

# UNCOUNTED Emily Roysdon

1. I believe in an alchemy of time. That a certain combination of words, a length of inaction, a discomposed room, or with some such cipher, I believe we can make time.

2. In a memorial poem to Yeats, W.H. Auden wrote, “Poetry makes nothing happen.”<sup>1</sup> Nothing is the realm of uncounted experience.

3. Uncounted experience, unseen in time. If only a wave in proximity to other waves. If only a wave that made a texture of a surface of a top of the line. If only a wave expressing the contour of a bottom, its bottom, the under. If only a wave a rhythm. All potential to break. Crash. hit. rock. wander. If only a night wave, peaking. If only a wave never counted. Measured if a threat.

4. In the same poem, Auden repeated but one refrain, “What instruments we have agree” “what instruments we have agree.”  
What instruments have we?

5. Beyond the will to measure.

6. Gertrude Stein said: “The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything.”<sup>2</sup> What is seen. How everybody is doing everything. In 1925–26 Stein wrote “Composition as Explanation” to talk about *time-sense*, *distribution*, *using everything*, and a *continuous present*. In her elliptical statement on epochal thinking, imaging, and representation (what is seen, difference) are aligned with the ability, potential, and mechanics of the body and technology (how everybody is doing everything). To which I add: How everybody is doing everything is what is different, and how difference is seen. *What is seen depends upon how everybody is doing*.

7. What is time if not activism?

8. I’ve been thinking about the phrase “to discompose” for about two years now, and I can barely use it in a sentence. In some ways I have taken this as a good sign, and in others, the failure has felt constitutive of the idea itself—a focus on the frame, a limit. My pleasure in holding on to it was to work with something open-ended and hard to harden, a word that eschews form and

the world to realize her or his vision, which, whereas the overt heroic language has diminished, and the artist is no longer necessarily singular, the process as *a whole* remains very much our default mode of creation.

38. To be clear, I would argue that even the early projects at Grand Arts are already moving in this direction. One beautiful example: Mei Chin and GALA Committee were working on injecting complex works of Art into the background environment of the TV series *Melrose Place*. (The project was *In the Name of the Place*.) I am not interested in presenting a “before 2004, after 2004” dichotomy. Nor am I claiming that this way of operating was any one curator’s vision. (They are, more than anything, an amazing team.) That said, the year 2004 marks a shift in the direction of Grand Arts.
39. I should be clear about this term, *research creation*—this was *never* a term explicitly used by Grand Arts to refer to what they were up to. I’m just adding it to the mix from my observations and discussions in and around Grand Arts at this time. From our personal experience (as Spurse), I can say that our first conversation with Grand Arts (circa 2007) went something like this:  
GA: Hi, this is Grand Arts. You don’t know us, but we would like you to do something with us.  
Spurse: Wonderful, but what does that mean, because we really take a long time developing projects?  
GA: Well, that is what interests us, we would like to support your research in an open-ended manner. It does not have to become anything in a gallery, or that we would understand as art...  
Spurse: Excellent, when can we start?  
GA: Now.
40. It should also be noted that Grand Arts never moved in just one direction. Research creation was always but one of many simultaneous directions. These kinds of projects were happening all over, not just at Grand Arts. I think the difference is that Grand Arts took on the consequences of these practices as a structural question (even if it was one that it could never fully address).
41. Of course the programming changes on something like a monthly basis, and the general trajectory of an institution will evolve (within carefully proscribed limits).
42. The institution’s version of neutral—not some “true” universal neutrality.
43. One telling example: When you are no longer bringing in gallery artists but various forms of researchers, the economic model of not paying artists becomes ethically unsustainable.
44. While many factors contributed to the closing of Grand Arts, three stand out as critical: (1.) Attachments cannot be ignored—they produce mutual dependencies. We become obligated not simply by pre-existing others but by what emerges through mutually composed situations. The situation transforms us from the middle via feedback loops across scales and networks. (2.) There are structural limits of institutions that cannot transform. Research involves a co-evolving at *structural* levels with the endeavor, and that co-evolution will reach a point at which the transformation is a transformation in kind and not just degree. It takes a unique logic to allow an institution to cross such thresholds. (3.) When the funding model allows for independence from a responsibility to community, community and institution are structurally decoupled in a manner that promotes a strongly delimited sense of engagement. Given the above, perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Grand Arts had already closed when it let the first attachment happen—many years before this moment of the official closing.
45. Ontologies, if you will. *Cosmologies* captures the sense that these are lived, felt, built, experiential realities—physical worlds and ecologies, not simply conceptual understandings.
46. See final diagram at end of essay.
47. A simple way to begin this: We could engage in practices without referencing art—a movie or a drawing or music. What matters is: *What do they connect to? What do they activate? What can they do? How can they entangle into and across systems, species, and environments?*
48. *Look elsewhere*: There are astonishing new cosmologies and institutions emerging (as well as powerful anthropologies of other cosmologies, e.g., Descola). Examples: Nunavut and IsumaTV.
49. Examples: the SenseLab (Montreal) and Madeline Gins’s most recent work.
50. This procedural idea of aesthetics is in dialogue with William James, Roger Parker, and James Gibson (see *Ecological Psychology in Context: James Gibson, Roger Parker, and the Legacy of William James’s Radical Empiricism*, ed. Harry Heft); the enactive approach (often called 4EA); and Foucault and Deleuze’s ideas of a *dispositif*; as

well as recent biological thought on emergent systems.

51. See the work of Alva Noe.
52. This is where we need to pay close attention to feminist, queer, and other analyses of the specificity of modes of actual embodiment; far too much of the current writing on embodiment assumes a neutral, universal subject.
53. One final question: How does sensing lead to new cosmologies? A hypothesis: *Feel without connecting*. If aesthetics is about what can be felt, it will always exceed and precede cognition (the self-reporting to the self on what it feels). This feeling without connecting can have an effect (affect), and as such it is a meaning-making act—it is meaningful. We can begin in the feel of the world without having a knowing/sensing experience of this event. This is an experimental inflection point of emergence and composition (A. N. Whitehead, and process philosophy in general have much to add to these experiments).
54. In some manner this means realizing that the bio-/geo-/social are themselves carefully composed cosmologies. And that we might look elsewhere to get a sense of very different ways to conceptualize place: indigenous communities worldwide, NGOs such as North Atlantic Marine Alliance (NAMA), and writers such as Ursula LeGuin, Eduardo Kohn, and Donna Haraway are all good starting places.
55. Gilbert Simondon has developed far-reaching pragmatics of individuation.
56. Think of how many species make up “our” bodies, and even each cell (and the long compositional process of endosymbiosis); see Lynn Margulis.
57. Example: the Land Institute.
58. Some possible starting points to focus on: entanglements and middles, defining things into processes and procedures, co-composition, and developing *relays* across fields—entanglements into emergent systems.
59. Some bad news for those who need to keep things neat: It’s going to require more hyphens (for a while, at least). These new forms of institution-building ask us to get transdisciplinary. To join, link, enter, and move across multiple, incongruous fields toward emerging otherwise. *But being transdisciplinary is not an end in itself*. It is best thought of as a stage toward developing new practices and cosmologies that are outside our current mode of being.
60. Developmental systems theory, in all its glorious forms, has much to offer (Susan Oyama, et. al.).
61. Examples: (again) Arakawa and Gins, and the Land Institute.
62. The call to acquire craft skills should not be taken as a call to elevate “Craft” in the longstanding debate between Art and Craft. That idea of the discipline called Craft is born of the same logic as Art. In coming after, we are also coming after Craft (the binary of the useful vs. the useless).