School Section
By Dave Hullfish Bailey
As part of The New Model
22.10 2014–11.1 2015

Tensta konsthall
Using the utopian ideas of the 1960’s as a point of departure, the artist Dave Hullfish Bailey in his installation School Section draws up real and self-invented connections between land use in the US and the nation’s public school system. He finds his way into a landscape of social, political, and economical tensions. Drop City in Colorado was a kind of hippie commune situated nearby a disused public school. The school was built thirty years earlier in connection with the Great Depression, as a result of progressive Americans choosing to invest in public education and to face locally the ecological and economical disaster that came with the sand storms in the region. By pointing out the school, or “the institutional ghost,” as a basis for later life in Drop City, Hullfish Bailey finds historical connections, whether possible or impossible, between the two social constructions.

Groups affiliating with alternative lifestyles and surveys of specific locations in the margins of society often occur in Hullfish Bailey’s installations, publications, and site-specific projects. Through his use of research material, educational object prototypes, and furniture, Hullfish Bailey questions how the public school system of today is becoming increasingly standardized. In relation to Palle Nielsen, and others, project The Model: A model for a Qualitative Society, Hullfish Bailey’s artistic methods advocate for active research into flexible ideas regarding childhood, citizenship, and the significance of certain sites in society.

Dave Hullfish Bailey was born in Denver and is currently based in Los Angeles. Recent presentations include Broken Country, Malmö Konsthall (2013); São Paulo Biennale (2012); Surrounded by Squares, Raven Row, London (2009); Biennale de Lyon (2007); What’s Left to Its own Devices (On Reclamation), Casco Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht (2007); and CityCat Project, Brisbane (2006/ongoing). Publications include Elevator (Secession, Vienna: 2006), What’s Left (Casco/Sternberg Press, Utrecht/Berlin: 2009) and Union Pacific (Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin: 1999). Reviews of his work have appeared in Artforum, Frieze, Springerin, artext, Untitled, Nu: The Nordic Art Review, and other journals. Hullfish Bailey teaches at Art Center College of Design, Pasadena and has guest taught widely. Hullfish Bailey earned his BA in philosophy and science at Carleton College and holds graduate degrees from Harvard Divinity School and Art Center College of Design. He has received grants from institutions including the Center for Cultural Innovation, Durfee Foundation, California Community Foundation, and Philip Morris Kunstförderung.
In the reception:


Experimental learning tool; adaptable to discussing multiple scales and dynamics of physical phenomena (meteors, dust particles, dropping rocks) and cultural activities (artworks, utopian architecture, transportation infrastructure, and others).

Meteor City, Coconino County, Arizona 2012: from the rock pile to the culvert; along eastbound I–40 frontage road; crossing to shoulder of offramp; until blacktop ends at dreamcatcher; from western boundary of Kempton property; at last billboard before exit; working up the drainage; down the prevailing wind; from sandstone trestle to trash pile; along rimrock shelf; paralleling BNSF right-of- way; juncture with grid; following barbed wire to rock pile. 2013, gridded arrangement of 42 images, photo paper, 175x75cm

Meteor City, Coconino County, Arizona 2012: radiating out, circumnavigating the sales counter, 2013. 15 images in repeating pattern, photo paper, 175x75cm

'Meteor City' was founded in the late 1930s as a tourist trap near Meteor Crater which is the world's largest and first discovered meteor crater, on Route 66. Known as the US 'Mother Road', the highway carried generations of Americans westward, first as farmers fled the Dust Bowl, an ecological disaster in the early 1930s caused by the attempt to over-produce wheat, for California, and again during World War II. The geodesic dome was added in 1979.

"Western Education" (School Section edit) x Cold War satellites, 2013. Scene from "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" (John Ford, 1962) divided into 36 sections, Sputnik model on group work tables, Google satellite imagery of Meteor Crater, Arizona (c-print on dibond)

The film “The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance” (1962), directed by John Ford, is a fictional account of the US frontier, before the settlement of the west in the 19th century. Farmers and townsfolk brought westward by Thomas Jefferson's vision of a democratic, agrarian society are in the film pitted against powerful cattle barons. Education is used to organize the citizens. In reality, US public education in the post-Depression era was widely understood as essential to sustaining a healthy democracy. Launch of the Sputnik satellite precipitated a sharp turn in policy that emphasized math, science and other subjects related to technological supremacy.

On reversing the Dismantling, 2014. 36 images, pigment on paper.

On November 6, 2012, Californians voted on two measures promoted as ways to improve funding for education in the state's public schools. The billboard was created by artist Barbara Kruger as part of a media campaign by a non-for-profit organization.

Exhibition hall:

"Western Education" (essay from The Phantom of Liberty – Contemporary Art and the Pedagogical Paradox, 2014).


Orchestrated and Accidental Collapse, 2014. Advertising signage, blower fans
Inflatable ‘air dancers’ or ‘sky puppets’ came into wide use in the mid-2000s as an advertising system for small, “mom-and-pop” roadside businesses. They are much less expensive than renting billboards, and their jerky spasmodic motion in the wind is highly eye-catching. The words are constructed from syllables or parts of words commonly used on sky puppets in economically disadvantaged areas of Los Angeles, the terminus of Route 66.

Working documents, 2013 (ongoing). Research materials in vitrine

Materials relating to the geographical and cultural context of the 1960s artistic experiment which became known as Drop City, an iconic community of the counter-culture. Drop City was located in El Moro, Colorado, a railroad town that failed when its rival, Trinidad, Colorado became better connected to East-West transcontinental rail routes. El Moro stood slightly north of the Purgatoire River, known locally as The Picketwire.

Dry Country, 2014. US Bureau of Land Management (BLM) 1:100,000 scale Surface Management maps of Southeastern Colorado, various publication dates, with notes

Maps showing which government agencies are responsible for managing public lands. The grid underlying the property lines stems from a post-revolutionary (1785) theoretical model designed to foster a democratic nation of ‘yeoman farmers’ (Thomas Jefferson). The model inter-relates land ownership, ideal population size, and economic instrumentalization of the land to support public functions and build private wealth. The checkerboard grid of blue squares shows state owned lands earmarked as the ‘School Sections’ intended to support public education.

Toponymic Technologies—Notes and Prototypes

Research notes, conceptual models and possible sites for creating texts large enough to be visible in satellite imagery. Proposals rely upon prevailing environmental conditions in specific sites in or near the Picketwire River drainage.

- Toponymic Proposal #1 (Llano Estacado), 2013. Marking chalk, computer fans, paper, nails
- Toponymic Proposal #2 (Comanche Grasslands), 2014. Model of four strand barbwire, aluminum tent poles, wire, ripstop nylon

Picketwire Watershed, 2014. US Geological survey 1:24,000 topographic maps, layered by date of publication, with notes

Topographic maps showing Picketwire Canyon and the Picketwire watershed downstream from Trinidad, Colorado. Individual maps showing satellite imagery include geographical features given the name “School Section” due to their location on school sections (sections 16 and 36).


Tools for field-based poetic investigations. Wooden blocks model the effect of the winds blowing on letters using single (large blocks) or double (smaller blocks) lines of 4-strand fencing. Wind data and topography are based on government records from November 6, 2012 on the Corbin Canyon School Section (Township 27 South, Range 54 West, Section 16).

School Section Manipulables, first prototypes (satellite image x proposed toponymic)/initial state, 2013/14. CNC-machined MDF on work tables.
- (splain between ditches) x (T 32 S, R 63 W, Section 16)
- (well by gobbler’s maw) x (T 28 S, R 62 W, Section 36)
Two sets of blocks related to specific school sections just north of the Picketwire River. Surfaces of blocks reflect the interaction of polygons created by satellite imagery of these sections, and those generated by text describing the site by means of an alternate placename.


Model of a canyon created by building a 3-D computer model of the words “School Section Canyon” (as they appear in Section 16 of the 2010 USGS 1:24,000 Topographic map of Corbin Canyon) and simulating the way rainfall would drain around them.
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 14:00
Guided tour of School Section

Wednesday 22.10, 18:30
The New Model: A conversation between Gunilla Lundahl, Ane Hjort Guttu, and Dave Hullfish Bailey.

Ane Hjort Guttu's film This Place is Every Place and Dave Hullfish Bailey's installation School Section have both been developed within the investigative project The New Model. The project was initiated in the fall of 2011 and uses Palle Nielsen and others' legendary work The Model: A model for a qualitative society (1968) as its point of departure and historical reference. The Model was exhibited at Moderna Museet in the form of an enormous playground for children that included elements of urban activism. It questioned the possibility and form of the qualitative society. The work was made in a political time very different from ours, a time with a preserved confidence in a utopian future. Today the situation is more ambivalent. But the question of how to create a qualitative society lingers. How can art engage with these kinds of issues today?

The cultural journalist and writer Gunilla Lundahl, who was in charge of the exhibition The Model in 1968, is invited to moderate the conversation. Palle Nielsen's installation was part of Aktion Samtal, a series of urban interventions that took place in Stockholm at the same time. Lundahl, who has been following the research project The New Model from its inception in 2011, thus holds a unique double perspective. She will join Dave Hullfish Bailey and Ane Hjort Guttu in a conversation on the creation processes of the two exhibitions, their relation to the utopian '60s, and thoughts on new models that art can propose today.

The New Model was initiated by Lars Bang Larsen and Maria Lind, who invited the artists Magnus Bärtås, Ane Hjort Guttu, Dave Hullfish Bailey, and Hito Steyerl to make new works. The project has resulted in a series of seminars and workshops (2011–2012), the group exhibition The Society Without Qualities (2013), and Magnus Bärtås's work The Miracle in Tensta (Theoria), 2014.

Wednesday, 17.12, 18:30
Book release for Phantom of Liberty: Contemporary Art and the Pedagogical Paradox. With Tone Hansen, director of Henie Onstad Art Center in Oslo and artist Ane Hjort Guttu.

How does contemporary art engage with issues like childhood, play, and pedagogy? And how is the act of learning affected by today's obsession with efficiency within governmental schooling and education? In an era increasingly characterized by competition and instrumentalisation, the reformed pedagogical concept “free play” is lost. The new book Phantom of Liberty: Contemporary Art and the Pedagogical Paradox addresses childhood and the policy of education during the 1900s in relation to the current debate. With contributions by Allan Sekula, Magnus Marsdal, Dave Hullfish Bailey, Carsten René Jørgensen, Ane Hjort Guttu, Marit Paasche, Carl Hegemann, Nils Christie, Adelita Husni Bey, Emanuel Almborg, Lars Bang Larsen, and Sharon Lockhart. The anthology is edited by curator and art critic Lars Bang Larsen and Tone Hansen, director of Henie Onstad Art Centre in Oslo.

The road to knowledge
Workshop for school classes

In relation to the project School Section, we take a closer look at the methods used by Dave Hullfish Bailey in order to attain knowledge. The school has its specific structure where grades and educational goals function as instruments to measure knowledge. But there are other ways to learn, and many contemporary artists are good examples of this. They work across borders to explore histories, places, and politics, often through experimentation, sometimes through play, and always with uncertain results. During the visit,
we will discuss knowledge and how it is produced in relation to school, life, politics, and the arts. The visit will include a tour followed by a discussion and, if you wish, a practical workshop where the questions will be converted into artistic exercises.

All school viewings are free of charge and will be adapted to the students’ age. To book a viewing, please contact Emily Fahlén, mediator at Tensta konsthall at emily@tenstakonsthall.se, 08–360763.

In collaboration with ABF.
Conversation between Hans Carlsson and Dave Hullfish Bailey

Hans Carlsson
Your art practice is often focused on hypothetical micro histories, as well as real events and historical facts. The point of departure tends to be geographical changes on a big scale, merging from, for example, natural disasters and geographical environmental changes. You are currently living in LA, a city where artists historically have been concerned with architecture, infrastructure, and geography, some of them working with the relationship between concepts such as peripheries and centers and sites and non-sites. Do you feel at home in this tradition?

Dave Hullfish Bailey
As a young city composed mostly of immigrants, or as a young art scene emerging from the shadows of New York and elsewhere, questions of sites and non-sites, centers and peripheries are part of the DNA of living here, let alone making art here. I came to Los Angeles in the mid-1990s, when the city was going through a string of natural and human-made disasters – fires, earthquakes, and floods, but also the civil unrest following the beating of Rodney King and the ravages of crack cocaine and organized gangs in the inner city. The dramatization of dysfunction through the massive media industry based here only fueled the rate of suburban sprawl and physical, as well as psycho-geographical, changes to the city. I think most of the art you are referring to comes out of the questions that experience opened up for artists – social and political questions about how the city is organized and critical questions about whose experience is represented, and how.

HC
The aesthetics of your work is often fragmented, and you use objects and materials as they are, as ready-mades. You use construction materials, commercial commodities from the hiking industry, as well as maps and mapping devices from the internet. The objects are often connected to each other in a DIY kind of way, sometimes evoking the idea of a persona: an explorer, or scientist, or potentially a hobby carpenter trapped in the middle of some more or less realistic project. Another noticeable character in your practice is an interest in similarities, comparisons, and analogies. Often this method makes it possible for you to compare seemingly very different histories and micro narratives as well as formal aspects. It’s almost as if you make structural and formal analysis of human behaviour and the construction of society. Is this a fair analysis of your work?

DHB
I am interested in how the world is put together, and how we put it together in our minds and our communities. The aesthetics – formal and conceptual – come from using common materials for wrong-headed purposes, and redirecting specific knowledges to lateral questions. I try to make objects that reward the kind of looking that happens in exhibitions yet can also open up spaces outside of it. The objects’ provisional appearance is often rooted in making something that can enter the world through the accessibility of its materials and construction and suggest itself as something to be recast in that space. I think of it as trying to create an intersubjective tool or “open sourcing” the codes within a site, rather than expressing a particular persona. The projects’ research and workshop phases enact questions of how sense-making expands from individual to collective meanings.

HC
Partly circulating around historical artifacts and histories from southeastern Colorado, namely the famous community Drop City, a counter-culture community started in the 60’s, your project for Tensta konsthall also makes great jumps between times and places. Drop City (now closed and deserted for several decades) was created with great help
of architect Buckminster Fuller’s utopian architecture, and the aim was to create a non-hierarchical, “drop out” micro society. In your project you also draw formal and historical connections from Drop City to a community school from the 30’s, constructed as part of the socially progressive New Deal politics next to Drop City, but closed down before the 60’s. In your installation, the school is still present as a ghost from an educational utopia, in this case confronting another visionary educational model for human coexistence. Again I am curious about your method: connecting different times and ideas through their placing geographically – what sort of understanding of place does this method implement?

DHB
I make work about things I don’t understand, but you always enter the unknown through that about which you know at least a little bit more. So to enter The Model: A Model for a Qualitative Society, I began with Drop City, where the revolutionary impulse of the 60’s generated a radical experiment based in experiential learning and forms of constructivist play. It’s worth saying here also that Drop City actually began as an artistic experiment named after a form of art-making (Drop Art) inspired by Kaprow’s Happenings and other art-into-life gestures. The other associations of ‘dropping’ (i.e., acid, out) became attached to it after it hit the media and became flooded with disaffected youth just looking for a scene or a place to crash while traveling cross-country. The inhabitants of Drop City were not young children but were intent on making a fresh start in a place without the rules of their parents. My main focus is upon where it happened and where the ‘utopian’ narrative and iconography of the place can be made to give way to its embeddedness in existing landscape systems and cultural precedents. So it is an attempt to contextualize the ‘no-place’ within the concrete. You could also read the project as an attempt to enact that kind of emancipatory thinking model, once a big part of progressive pedagogy but now pushed out of public schooling, upon a geographic site that has also been largely written off as a blank space in public consciousness.

HC
There are also other connections between education, land use, politics, and place in the project in Tensta. The geopolitical references in your installation – to Sputnik, but also a scene in a Western movie, The Man who Shot Liberty Valance, where John Wayne plays a frontier cowboy who is being confronted with civil society and its educational institutions. You are also concerned with the political situation in Colorado today. The state is confronted with plans for making huge areas of land into military training grounds as well as student demonstrations, protesting against right-wing attempts to impose conservative versions of US history as the standard in school curricula. Is Colorado a case study that serves as a “model” for further reflection in your work?

DHB
Colorado is an interesting place to look at right now. It’s considered a “swing state,” meaning it could go either Republican or Democrat in any given election, and has enough votes to impact the national balance of power. It is a historically very conservative state, with roots in an anti-federal, small government view of things. But as Denver urbanizes and Colorado diversifies from the historical mining, ranching, and agriculture economies, it is becoming increasingly liberal. For example, the legalizing of marijuana was sold to voters as a way to fund public education. The protests against the standardization of curriculum reflect pushback on a much bigger issue – the instrumentalization of learning to assure competitiveness in a global economy. So you can look at the pot issue as a sad referendum on public funding for schools, but within that lies an open question – did it happen because both ends voted for the principle of personal liberty (here the extremes of the liberal
and the conservative factions actually share ground,) or was it more because the middle made the more pragmatic decision to maximize for its youth the liberties afforded by higher wages. It frames questions of instrumentality (of education and land) quite concretely.

HC
I have always been thinking that the way your work is put together has some similarities with literature. More specifically I think of someone like William Faulkner, like you, picturing the social topography of rural US, also revisiting sites and places in a fragmented way. Is this too bold of a comparison from my part?

DHB
I am interested in that reading, understanding it to be a structural observation rather than some claim of “literary quality.” I am interested in some of the things literature can do, which includes close description sustained over time and relational thinking. But I rely little on characters or dramatic arcs – the human perspective is not always primary. The way Faulkner turns the Mississippi River into a protagonist in his writing, might be a parallel. Also I tend to stay rooted in the concrete. I am involved in the activity of reconnoitering, about going out and getting the lay of the land, which involves jumping between kinds of objects (plants, animals, rocks, etc.), orders of scale (the position of the sun or moon, geological magnitudes of time, or the pathways of animals or water) and the interactions between human and nonhuman systems. It’s been observed by nature writers and painters that the middle ground evaporates in desert landscapes – your eyes and mind jump from what is at your feet to distant horizon line. I try to resist that in many ways – being in (not just looking at) a landscape really requires you to articulate the interconnections between the immediate ground and the infrastructures and ecologies in which it is inscribed.

HC
Your practice as an artist also extends into domains of writing (essays as well as artist books) and also community-based work and workshops. You have also been working as a teacher for higher art education. Does this type of work connect to your more formal installations?

DHB
Books and writing provide sites where test-based research materials and narratives can be brought forward more fully than in exhibition contexts. But perhaps the red thread in your list is my interest in the construction of knowledge, in which books, workshops, and formal education are all active and often institutionalized. So they are sites with structures that can be interrogated on their own terms, and in relation to the others. The connection to my exhibitions is rooted in the idea that what you see in an exhibition is often a freeze frame of a project that presupposes other destinations, modalities, and audiences. Typically a project unfolds through my initial, independent investigation of a place that, in turn, leads to a tool or proposal that requires a broader participation in order to realize out in the world. Often what I am showing in an exhibition is background research, the experimental networks of information that lead to a specific proposal, or equipment a group might need in order to go out and realize it. Whether that happens or not, I try to create exhibitions that require kinds of looking and thinking that parallel those needed in mapping a landscape or other complex, emerging system.

HC
In one of your later texts, Western Education, (Tone Hansen and Lars Bang Larsen, ed.; also present in the exhibition) you are in general terms mapping out the terrain of US education since the early 20th century, focusing on the situation in California. The ideas about a socially engaged pedagogy, shaped in the progressive era of the Great Deal Politics mentioned above,
were surrendered in the wake of the Cold War in the US. When Sputnik was launched, you state, the competitive spirit took over, and the idea to form an educational elite (focused on mathematics and physics) was gaining ground. Is the pedagogical approach of the Great Deal (and later on the US counter culture) an inspirational source for your own educational practice?

DHB
Definitely. I am a product of the changes to public education brought on by that “Sputnik moment.” I succeeded with all the math and science, but did not get a chance to develop what I now think of as my core interests until I took myself off that track. (It was more of a violent throwing!) Only then did I begin to learn about other ways of learning, which have guided my teaching (as well as my parenting.) The New Deal was based very explicitly on the thinking of the philosopher John Dewey, who had a lot to say about art and experience. So he is something of a lodestone in what is now US counter-pedagogy, although I’m by no means orthodox, and the challenges are so different. Dewey, perhaps like the makers of The Model, saw a chance to start fresh, to catch children early. My work as an educator is more about navigating entrenched, competing systems of learning and knowledge production, where experimental approaches can be put forward as a horizon line with which to engage dialectically. In a city like Los Angeles, teaching also includes traversing a lot of different cultures that balance learning and training in different ways. This would be true in Tensta as well, which for me is one of the compelling parts of revisiting The Model in this context.

Hans Carlsson is an artist and writer.

Initiated in 2011 at Tensta konsthall, over a period of two years The New Model investigated the heritage of The Model: A Model for a Qualitative Society through a number of projects, seminars, workshops, and exhibitions.

Participants included Lars Bang Larsen, Magnus Bärtås, Ane Hjort Guttu, Dave Hullfish Bailey, and Hito Steyerl.
Past:


By transforming Moderna Museet into an adventure playground, Nielsen wanted to give children a chance to “be themselves” and express their own reality. The children would be able to play in an environment that was free and separate from the adult world in general and from the urban milieu in particular, and that was also adapted to their own energetic activities.

In contrast, nowadays, more or less every aspect of our lives is capitalized and culture is dominated by entertainment. Our lives in 2011 do not share much in common with the social and cultural upheavals of 1968. Today, not even play is an unspoiled, intact freedom; it is in part a function of the creative industries. How can we re-articulate and renew the questions Nielsen posed with his Model? How can we create a qualitative society out of a totally other reality?


In 1968, the artist and architect Palle Nielsen initiated The Model: A Model for a Qualitative Society, a children’s playground that was installed at the Moderna Museet. The event was part of Aktion Samtal (Action Talk), a series of urban procedures that took place in Stockholm at the same time.

Although the model was a spectacular manifestation at one of Sweden’s most prestigious museums, it has taken a long time for the project to find its way into the history books. The reason for this has undoubtedly been the project’s dual nature as a mixture of artistic research and activism, and the manifestations of collective authorship that built on Palle Nielsen’s activist network.

With some of the key players from the The Model and Action Talk, the seminar at Tensta Konsthall explored the project from an art and cultural historical perspective as it was understood then, as well as its historical context. An important aspect is the project’s relationship to postwar urban development, especially the new suburb’s emergence. In addition, the seminar was about how contemporary experience and theory can formulate historical events that are still important and relevant for us today.


11.6–28.9 2014 The film The Miracle in Tensta (Theoria) by Magnus Bärtås is a wayward depiction of how the Virgin Mary appeared in Tensta in the summer of 2012, based on testimonies on the internet. With the help of Tensta residents, the testimonies have been visualized and shot in the same room in the gallery where the film will be shown.