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Blueprint for Counter Education at CalArts
1969–1972

“Though the wind blows in a number of different ways, it blows through the problems of the ‘60s” – Maurice Stein

In 1969, Nixon was elected as the 37th President of the United States. Nearing the end of his first year in office, the administration’s “Vietnamization” policy plan provided a gradual withdrawal of American combat forces. As American troops were exiting Vietnam, young people were drafted by random lottery to continue fighting. Students protested against these abrupt policy decisions as precariousness and uncertainty towards the future set over the nation like a thick fog. As tension bubbled on college campuses across the country, US universities scrambled to keep a level of accreditation and a sense of calmness projected to the governing boards while information to students and faculty was remained opaque. The calmness was a strategy to conceal emotion, a tactic of control, or a way of pretending that everything was OK, meanwhile a Bank of America was set ablaze at near University of Santa Barbara and students organized sit-ins at Columbia University.

Discussing this bubbling moment of war and unrest at the end of the ‘60s, California Institute of the Arts, or CalArts, provost Herbert Blau and critical studies faculty member Mark Harris exchanged letters speculating the outcome of Nixon’s campaign while envisioning a radical response to institutional education in a rather grim US environment. The radical response Blau and Harris were referring to was a utopian approach to education, one which embodied a hippie communal lifestyle

embedded in an institutional framework. This institution took shape as the new CalArts facilities just 30 miles from downtown Los Angeles. President Robert W. Corrigan and Blau began recruiting faculty in 1969, pitching an open space where different disciplines intermingled a curious crew of conceptual artists and thinkers, including Michael Asher, Allan Kaprow, Gene Youngblood, and Maurice Stein. This essay will examine the interdisciplinary curriculum developed at CalArts, specifically between the years 1969–1972, and take into account Maurice Stein and Larry Miller’s *Blueprint for Counter Education* as a guiding model.

CalArts was Walt Disney’s idea, who envisioned a congregating place for art professions in an environment comparable to vocational education or a trade school. However, Disney’s vision seemed capricious to the early organizers of CalArts, who faced a greater challenge of structuring a new school in an era of political upheavals and acute scrutiny against the education system at large.¹ In a series of memorandums from Corrigan to the university governance (many of its member old friends and colleagues of Disney), Corrigan released a plan for the CalArts administration as one where “students, faculty, and the administration teach each other” and that “art, school, and life should be directly related.”² In other words, everything must be leveled and related—an early attribution of postmodernist discourse penetrating the crumbling walls of the old modernist house. Out with the old, in with the new. Straying away from Disney’s original plans, a counterculture and avant-garde vibe structured the early

¹ Janet Sarbanes, “A Community of Artists: Radical Pedagogy at CalArts, 1969-72”, *East of Borneo*, accessed December 1, 2015.

<http://www.eastofborneo.org/articles/a-community-of-artists-radical-pedagogy-at-calarts-1969-72>

² Robert W. Corrigan, Memorandum to the CalArts Governance Committee, June 16, 1970.

<http://images.library.wisc.edu/Arts/EFacs/ArtsSoc/ArtsSocv07i3/reference/arts.artssocv07i3.i0028.pdf>

years of CalArts, comfortable and supportive of a horizontal style of learning. This kept the governing board on their feet, Corrigan playing the in-between role of simultaneously calming and agitating Disney's comrades. The project of CalArts, in Blau's words, was "in some particular way to put the whole cracked world together again."³

³ Janet Sarbanes, "A Community of Artists: Radical Pedagogy at CalArts, 1969-72", *East of Borneo*, accessed December 1, 2015.
<http://www.eastofborneo.org/articles/a-community-of-artists-radical-pedagogy-at-calarts-1969-72>



CalArts building designed by firm Ladd & Kelsey, 1972. Photograph courtesy of East of Borneo

As walls were literally constructed for a new campus, metaphorically, they were coming down as plans for CalArts curriculum came into fruition. Again, President Corrigan addressed the governance committee on the challenges US universities faced at the beginning of the '70s: ⁴

“We all know the old term town and gown, and we know that this term expresses a belief that there are irreconcilable differences between academe (where every voice and attitude must be heard and protected) and the rest of society. We have tended to perpetuate this split by building educational institutions which are conceived as independent entities, completely cut off from the rest of society. We have, literally, put walls around our institutions. Today our young people are determined that these walls must come down, and this is one of the reasons we are in such trouble.”

Although walls were erected in Valencia to create space for radical learning, the late modern-style CalArts complex was not a spatial success for the students and faculty. The big, blocky sterile concrete walls of the building (a description more fit for a hospital) were designed by trustee Thomas Ladd's firm Ladd & Kelsey, costing more than \$25 million to complete and \$1 million a year to maintain.⁵ Situated in the new, mostly empty suburb of Valencia in Santa Clarita Valley, manicured eucalyptus trees and rolling green hills framed the campus, giving the location a mostly lonely outpost feeling. Highway 5 shuffled in visiting faculty, while others stayed full-time detached from bustling Los Angeles, a city with its own urban counterculture happening at the time. CalArts members, as Judith Adler points to in *Artists in Offices*, experienced the school as an awkwardly placed urban institution with rural utopian aspirations.⁶ In the

⁴ Robert W. Corrigan, Memorandum to the CalArts Governance Committee, June 16, 1970. <http://images.library.wisc.edu/Arts/EFacs/ArtsSoc/ArtsSocv07i3/reference/arts.artssocv07i3.i0028.pdf>

⁵ Judith Adler, *Artists in Offices* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, Inc., 1979), pg. 59

⁶ Ibid

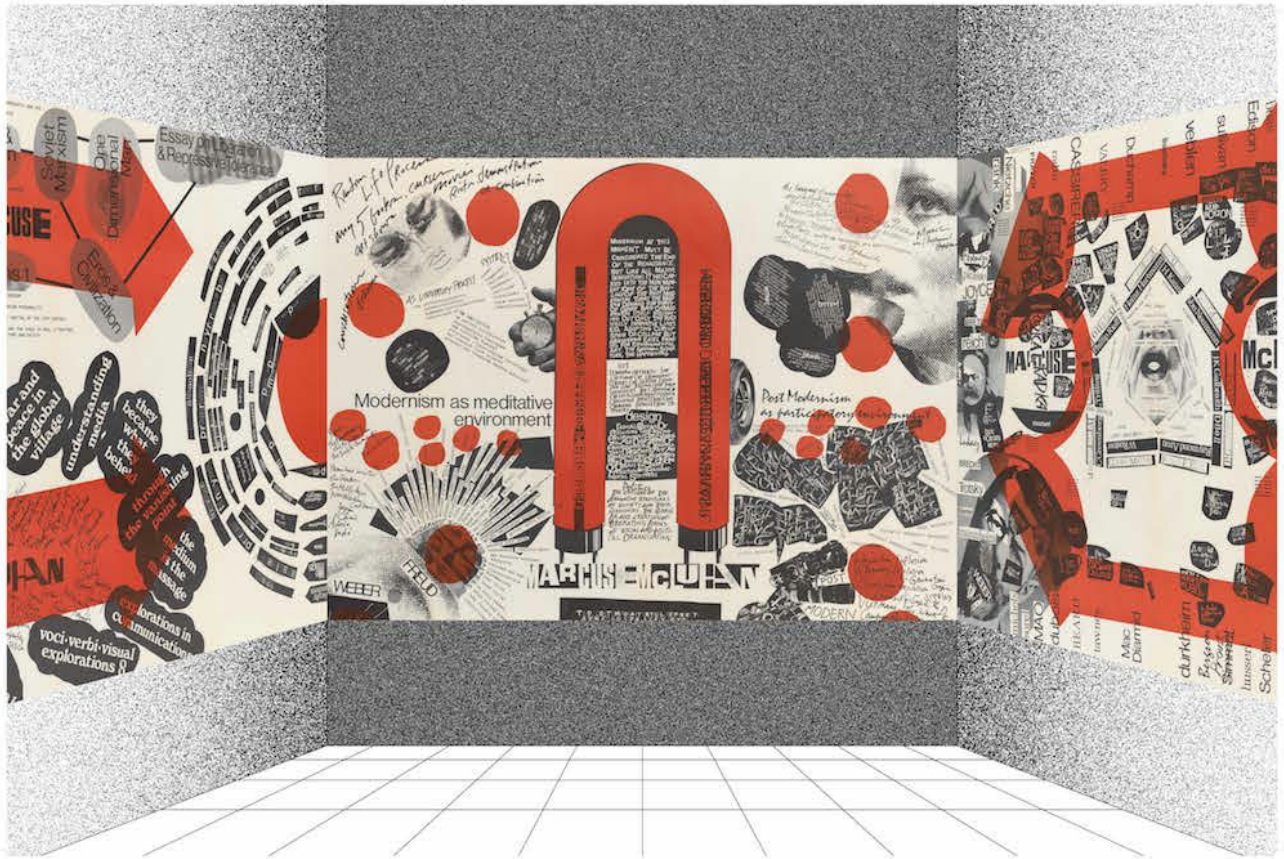
building's original blueprint, the infrastructure intended to open communication by constructing modular walls to unify the different disciplines (art, film, design, theater/dance, critical studies) under one roof—an architectural attempt at facilitating a truly “interdisciplinary” approach to education. In descriptions of the buildings interiors, Ladd had hoped the moveable walls would fully immerse students into different environments. For example, students in a theater and painting class could participate in a studio seminar by moving around the walls to create an open floor plan. However, this feature was not as convenient as initially expected. The interior impotence of the new Valencia building as “repressive,” leading to regular ‘happenings’ outside, is documented in the institution’s spacial history more often than the praise of modular walls.⁷

While Ladd designed modular walls and Corrigan called for a structural change in the institution, the new chair of critical studies, Maurice Stein, was thinking about how hanging wall charts could support visual learning, almost like an analog infographic. “Stare at your walls. You might learn something for a change,” an advertisement in *Columbia Daily Spectator* read announcing the release of *Blueprint for Counter Education*. *Blueprint* was a small “shooting script” booklet and three standard wall sized posters published by Doubleday in 1970. Persuaded by Blau to leave Brandeis University, Stein joined CalArts in 1969 and brought with him student and co-author of *Blueprint*, Larry Miller and the *Blueprint* methodology as the guiding pedagogical approach to the department. To Stein, the relationship between student

⁷ Janet Sarbanes, “A Community of Artists: Radical Pedagogy at CalArts, 1969-72”, *East of Borneo*, accessed December 1, 2015. <http://www.eastofborneo.org/articles/a-community-of-artists-radical-pedagogy-at-calarts-1969-72>

and the action of staring at a visual chart was a way to set a spatialized educational environment where, using Stein's words: "radical energy could be sustained, deepened, and transformed."⁸

⁸ Maurice Stein, Larry Miller and Marshall Henrich in discussion with Herbert Blau, September 11, 1970.



Ideal spatial environment for the Blueprint charts, 1970. Photograph courtesy of Adam Michaels.

How was energy best sustained by looking at a wall covered in charts? Perhaps this is what artists at CalArts were doing already anyways: staring at the walls in their studio, so why not take the action of staring into the classrooms? The application of *Blueprint* was not unlike a popup exhibition in a box, meant for a sort of on-the-road attraction, equipped with an instruction manual on how to best install the set on three intersecting walls. *Blueprint's* main component the a "shooting script." Functioning as an ideal library for understanding modernist and postmodernist thought, the shooting script held a political reference in its title as well: the shootings happening at the end the 1960s. Between 1968 and 1969, both Kennedy's were shot and killed, Martin Luther King died in Memphis, and tens and thousands dying in Vietnam. In practical terms, the sheer volume of information contained in the shooting script would hopefully encourage students to shoot their energies in particular directions, networking outward from the linear fields of modernism and postmodernism.

As a set, the shooting script and the charts formed a do-it-yourself classroom: a portable educational environment that would instantiate a personalized, "socially engaged model for learning." Unlike the Timothy Leary mantra circulating communities at this time: "Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out," Stein and Miller never saw the charts as an alternative to the classroom or as something that would replace a college education. For them, *Blueprint* was a new way to navigate academic institutions and a new framework for developing a radical, critical path through them.

The first title featured in the shooting script was the *Whole Earth Catalog* from Spring 1968. The shooting script functioned as a replicated circulating catalog, not dissimilar from projects such as *Whole Earth* or even the art magazine-cum-exhibition in a box, *Aspen*. Stein and Miller's motivation were to develop school curriculum around the students, for the students, rather than inserting them into a structure of imposing a pre-existing canon of content. Where *Whole Earth* gave the counterculture tools to live off the grid by supplying networks of individual resources and DIY strategies, *Blueprint* provided students radical educational and intellectual resources so they empower themselves to self-manage their own education.

Also in the spirit of *Whole Earth* ethos, *Blueprint* suggested not just participation, but proactive engagement from the students of the charts. Stein and Miller encouraged the "reader/viewer/participant" (Stein's term for a user of the charts, or r/v/p for short) to design their own charts as soon as they finished learning from theirs. *Blueprint* was open ended to encourage the r/v/p to move in directions useful and appealing to further investigation.

Blueprint was received as a playful and provocative proposition. Indexed at the end of the shooting script, Fluxus and Dadaist projects agitated the content featured in the front of the book: re-published Kurt Schwitters "Time Chart" compiled by Polish filmmaker Stefan Thermerson, a Fluxus questionnaire by Tomas Schmitt (borrowed from one of Dick Higgins' *Something Else Press* books), a "bibliotypography" (a list of suggested further readings that overlapped with the listings of tables of contents), and a series of lists entitled *101 Learning Aids for the Charts* in the style of poet Tuli

Kupfeberg's *101 Things to Do with Anything*. *101 Learning Aids* contained lists of how to use the charts in totally non-conventional, psychedelic ways. Some favorite directives include: 1. Drop Acid, fuck the charts; 27. Revolutionize or destroy the charts; 36. Have a sexual fantasy about Susan Sontag.⁹ The projects acted as a sort of contradictory provocation to the rigor of the "shooting script," suggesting that the r/v/p create their own way of interpreting the set of materials. The charts were a meandering exercise which the viewer's cognitive and perceptive experience transformed into new critical inquiries within postmodern and modern discourses.

The tension between modernism and postmodernism is precisely where Stein's argument for *Blueprint's* adoption into CalArts materializes: prior to this moment of 1969, the doctrine of US universities, in all aspects of institutional design, was modernism. On one hand, Brutalist architecture, a descendent of modernism and a popular style for administrative buildings in the '60s and '70s, instituted spacial control rebuking any logic of potential interdisciplinarity ideology. On the other hand, college curriculum design and institutional teaching was systematized and professionalized in the arts and humanities.¹⁰

The architecture of the Blueprint charts constructed a way to map a constellation of tensions and similarities between modernism and postmodernism – framed by Herbert Marcuse and Marshall McLuhan at the center. The charts developed out of Stein's teaching at Brandeis University in the late 1960s, where he regularly taught courses like "Social Theory" and "Sociology of Literature." These courses

⁹ Maurice Stein and Larry Miller, *Blueprint for Counter Education* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1970).

¹⁰ Maurice Stein, Larry Miller and Marshall Henrich in discussion with Herbert Blau, September 11, 1970

sought to map the shifty constellation of critical discourses arising at the juncture between modernists like Freud, Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, to thinkers like Karl Jaspers, and contemporary figures like Marcuse, McLuhan, and Fuller. To map this in linear form was too multi-layered and complex so Stein started charting as a result.¹¹

There was a messiness and hodgepodge aesthetic to the charts, reminiscent of Dadaist collages and DIY cut-and-paste zines. The rendered scribbled quotes and overwhelming lists of names and rigorous modernist schools of the art historical past were there to guide the r/v/p through each discipline, or expansive “environment.” Once positioned in a particular environment, sets of “sub-environments” such as “modernism as meditative environment” and “postmodernism as participatory environment,” guide the r/v/p through a set of particular positions within a given environment. The charts applied an assemblage process to an interdisciplinary curriculum, to students entering the critical studies department at CalArts who were used to art courses, political courses, design, and general courses which were previously experienced as separate. The students derived the structure from the works the r/v/p was studying, locating a method within them.¹²

As dean of the Critical Studies department at CalArts, Stein’s agenda was to bring on faculty that represented this shift from modernist to postmodernist theory. His first hire was Herbert Marcuse, a New Leftist and Frankfurt School philosopher. Stein had been a long admirer of Marcuse, and his essay *An Essay on Liberation* deeply shaped *Blueprint* and Stein’s vision for CalArts approach to interdisciplinary education.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Maurice Stein, Larry Miller and Marshall Henrich in discussion with Herbert Blau, September 11, 1970

Stein became invested in Marcuse's concept of "the aesthetic universe." According to Marcuse, the aesthetic universe was "the precondition of Art is a radical looking into reality, and a looking away from it—a repression of its immediacy, and of the immediate response to it."¹³ Equally important to Stein was Marcuse's expansive definition of form, "when art separated from the social division of labor, it assumed a Form of its own, common to all arts."¹⁴ Here, Marcuse's terms meet Stein's curriculum via the Blueprint project: the subjects experience with the charts is an action of radical gazing, encouraging an immediate response through the aesthetic direction embedded within the charts. By Stein's extended invitation to Marcuse, there was hope that the critical studies department would create an environment based on Marcuse's terms: treating students as a part of a larger collective of artists learning from the world.

The emergence of the critical studies department was primarily due to the efforts of Blau, who was aware of the students concerns at the end of the '60s: Vietnam, drugs, alternative lifestyles. Modernism in the education system had overlooked the concerns and criticisms relating to broader, global and domestic issues. Stein was hired to engage students on these issues, yet his approach to teaching ultimately backfired: While CalArts was preaching a more "radical education," it never quite met Stein's expectations for leftist institutional reform. Ultimately, Stein didn't have enough time. His tenure at CalArts was only one year long and it was never renewed, due in part to his hiring of Marcuse. Stein's final months of teaching at CalArts were spent wearing a Mickey Mouse t-shirt to class in order to make the point

¹³ Herbert Marcuse, "Art as Form of Reality", *libcom.org*. accessed December 4, 2015. <https://libcom.org/library/art-form-reality-herbert-marcuse>

¹⁴ *Ibid*

no one really wanted to face up to: the early years were still under the control of the Disney's.



Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse ride as the Rose Parade grand marshals on January 1, 1966. Photograph courtesy of the LA Times.

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