

BREAK DOWN

Workbook #1

**Questions for
evaluating
art that
concerns itself
with ecology**

Breakdown Break Down Workbook #1 April 2016

This is the first in a series of workbooks published by Breakdown Break Down Press. The intention of the series is to help focus discussions and efforts to shift the ways in which we talk about and practice ecological awareness in art and everyday situations.

Contemporary art almost invariably presents ideas and aesthetics on a symbolic, referential level, particularly when it concerns itself with ecological issues. What this means is that it tells a story that does not include its material realities in that story. The effect this has is that the artwork hides its own material use, social impact, energy use, and other conditions necessary for its production and reception. We need to understand what is at stake when an artwork's primary form and

mode of communication replicates the very problems of a society it reflects on.

The questions on the following pages were generated by Brett Bloom in conversations with Nuno Sacramento, director of the Scottish Sculpture Workshop (SSW), for use in a gathering of artists, curators, and administrators working in the Frontiers In Retreat initiative—a 5 year project presenting artists working with ecology—at SSW in March of 2016.

1. To what extent does an artwork replicate or enact the same types of ecological relationships that it seeks to address?

Why aren't we talking about this issue more amongst ourselves as practitioners?

How do we find a way to talk about the power, waste, pollution, resource extraction, colonialism, petroleum-based lifeworld we inhabit, and other concerns amongst ourselves?

If we can't do that, then how do we expect to understand how our work is effecting the people we engage and the world around us?

2. What are the externalities –the social and the environmental costs– of making artwork that concerns itself with ecology?

Do you fly from one location to another to make your art work?

Is your audience in multiple cities instead of where you live?

What kinds of materials do you use in your art work?

Do you use technology, computers, search engines, power from the socket in the wall?

**Have you taken the time to
enumerate environmental
costs of your art work?**

**How does all of this make you
feel?**

3. What role does culture (art) have in shifting our society away from one that is fossil-fuel-based towards whatever is emerging?

We have recently seen several open calls for artists to make work with scientists to help visualize climate change for the general public. This seems like only part of what is needed, and is probably the least effective, as we think we need embodied, empathic, and directly experienced ways of understanding the situation we are in.

What are other ways you have found of addressing this issue of communicating these incredibly large, complex problems we face, with others?

4. What forms of art making can we develop to address the challenges and urgencies of rapid climate breakdown?

How can we shift the ways in which we are artists or use our work?

How can we do things that look more like movement building and generating mass cultural shifts in contradistinction to making art works for galleries, museums, individual careers and development?



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Brett Bloom

2016



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***Petro-Subjectivity: De-Industrializing
Our Sense of Self***

Brett Bloom

2015

Breakdown Break Down is a long term effort to organize cultural workers, artists, activists, and those interested in surviving climate breakdown, to de-industrialize our sense of self and produce the civil society that will help us endure ecological collapse. This is done with camps in rural settings, workshops in large cities, publications, and a developing vocabulary, to help us make the shift away from petroleum culture.



www.breakdownbreakdown.net