PROJECT MUSE®

The Intimate Relations of Sustainability: Pedagogical
Encounters and Public Art at the Land|Slide: Possible
Futures Exhibition

Chloë Brushwood Rose

Resilience: A Journal of the Environmental Humanities, Volume 1,
Number 3, Fall 2014, pp. 179-202 (Article)

Published by University of Nebraska Press

➔ For additional information about this article
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/569984>

The Intimate Relations of Sustainability

Pedagogical Encounters and Public Art at the
Land|Slide: Possible Futures Exhibition

CHLOË BRUSHWOOD ROSE

Over the last decade, contemporary artists and curators have become interested in notions of pedagogy as describing the kinds of public engagements and social practices that animate both art institutions and deinstitutionalized art spaces. Curator Irit Rogoff (2008) writes about the “educational turn” in contemporary art as a reimagining of cultural institutions like the museum or the art exhibition, where the pedagogical impulse is relational and situational, and thus acts as a force of deinstitutionalization. Rogoff cautions that the turn to education in contemporary art may itself become institutionalized and instead explores the idea of turning—to the next thing, to the new idea or encounter—as the site of education or pedagogy. This approach to pedagogy takes us out of the traditional relations of schooling and out of the relations between teacher and student, to think about how pedagogical experience might be a foundational condition of social engagement and public life.

Instead of thinking about education in institutional terms, Rogoff asks, can we think of education as something that touches all the institutions of culture? Rogoff advocates for what she calls “weak education,” an approach she contrasts with “strong, redemptive, missionary education” (Rogoff 2008, 7). “Weak education,” she writes, is “a discourse on education that is non-reactive,” and instead she posits education as “in and of the world—not a response to crisis, but part of its ongoing complexity, not reacting to realities, but producing them” (5–6). Here the

significance of education is not understood in terms of the institution's significance, or in terms of what the institution can teach us, but instead through the "weaker" question (to use Rogoff's language) of *what possibilities for engaging ideas differently it might offer*.

This conceptual shift suggests a theory of pedagogy as something unsanctioned or radically deinstitutionalized, "propelled from within rather than boxed in from outside" (Rogoff 2008, 6). In public settings, such as the public art exhibition, education "becomes the site of a coming-together of the odd and unexpected—shared curiosities, shared subjectivities, shared sufferings, and shared passions congregate around the promise of a subject, an insight, a creative possibility" (Rogoff 2008, 6). The work of Rogoff and others (see also O'Neill and Wilson 2010) offers a new way of thinking about the roles pedagogy and public art might play in the context of the social, political, and economic crises we gather under the heading "sustainability" and suggests innovative approaches to pedagogy through the staging of encounters with public art. A recent public art exhibition on the theme of sustainability, Land|Slide: Possible Futures, hoped to enact just such possibilities.¹ What would it mean, we wondered, to invite the public to congregate around a set of tensions and questions about possible sustainable futures? How might the work of contemporary artists produce new promise, insight, and creative possibility for public dialogue around questions of sustainability?

The Land|Slide exhibition, curated by Janine Marchessault and organized by an interdisciplinary team that included members from the fields of education (myself) and environmental studies (Jenny Foster), was conceptualized as an experiment in bringing contemporary art, pedagogy, and questions of sustainability into dialogue with one another. Central to the conceptualization of this exhibition was an understanding of pedagogy as offering "possibilities for engaging ideas differently" (Rogoff 2008) and as made through the temporary formation of "experimental communities" (Basualdo and Laddaga 2009) in the space and time of the exhibition. Basualdo and Laddaga describe "experimental communities" as those "constituted in the universe of the arts (while linking this universe with other regions of human life) to explore forms of articulating competition and cooperation, collective learning and radical innovation, design and execution, direction and realization" (29). Importantly, they describe the formation of these experimental

communities as tied to the kinds of unique demands that are made by the arts on the spectator or visitor and to the interaction of the arts with other disciplines and practices.

The kinds of participation made available through the formation of experimental communities include those that Arjun Appadurai argues characterize “deep democracy”: “internal criticism and debate, horizontal exchange and learning, and vertical collaborations and partnerships” (2002, 46). In this way, the pedagogical impulse of the Land|Slide exhibition was shaped by an interest in how sustainability might be contested and reimagined by artists and visitors alike. Rather than aiming to educate the public, an approach tied to the current climate of standardization across educational and cultural institutions, the pedagogical impulse of the exhibition sought to interrupt a “strong, redemptive, missionary education” (Rogoff 2008, 7) by offering a provocation for learning and by calling artists and visitors into an active engagement with the significance of our intimate material experiences and relations for thinking about sustainability and possible futures. Rather than offering lessons about sustainability, the Land|Slide exhibition sought to offer visitors “possibilities for engaging ideas differently” by centering the experience of learning, rather than teaching, and the significance of group life, rather than the role of the expert, for thinking anew about sustainability.

In this paper, I explore three of the installations in the Land|Slide exhibition in which the pedagogical impulse of the works recast the relations of sustainability and called visitors into unusual and intimate relations with natural and built environments and with notions of ecology more generally. While many of the artists addressed themes commonly understood as central to discussions of sustainability—such as food production and security, urban development, and shelter²—the artists whose work I explore here also invited visitors to reconsider the social, psychic, and material parameters of sustainable living. In Angel Chen’s “Dim Sum City,” visitors were called on to negotiate how they imagine possible urban futures with a group of strangers and, in doing so, experienced the ways in which sociality and community are integral to the experience of sustainability. Deirdre Logue’s “Euphoria’s Hiccups” invited visitors into the inner world of the artist through an unsettling self-portrait of her psyche and asked us to consider how notions of sustainability might address the ecology of inner life. Finally, Jennie Suddick’s “Stomping Ground” recast “natural space” as the site of intimate narra-

tives and geographies, inviting us to imagine the work of sustainability as tied to the ways in which subjects and spaces impress themselves on each other. I argue that the pedagogical impulse in each of these pieces pushes us to think in new ways about the lines and relations between individuals in community, between inner life and the external world, and between the human subject and inhabited spaces and, in doing so, frames these intimate relations as central to imagining possible sustainable futures.

Land | Slide: Possible Futures

In the fall of 2013 the Land|Slide exhibition opened for three weeks at the Markham Museum and heritage village,³ inviting thirty-five artists to create site-specific works in response to the concept of “the line” and the task of imagining possible futures for emerging North American cities. The concept of the line was meant to activate two key dynamics in struggles over sustainability, urban development and land use—geography and history. The geographic line marks the encroaching edge of urban development as it meets the greenbelt of farmland and wilderness that surrounds the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). This geographic line has been the topic of heated debate for the edge city of Markham, and yet farmland and green space continue to be repurposed for residential and commercial development. Indeed, while the notion of the greenbelt is common in public discourse, it is also true that few residents of the GTA understand its geographic specificity and its significance as a source of food and sustainable life. The popular discourse around the greenbelt often seems to obscure the material reality of this line and its material significance as a shared resource. In its second iteration, the line refers to the historical line that connects past, present, and future and invites the question of the cultural imaginary into debates on sustainability. How is it possible to imagine a just and sustainable future without first narrating the injustices of history? How can we bring notions of heritage and preservation into conversation with the realities of cultural and ecological diversity?

The city of Markham, Ontario, was chosen as the site for this exhibition because it is an edge city—a city that marks the line between the sprawl of urban development and the greenbelt of rapidly receding farmland. As an edge city, Markham has been the active site of current debates about the kinds of restrictions that might be placed on develop-

ment and about the nature of sustainability in urban life. The idea of the edge city offers rich conceptual terrain for exploring themes of sustainability; as a line that determines the outside limit of a given area, the edge city implicitly poses questions about the limits of urbanization and the finite qualities of the natural ecology that cities inevitably encroach on. In taking up the location of the edge city and the concept of the line, this site-specific exhibition posed further questions about the boundaries between municipalities, between city and greenbelt, between individuals, between the inner worlds of the subjects and the spaces they inhabit, and the boundaries that characterize sustainability itself.

While many of the artists in the exhibition took up the formal concept of the spatial or geographic line in quite explicit ways,⁴ some of the exhibition's most pedagogically rich moments emerged in works where the boundaries at stake were those between subjects and environments, opening up questions about the intimate relations that instantiate sustainability. While sustainability is fundamentally about how we live in the world, how we imagine our relationships to each other and the environments we inhabit, the popular discourse around sustainability often fails to grapple with the intimacy of those relations. Reduced to images of endangered polar bears, melting glaciers, and foreign landfills, sustainability is framed as a problem that is "out there" and at a distance from our selves, our personal stories, and our identities. In contrast, several of the artists in the exhibition, including Chen, Logue, and Suddick, whose installations I examine more closely below, worked explicitly to close or eliminate this gap, centering questions of subjectivity and intimacy in their work and recasting "the line" not as a boundary that separates two fields of experience but as a shape formed by their intersection.

Imagined Communities: Angel Chen's "Dim Sum City"

Angel Chen's "Dim Sum City" is a project in the contemporary art tradition variously referred to as relational aesthetics, social aesthetics, dialogic art, or social practice. While these various descriptors reflect a somewhat anxious debate in contemporary art about spheres of influence, what these traditions share in common is a "shift in artistic practice from image production to the initiation of scenes for the replaying of social relations" as a way to offer a kind of critical perspective on broader social transformation (Papastergiadis 2009, 34). Artists working within social practice deploy artistic practice as method for inter-

Fig. 1. Angel Chen's "Dim Sum City" project. Photo appears courtesy of Will Pemulis.

rogating and interrupting social forms, by situating such social forms in unusual places (such as a the art gallery or exhibition) and by animating those social forms and practices in unusual ways. These artistic practices highlight the tensions between the familiar and the strange, inviting people into relational encounters that may feel familiar—they understand the disposition required to occupy them—and also ask them to interact and undergo experiences that estrange them from these familiar habits.

In "Dim Sum City" Chen worked with the social form of the Dim Sum restaurant and the social practice of ordering from a restaurant menu in order to interrupt the notion of a consumerist approach to possible futures and to foreground both the negotiation between individual and group desires and the balance between the imaginative and the real in those negotiations around possible futures. Visitors to Chen's installation were invited to sit together around a dim sum table and were offered menus, which instead of listing appetizers, entrées, and dessert included categories such as "housing," "commercial," "transportation," "retail," "culture," and "recreation." Under each of these categories, visitors were offered several numbered options or "dishes" to choose

Fig. 2. Angel Chen’s “Dim Sum City” project. Photo appears courtesy of Will Pemulis.

Fig. 3. Angel Chen's "Dim Sum City" project. Photo appears courtesy of Will Pemulis.

Fig. 4. Angel Chen's "Dim Sum City" project. Photo appears courtesy of Will Pemulis.

from—for example, under the category of “commercial,” patrons were able to choose “barn,” “fish farm,” several types of office buildings and factories, an “office park,” an “industrial park,” and so on. Patrons were also given a standard dim sum order form, with multiple carbon copies, to fill in their selections, while Chen served tea and interacted as a waiter would with the customers.

Chen’s work has a strong pedagogical impulse, not because it aims to teach the visitor anything in particular, but because the experience of participating in “Dim Sum City” brings the visitor up against desires and conflicts that reveal something about the complex nature of community life and the significance of sociality for sustainable living. From the start, the structure of the menu itself offers insight into the nature of choices. One doesn’t order “one of everything” from a menu; rather the menu is implicitly understood as requiring a choice between items. The visitors, or patrons, were invited to create a future city based on their own wishes and desires; but the social form of the restaurant, the practice of ordering from a menu, and the limited budget given to each group by Chen framed the experience of imagining a possible future as inherently frustrating, or at least complicated, those desires. In this way, the pedagogy of the menu brought the visitors to Chen’s “restaurant” up against the tension between imagination or fantasy (what one desires) and the material constraints of social and human life (how much one can “eat”). This tension takes on added depth in Chen’s work where the individual task of ordering from a menu is brought into dialogue with the choices one might make about the possible futures of city dwelling.

Chen’s installation also mobilized the unique pedagogical dimensions of the restaurant’s social relations, in which a waiter answers the patron’s questions about the nature of their various options. Chen herself acted as the host and waiter of the restaurant, inviting patrons in, seating them, distributed menus, and serving them tea. She also offered guests some information about their menu choices, for example, explaining the polluting features of the “fish farm,” which many patrons seemed inclined to choose. Chen described this pedagogical work as very complex and talked about the difficulty at times about knowing when to offer more information and when to step back and leave the group to their own process. The relation between the waiter and restaurant patrons raises some interesting questions for rethinking pedagogies of sustainability. First, there is the question of the teacher or educator’s role in sustainability. What might

it mean to offer one's students information about the variety of options available to them, without ascribing value judgments of good and bad? What would it mean to trust the students' "taste"? These questions, not coincidentally, are particularly relevant in relation to issues of sustainability that involve food security, where "good" and "bad" choices about food tend to map onto ethnic and class divisions. Second, the pedagogy of the waiter poses interesting questions about the relationship between the educator and the larger group or community of learners. What might it mean to understand the teacher as "in service" to the students? How might the teacher's disposition or stance be rethought through notions of hospitality?⁵ These questions foreground the importance of group life, rather than the life of the expert, in the formation of a just and sustainable future, and they also ask us to consider the social dimensions of a hospitable environment.

This is perhaps the most compelling pedagogical quality of Chen's installation: the way it centers group life and sociality through the social form of the dim sum restaurant, in which meals are inherently communal or family style, food is ordered by the group, and plates are shared. The communal qualities of this particular social form, unlike the ordering of individual entrées at another kind of restaurant, produced an encounter for patrons in which the social practices associated with dim sum required them to negotiate their own desires and fantasies of future city dwelling—offered via the menu—with the group members at their table. Chen described how the nature of this group-based social practice quickly transferred itself into thinking about the larger social group of the city community. For example, patrons would often begin by selecting items from the menu that reflected their own individual tastes, needs, and interests but would soon realize the difficulty of ordering items for a future city without knowing who else might live in the city they were trying to imagine. This move from the self-gratification of fantasy to a sense of public and community responsibility was undoubtedly facilitated by the social form of the dim sum restaurant and its invitation to engage in a social practice characterized by communal relations.

While the textual content of Chen's installation—the menus and dim sum order forms—explicitly name and foreground items considered central to our understandings and practices of sustainability, particularly in relation to urban development, food production, land use,

and sustainable living, the pedagogical encounter staged by “Dim Sum City” offers another dimension of insight into the stakes of sustainability. Through the communal social practice of imagining a shared community with a group of strangers, visitors to Chen’s installation were called to think about the centrality of social life for imagining a sustainable future. Rather than making a list of the “right choices” for sustainable living, Chen’s work suggests that the stakes of sustainability might have more to do with our capacity to gather together, negotiate with one another, and engage the difficulties of social life. It may be that our capacity to imagine a sustainable future rests on our capacity to tolerate the intimate, and often strange and uncomfortable, relations of sociality.

Ecologies of Self: Deirdre Logue’s “Euphoria’s Hiccups”

In Deirdre Logue’s installation the question of sociality takes an intimate turn as the questions of psychic life and experience are brought to the relations of sustainability. Logue describes her Land|Slide installation as a self-portrait, an idea that immediately poses a question about the place of the self in discourses of sustainability. Using Logue’s own history of psychic unrest as its anchor, “Euphoria’s Hiccups” explored the boundary between inner and outer worlds, the self and the environment, and the relationship between hurting and healing, problematizing the typical hierarchy that places happiness, logic, remedy, and physicians at the top and trauma, dysphoria, irrationality, and individual suffering at the bottom.

The installation itself plays with these boundaries through the use of visual and auditory media. Working both inside and outside of the Honey House, one of the smaller buildings at the museum site, Logue animated the experience of being both inside and outside psychic life, inside and outside trauma. Inside the building, Logue installed seventeen repurposed video touch screens, ranging in size from two inches to fifteen inches, which displayed video images of “the artist’s bitten fingernails worrying into blankets for warmth, hyper nervous gestures and anxious landscapes” (artist’s statement), as well as gestures of intimacy, such as a small plastic doll hand stroking the instep of the artist’s foot. These images are close-up and somewhat distorted, inviting us into an ambiguous dreamlike landscape that is both disturbing and uncanny. In addition to these visual media, Logue installed twelve small exciter speakers, which amplify the sounds of the house itself, producing a

Fig. 5. Deirdre Logue's "Euphoria's Hiccups" project. Photo appears courtesy of Will Pemulis.

Fig. 6. Deirdre Logue's "Euphoria's Hiccups" project. Photo appears courtesy of Will Pemulis.

Fig. 7. Deirdre Logue's "Euphoria's Hiccups" project. Photo appears courtesy of Will Pemulis.

Fig. 8. Deirdre Logue's "Euphoria's Hiccups" project. Photo appears courtesy of Will Pemulis.

constant buzz and creak and moan of timber. In this way, entering the house felt like entering the interior of the psyche, a place at once busy, colorful, and compelling as well as deeply unsettling.

The psychic space depicted by Logue poses an ecology of unrest and a question about the place of the psyche in our thinking about ecologies more broadly. Disrupting the discourses of sustainability that typically represent ecology as the thing that we inhabit, Logue's installation invites visitors into an intimate ecology of self, an interior ecology, which, like the external ecologies we are used to thinking about, is similarly in crisis. In addition to confronting our assumptions about the line between inner life and the natural world, Logue's installation also asks us to wonder about the aesthetic, social, and political value of such crises. How might attending to such crises and the trauma they incur be instructive? How might our rush toward a better world or happier state of mind obscure the lessons to be learned in first listening to spaces and relations of difficulty?⁶ Logue's installation reminds us of the subjective spaces of sustainability—the ways in which the psyche is imprinted by the difficulties, impossibilities, and crises posed by contemporary dilemmas—and suggests that an attention to the (im)balances of such

intimate ecologies is imperative for forging a more sustainable relation with the external world.

The relation between internal and external worlds was further animated by Logue's installation as visitors exited the Honey House through the back door, where they found themselves in a garden with planting beds built in the honeycomb-like shape of the serotonin molecule (5-HT), the chemical most often associated with happiness. Planted in these beds, in collaboration with landscape artist Glynnis Logue, were plants with mood-altering properties—including scented geranium, late-flowering red pineapple sage, lemon verbena, bush lavender, willow, witch hazel, Cuban oregano, and New England aster flower—that the artist described as scenting “the surrounding air, drawing bees from afar for a hallucinating hit and a calming whiff” (artist's statement). The calming quality of the garden, particularly after the chaotic sensory stimulation of the inside, is striking but also partially offset by its construction—visitors step out into the garden, only to find themselves trapped among the garden beds, which offer no clear path out. That each of the plants in the garden were chosen for their psychotropic properties further stages a challenge to the line drawn between the human's subjective world and the objectively perceived natural world we inhabit. The properties of the plants grown by Logue and Logue in the garden suggest the permeability and artificiality of such distinctions—indeed, signs warning visitors not to ingest or touch any of the plants in the garden suggest the shared vulnerability of inner and outer worlds.

Logue's installation offered an opportunity to question the typical boundaries we use to define discussions of sustainability by inviting the visitor into an affective and intimate relation with notions of ecology and by implicating the visitor's own psychic life as central to the ability to imagine sustainable futures. Logue's work recasts our relation with the natural world as one of interdependence and of mutual crisis, anguish, and vulnerability. The visitor is provoked to think about ecology, not as referring to something outside of the self, but as manifested in the intimate relation between the psyche and physiology of the human or animal and the inhabited external world.

Intimate Spaces: Jennie Suddick's “Stomping Ground”

Jennie Suddick's “Stomping Ground” further explores the line between human subjects and the natural spaces they inhabit, considering more

Fig. 9. Jennie Suddick's "Stomping Ground" project. Photo appears courtesy of Will Pemulis.

Fig. 10. Jennie Suddick's "Stomping Ground" project. Photo appears courtesy of Will Pemulis.

Fig. 11. Jennie Suddick's "Stomping Ground" project. Photo appears courtesy of Will Pemulis.

Fig. 12. Jennie Suddick's "Stomping Ground" project. Photo appears courtesy of Will Pemulis.

carefully notions of influence and drawing in particular on experiences of the child and adolescent in Markham, where she herself grew up only blocks from the museum. Suddick's installation occupied several rooms in a heritage house on the museum site and included several interrelated elements. In one room, Suddick shared audiovisual and map-based documentation of a narrative project she undertook, interviewing past and present residents of Markham about their past and present relationships to the city's changing landscapes. The final presentation of these interviews took multiple forms: a feature-length documentary; a Korsakow user-guided, browser-based narrative of location stories; and printed guide maps. According to Suddick, "The maps act as walking tours [of Markham], revealing these hidden or little known sites, allowing people to engage or reengage with a sense of whimsy in these spaces" (artist's statement).

In two other rooms of the house, Suddick re-created, in exquisite detail, the bathroom and bedroom she occupied as a teenager, growing up in her parents' home in a Markham housing development near to the museum. In this second part of the installation, Suddick makes a startling shift away from stories about how the natural landscape impresses itself on us in childhood and adolescence, to address the ways in which youth also impress themselves on the spaces around them. In these rooms, every surface was covered, with textiles, personal objects, posters, and graffiti (which Suddick photographed and then projected onto the walls of the bedroom installation). Suddick reveals a great deal about herself and about the secret life of the adolescent in these rooms, including the complex negotiation of moving between childhood (stuffed animals, comic books) and young adulthood (makeup and accessories, posters depicting erotic imagery). This tension animates a kind of vulnerability and embarrassment in visitors, who recognize themselves in the kinds of objects that populate these rooms, in the failed attempts at being grown-up they represent, and in the powerful erotics of imagining that one's world might contain what one desires.

While the first part of Suddick's installation offers visitors what they might expect at an exhibition on the themes of sustainability—stories about our relationships to nature—the second part of the installation dramatically disrupts these expectations. What does the carefully staged bedroom of a teenager have to do with sustainability? It is this contrast and

disruption to anticipated discourses of sustainability that invites visitors into a new relationship with these discourses and with their own agency in relation to the environments they inhabit. Suddick's work invites visitors to participate in both remembering and imagining physical space as tied to the formation of self, recasting childhood and adolescent experience in relation to natural spaces, refiguring spaces that are not immediately understood as natural in terms of land use, and calling on visitors to see themselves as always already forming impressions in space and impressing themselves on the spaces around them.

I had the pleasure of taking several groups of seventh- and eighth-grade public school students through Suddick's installation and noted how the youth who visited were struck by the connections and disconnections between her impressions on the space (her adolescent bedroom) and their own impressions on the spaces they occupy. They wondered about their own uses of space (did they also put such posters on their walls? how was their use of bedroom spaces governed by parental rules?) and about the possible futures they imagined for such use (would the degree and quality of their impressions on the space around them change over time?). This movement from feeling oneself growing up in an environment that impinges on you to sensing the possibilities for one's own agency in relation to the environment seems to be a fundamental pedagogical experience in relation to questions of sustainability.

Suddick's installation calls into question the line that defines the "natural" world as the site of wilderness rather than cultivation and, in doing so, asks visitors to reflect on their own influence and the nature of their efforts to cultivate a self within the spaces they occupy. Imagining oneself as interacting with, as being both impinged on and pressing oneself into, the environments one occupies is essential to opening discussions about sustainability's material and humanistic projects. In Suddick's work, the environment is not some unknown, uninhabited space out there beyond the city, populated by glaciers, polar bears, and old growth forest; it is the ravines, houses, trails, strip malls, and schools that youth inhabit and interact with everyday as they negotiate the complex internal terrain of growing up and making a self. In this way, Suddick's work foregrounds, as do Chen's and Logue's, the intimate relations between social and natural worlds, between internal and external ecologies, and between subjects and the spaces in which they are formed.

Conclusion

Each of the installations I discuss in this paper called visitors to rethink the kinds of material practices and relations in which we imagine sustainability to be at stake and particularly the boundaries between personal and natural spaces, between the materiality of the subject and the world. These artists, in different ways, invited visitors into a different kind of pedagogical relation with the question of sustainability by implicating the intimate and personal spaces of the human subject in the project of sustainability. How does this mode of address reimagine discourses of sustainability in ways that invite new participation?

Much public and civic discourse on sustainability addresses those invested in land use through property ownership, whether residential or corporate. For example, consultations around sustainable city planning in Markham, as in most municipalities, are addressed to property owners, those seen to have an interest or investment in such concerns. Popular discourses also tend to address homeowners, many of whom are also hailed as parents, who are encouraged to make (small) changes in their patterns of consumption in order to preserve the planet for their children. In these discourses, many citizens are either absent or the passive recipients of a potentially devastated planet that landowning adults must save for their children's children. There is much to be said about the limitations of these discourses both for the adults they do address and for the ways in which they alienate and marginalize the majority of those who dwell in cities like Markham—in apartment buildings, shelters, even homes.

Not unlike other popular images that circulate around discussions of sustainability—polar bears, melting ice caps, etc.—this framing of sustainability as being largely related to land ownership, consumption, and development similarly obscures the notion of a complex subject who in essence is part of the local ecology. To reassert the intimate relations between individuals in community and between the human and the external world both insists on sustainability as a question of intimate material and affective experiences and allows us to consider an infinitely more complex range of subjects as participating in the material practices central to a just and sustainable future.

Of course, the difficulty with framing sustainability in such intimate and subjective terms is that it requires the ability to tolerate a wildness and ambivalence of both sociality and affect. As was the case for the

visitors to “Dim Sum City,” who had to negotiate the design of their future city with each other, taking seriously the importance of subjective experience in the pursuit of sustainable life requires a willingness to tolerate living with selves, subjects, and spaces that cannot be tamed or may not comply to a set of solutions given in advance. Logue’s installation reminds us that the inner world of the subject might be as difficult and complex a wilderness as any external world, while Suddick’s work similarly reminds us that in our relations with the world, we may be nearer to adolescence than we imagine.

Of course, this is also the generative nature of intimacy and the intimate relations of sustainability opened up by the works of these Land|Slide artists. As Bonnell and Simon suggest in their discussion of the intimate encounters staged by “difficult” exhibitions, “intimacy suggests an act of acknowledgement . . . that resists attempts to reduce the other’s experience to something graspable or containable. In this act of acknowledgement lies the possibility for insight; the possibility of a transformative critique of one’s way of understanding the world” (2007, 69). This is a vulnerable position to take in relation to the material and geopolitical crises that populate our understandings of sustainability. Discourses that separate the human from the world, that fail to implicate our subjective material and affective practices in questions of ecology, feel much safer. And yet our understanding of the intimate relations of sustainability seems integral to our capacity to develop a sense of agency in relation to the crises that must be addressed, as it was for the adolescents who visited Suddick’s installation and saw, perhaps for the first time, their own use of space as significant for such discussions.

Encountering these intimate relations is also integral to forming a robust and critical conversation around the possibility of a sustainable future. While the idea of having to grapple with one’s own inner life, and the inner lives of others, in relation to the world around us might seem like a detour from the more important work of “saving the planet,” such “acknowledgement of particularity—of what is not immediately possible to understand with the authority of my frameworks for negotiating the world” (Bonnell and Simon 2007, 69)—is also vital to imagining a possible future that is made rather than given. The pedagogical encounters and intimate relations elicited by the artistic works discussed here contributed to the formation of an experimental community in which all—even complete strangers, unhappy subjects, children and youth—might see themselves together as makers of a sustainable future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chloë Brushwood Rose is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at York University in Toronto. She was a research lead on the *Land|Slide: Possible Futures Exhibition* (2013, Markham Museum). Find her at <http://www.yorku.ca/cbr>.

Notes

1. For more information on the exhibition, see <http://www.landslide-possiblefutures.com>. All exhibition photos included here were taken by Will Pemulis (<http://www.willandalexphoto.com>).

2. Examples of work on food production and security include Phil Hoffman's installation "Slaughterhouse," a seven-channel video poem on the changing nature of meat production and Lisa Myers and Sean Martindale's "All Purpose," in which they address the history of food and colonization through their piece on the five white foods introduced to Indigenous communities. Issues of urban development and shelter were addressed by the Department of Unusual Certainties' "Buying & Selling," through the performance of a real estate sales center for the global housing market, and by the Skyhill Collective's "Textured House," a dwelling built to imagine how the future for sustainable living might require us to reclaim the past.

3. For more information on the Markham Museum, see the city of Markham website at <http://www.markham.ca/wps/portal/Markham/RecreationCulture/MarkhamMuseum>

4. For example, in his photo installation, "Where Do We Go from Here?" Jeff Thomas grapples with the image of the railway line and lines of colonial expansion, land appropriation, and uprooting of First Nations communities; and in *The Line*, a film projected on the side of an aging barn, Patricio Davila and David Colangelo explore the lines of suburban development, including borders, roads, fences, pipelines, and flight patterns.

5. See Jen Gilbert's (2006, 33) lovely discussion of education as hospitality: "If education is a relation of hospitality, then we will affect and be affected by our encounters with others. This is a relation that exceeds affirmation and risks ambivalence" (33).

6. This attention to the productivity of trauma and difficult feeling resonates with recent work by queer affect theorists Sara Ahmed (2010), Ann Cvetkovich (2012), and others on the political and social significance of affect, particularly unhappiness.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, Sara. 2010. *The Promise of Happiness*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 2002. "Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics." *Environment and Urbanization* 13, no. 2:23–43.
- Basualdo, Carlos, and Reinaldo Laddaga. 2009. "Experimental Communities." *PUBLIC* 39:15–31.

- Bonnell, Jennifer, and Roger I. Simon. 2007. "'Difficult' Exhibitions and Intimate Encounters." *Museum and Society* 5, no. 2:65–85.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. 2012. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Gilbert, Jen. 2006. "'Let Us Say Yes to Who or What Turns Up': Education as Hospitality." *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies* 4, no. 1:25–34.
- O'Neill, Paul, and Mick Wilson, eds. 2010. *Curating and the Educational Turn*. London: Open Editions.
- Papastergiadis, Nikos. 2009. "Collaboration in Art and Society: A Global Pursuit of Democratic Dialogue." *PUBLIC* 39:32–51.
- Rogoff, Irit. 2008. "Turning." *e-flux journal* 0 (November): 1–10. http://workero1.e-flux.com/pdf/article_18.pdf.