U to survive.*

It seemed the best solution. The U had the support of the governments, the corporations, and the bankers. It made sense you went to school, then The U, then you could work and have a family.”

Eon speaks up, “But what about The Refuters? Didn’t they….”
Chapter 2: The Refuters

“Grab that and anything flammable.”

Quickly Ingrid, Angelica, Alon, and Ari ran around the dark lab searching and brought back anything they could find.

“I can’t believe we are doing this.”

“It’s the only choice they’ve given us.”

“I only needed two percent more to get an A. The U deserves it. I worked for years. Paid their dues. Sat through their training. And what did they give me? SHIT.”

“Two percent?! I just needed her to give me a few more points - so I could get the B+. Not even a percent. Fuck The U.”

“You could have gone to The Donar Kuppel…like Frank.”

“Yea, but you saw what happened to him. As soon as he walked in…”

“I would do it - but not for them. Not for an audience. Just so they can line their pockets with more of our blood. So they can watch it at home.”
“If I had gotten the A, then I’d have gotten the job at the plant. Had a family. A place to live.”

“I can’t wait for the new world. Deep Time University will be different.”

“Fuck it. I’ve been to Donor Kuppel. And I had to go back again. It’s all a trick. A big trap to keep us coming back - it’s all bullshit and it’s all fucked. The U is the same.”

Alon and Ari pour out the jugs onto the floor as Ingrid finishes the wiring. Angelica holds the door open as they all run out of the room quickly.

**Chapter 3: Deep Time University**

“Radical compensation. Radical hospitality. Radical collaboration. Radical education. Deep Time University is a beacon. In our moment, we know it will stand as a light tower. A model for future societies to construct their temples on, to build their families, to understand what it is to be a citizen.”

The provost continued, “Deep Time University is built from the remains of The U - recycled stones and ideas, structures re-fashioned. We did not burn down The U, we left a few pillars and posts to mark the territory.”

The provost pulls a small cloth from her pocket and wipes her brow, folds and returns it - briefly looking down to her notes.
“We looted the museums, the galleries, the theaters, the private and public collections. We stripped the paintings, sculptures, videos, and performances from vaults, walls, and crates. We brought them into what was The U. This would be our University!

It would be free. It would be accessible. It would be interesting. It would be transparent. It would teach us what we think we need to know. It would teach us what it means to be a good person, to be a good citizen. It would teach us what we really need to know to survive.”
UNKNOWN UNKNOWNS

UNKNOWN UNKNOWNS is an accumulation of performance documentation and sculptures exploring the university and museum as sites for citizen building. Focusing on the ongoing project *Deep Time University*, *UNKNOWN UNKNOWNS* formally addresses tactics of information distribution, platform development, and methods of pedagogy documentation – while, in parallel, meditating around the efficacy of each institution, potential alternatives to current pedagogical strategies, and other possible sites for citizen training.
INSTITUTIONAL PRODUCTIVITY

The earliest iterations of the university were meant to train citizens and create a knowledgeable, responsible community. It has now mutated into occupational training. The university has failed us as a tool for creating better citizens. It has failed to teach us about others outside of our circles of intimacy. It has failed to help us understand the multitude of connections between our specialized industries. The university is no longer the site to develop good citizenry, but a spectacular job training facility.

Alternatively, museums started off as collections of ego and narratives of conquest often by white European males, but just as the university has mutated, so has the museum. The museum has evolved into a site of immense cultural training and generosity. A site that promotes alternative and challenging dialogue and exchanges which regularly critique itself and its sponsors. The museum has evolved into an institution that welcomes all (assuming distance and admission are made accessible), cultivating an environment which can train more knowledgeable citizens.

Rather than continue the historic practice of institutional critique, Deep Time University (DTU) is invested in an ethos of institutional productivity. Institutional productivity is radical collaboration and generosity, radical openness and hospitality, radical labor and compensation. It is operating with transparency, exposing processes, hierarchies, and budgets. Institutional productivity is an acknowledgement of each others limits and an attempt to collapse the space between the individual and the institution.

Deep Time University is an alternative-learning platform, developing and sharing rhizomatic pedagogical learning strategies. A repository and archive for alternative syllabi, DTU promotes pedagogy which integrates the arts, sciences, and other contemporary knowledges equally. Deep Time University is a para-institution, operating in parallel to the
University and Museum, acting as a parasite culling the intellectual resources of each, and exploring pedagogical practices which neither institution could perform because of their natural limitations. *Deep Time University* re-affirms that all art is pedagogical; contrary to pedagogy, which is often not artful. Curricula are typically guided by a syllabus – a PDF or printed document. What if that document was an art object, video, lecture, workshop, talk, or performance?
A COLLECTION OF OBJECTS

The space of the performance resides within the observer - the space of unseen magic, of fictionalized anecdotes, of imagination and unknown. The transmission of ideas and its correlative relationship to systems of power demand alternative platforms for information distribution in order to explore how ideas and people connect, as well as to ask whether pedagogical methods can more fully democratize the diffusion of learning.

A modest assortment of objects and videos will represent Deep Time University - four videos, a banner, and a collection of objects will be exhibited at The Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego. The abundance of documentation composes a constellation of positions that can be laced together to shape a vision of what could have happened at the Che Café on April 12th.

Four videos occupy the space - a Facebook live stream, an edited survey of the day, and two collections of commercials advertising the event at Che Café. Their audio is piped into the gallery and to the adjacent train station. (The exterior audio has ended up being a great surprise in activating temporary audiences and thinking through distribution methods.) Together they produce a cacophony of image and sound, a barrage of folk moving, learning, teaching, making, exchanging, lecturing, discussing, debating, performing, writing, and, most importantly - sharing time with each other. Over moments of observation a multitude of pedagogical strategies will be demonstrated, found wanting, tried again, with a few successes and moments of translucence.

Each video has its own stylistic tone with the commercials being the most pedestrian-riffing on pop culture television shows exploring the unknown, and daytime university commercials. The Deep Time University (video commercials), 2017 focus on the X-Files, Twin Peaks, and Devry commercials as models. They contemplate how is the unknown
advertised, how is learning commoditized, and what sounds and images draw folk into wanting to know more? The two other videos are gleaned from ambient footage and Facebook live stream content. *Deep Time University (video survey), 2017* offers a succinct narrative of each workshop and the day at the Che Cafe. Titles and captions paginate the video, introducing each faculty member, leading to a brief survey of their seminar. The video survey gives a sense of getting to experience the day at the Che- but its briefness and editing mean that nearly all of the content has been neutered. The final video *Deep Time University (video Facebook live)* is an eight-hour video with only three cuts. A single camera moves through the event, cutting only every three hours or so - the durational limit created by a battery and not film. The three videos strung together to form a seven hour marathon of wandering in and out of seminars. Audio from *Deep Time University (video Facebook live), 2017* fills the space with its chatter, lectures, and interviews – always reminding of the fervent activity of that day.

Contained within *Box in a Suitcase, 2017* is a modest collection of art objects, reproductions, ephemera, and notes which were developed by faculty of Deep Time University. Between the interspace of a zine (an art object) and a curriculum package (a learning tool), *Box in a Suitcase* expands what can be a pedagogical prompt - offering only ephemera without answers, exercises without desired outcomes, and notes without context. Some of the objects are ephemera, notes, and documents from *Deep Time University - All Syllabi*, while others are reproductions or objects the faculty have produced reflecting on the event.

A simple banner reading “DEEP TIME UNIVERSITY” will be hung in the room, naming the space, and claiming it for the alternative university.
PEDAGOGY AS PRACTICE

Southern California has over seventeen art schools and hundreds of museums. It produces more MFAs than any other region within the United States - an incredible density of artists and cultural institutions situated at the edge of the West.

_Deep Time University_ positions itself contemporarily around the work of Sean Dockray, Telic Arts Exchange, Public School, aaaaarg.org, Anton Vidokle’s Night School, The Mountain School of the Arts, Slanguage, Mark Allen, Machine Project, The Bruce High Quality Foundation, Toro Lab, the performances of Nicolas Paris, the publications and conferences organized by SOCCAS, Ultra-red, Nato Thompson’s essay on social practice and militarization, The New Museum’s and The Hammer Museum’s education departments (and MOCA’s brief Public Engagement Series), and the curatorial work of Johanna Burton, Eungie Joo, Claire Bishop, Pablo Helguera, and Alison Angsten. More historically, _Deep Time University_ looks to Black Mountain College, the development of CalArts, the Bahaus, GranFury, the work of John Baldesarri, Hans Haake, Agnes Martin, Martha Rosler’s vision for the New Museum, the pedagogical philosophies of Joseph Albers, Joseph Beuys, Andrea Fraser, Act Up, Allan Kaparow, Allan Sekula, UCSD of the 70’s, and Michael Asher’s everything.
### A Series of Pedagogical Performances (Table 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASAP (After School Arts Program)</td>
<td>2007-2014</td>
<td>A nomadic arts education collective modeled after the grade school programs of the same name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXTENSIONS</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>A series of salons connecting UC San Diego’s Visual Arts faculty and graduate students’ practices to current exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3x3</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>An exhibition and performance series fostering graduate and undergraduate research and mentorship organized in collaboration with Sixth College.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What’s an MFA worth?</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>A series of panels and installations exploring the value, meaning, and exchange of a Master of Fine Arts degree.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PLATFORM DEVELOPMENT: (A REPORT ON TWO EVENTS)

An institution is only a name. Administrators, financiers, thinkers, deciders, helpers - bodies and flesh are what form it - the employees moving within and around the platform that the institution creates, allowing them safety. While an institution is formed by flesh, it is only known by name, by reputation, by myth.

The Che Café provided an ideal venue for Deep Time University: All Syllabi. The amalgamation of intimate causal interior spaces, private exterior gardens, walls covered in the history of its past events, the space’s DIY nature, its frictional yet tangential relationship with the university - all assisted to help create a vibe of generosity and conviviality.

Deep Time University: All Syllabi was held on April 12th, 2017 from 10am-8pm. It focusing on exploring ideas around “What should the university teach you? What do you want to learn? And what do you need to know now to survive?” Over the course of the day, faculty led workshops and performances exploring radical collaboration and generosity, the limits of the university, trauma and the female body, the border and its relation to San Diego, deep history, art and social justice, intuition and transformation, post-studio practices, prehistoric drawings, embodiment, the NEA, strategies for information distribution, how to be cool, metric analysis for entrepreneurs, and many other experiences.

The Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego is the host for the second iteration, Deep Time University: Intersession. Located in downtown San Diego the Museum’s white walls and air-conditioned exhibition spaces feel like a luxury - occupying a strange structure somewhere between transit, commerce, and culture. Not twenty miles from the border of Mexico and the United States, the Museum finds itself surrounded by a nouveau metropolis - a growing cosmopolitan cityscape with a growing homeless population.

Deep Time University: Intersession takes place at the Museum of Contemporary Art
San Diego on Thursdays, from August 31- November 2, 2017. The series of ten weekly salons explores: alternative modes of poetry production, embroidery as resistance, underground extreme music, meditations on white supremacy, trauma and revolution, sustainable post studio practices, recent border art exhibitions, and collaborative opera – with all topics addressed from the perspective of ongoing research and production.
KNOWN UNKNOWNS

How do we share the content of Deep Time University more efficiently? Can/should content be distilled/edited? How can the events be shared with those that could not be there? How can it be shared later?

How can future projects be funded? What are sustainable strategies for consistently paying faculty, assistants, and facilitators? Is institutional support always required for projects of this scale and investment in compensation?

What are the spaces (physical and conceptual distances) between universities and museums? Can we create more inclusive learning tactics? Can these spaces embody the generosities of Deep Time University through their location, architecture, or something else?
EPILOGUE: LEARNING TO DIG A HOLE

The old man took the shovel and walked out. He said nothing and made no gesture to follow.

I found him standing over a small plot. It had been marked with small posts and a ribbon. He plunged his shovel into the dirt and began to pull out immense piles of moist dirt.

The smell. I will never forget the smell. Fresh dirt. Untouched soil. Moist and fertile.

The old man continued to move the dirt. Pulling from the earth and spilling it back out. As the hole began to take form he muttered something. At first I simply ignored him, as he was often grouchy - mumbling profanities and bits of hopelessness. He looked up as if expecting a response and I just stared into his grey eyes.

“Did you hear me? The hole must be deep enough. It must be wide enough. We must work quick and not make a mess.”

I nodded. And he continued to dig. After a bit, he placed his shovel down and walked to a tree nearby and sat. He motioned that it was my turn. I grabbed the shovel and began. I nearly slipped in. My toes quickly wet from my thin shoes. My hands began to slip across the old wooden handle, as they got muddy and sweaty. I continued to dig - sloppily; spilling dirt over my clothes, around the hole, in my hair.
When I was nearly waist deep in the hole the old man returned. He muttered for me to climb out. As I did, he began to kick the clumps of dirt around the edges back into the hole. With his shovel, de dragged the remaining dirt back into the hole.

“I guess we will try again tomorrow eve.”