

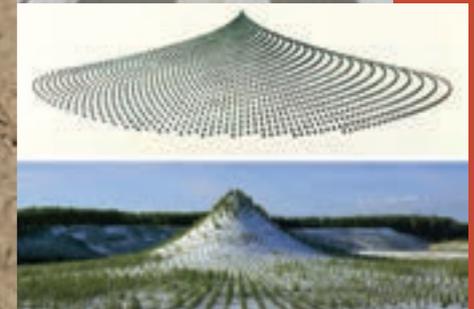
isc Press

The New Earthwork

Art Action Agency

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51 Declarations for the Future — A Manifesto for Artists

by Frances Whitehead

Why

1. Climate change = culture change
2. Sustainability is a cultural problem
3. Culture is everywhere
4. Ethics and aesthetics are inseparable
5. We need a new metaphysic
6. This is ideological
7. This is pragmatic
8. This is a call to arms.

How

9. Opt in
10. Question autonomy
11. Seek agency
12. Claim knowledge not just creativity
13. Move beyond critique
14. Demonstrate alternatives
15. Put up or shut up
16. Connect the dots
17. Be suspicious of expertise
18. Redirect contemporary practice.

What

19. Think systemically
20. Contend with complexity
21. Champion diversity
22. Create legibility
23. Solve more than one problem at a time
24. Sit at the collective table
25. Innovate through collaboration
26. Account for intangibles
27. Subvert the cultural quo
28. Violate your own taste
29. Get comfortable being uncomfortable.

Where

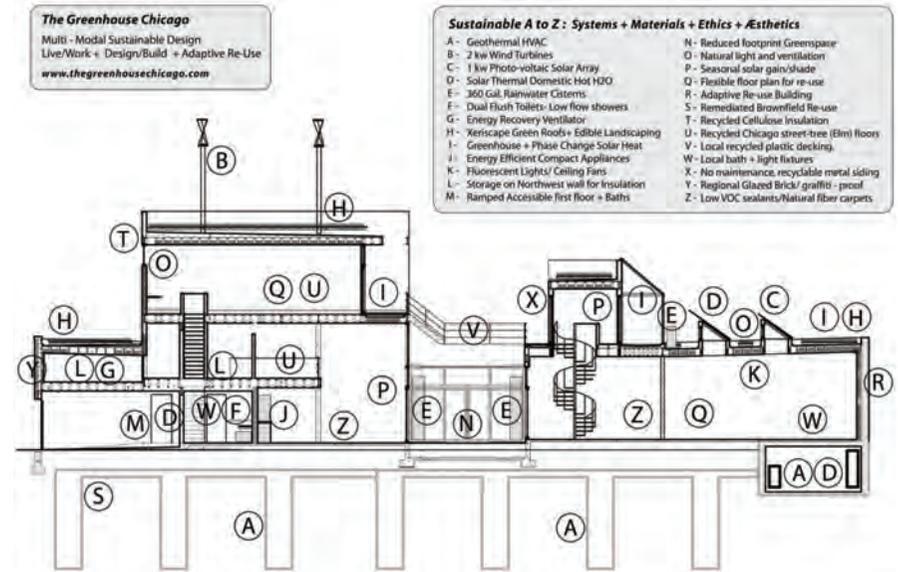
30. Start where you are
31. Re-localize radically
32. Envision place-based practice
33. Develop spatial literacy
34. Work at all scales
35. Create situated knowledge.

When

36. The world is dynamic
37. Adaptation is key
38. Our perception is limited
39. The future arrives every day
40. We are running out of time.

Who

41. We are world makers
42. We are culture workers
43. We are change agents and double agents
44. We are proactive
45. We are problem-finders
46. We are at home in the future
47. We claim intentionality not morality
48. We practice in public
49. We know we don't know
50. We make new knowledge
51. We change culture.



Why (does it matter)?

1 The discourse of climate change has replaced disciplinary-specific models of ecological action with a meta-disciplinary, systemic understanding. The culturally based behaviors that drive these deeply interconnected problems will not be changed by technological solutions alone. Climate change adaptations are **changing our cultural future**.

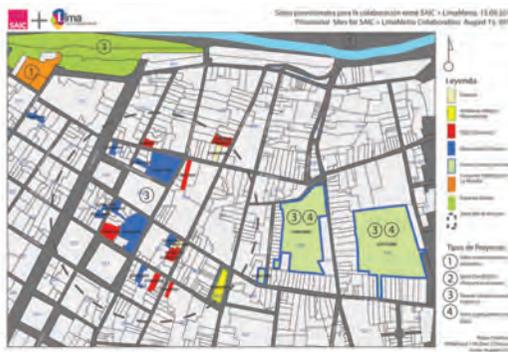
2 The four-pillar model of **sustainability adds culture** to the “triple bottom line” of “social, economic, and environmental” criteria for evaluating sustainability. First described in 2001 and recently adopted by UNESCO, the key insight is that a broad cultural “framework,” not a cultural “sector,” is essential for the achievement of a sustainable society.¹

3 Understanding culture in this expanded way requires artists to work “upstream.” We must act throughout all sectors and disciplines to integrate cultural expertise into wider decision-making, *in situ*, revealing that **culture is everywhere**.

4 Systemic thinking brings the relation of **ethics and aesthetics** into high relief. If a new aesthetic is to be had, it is a systemic one, beyond appearances, a diverse aesthetics evolved to address more than human factors.



Above: Frances Whitehead with Lisa Norton, *SUPERORG. net*, 2005–07. Detail of Steelyard Commons Sustainability Plan, Cleveland. Below: Frances Whitehead, Douglas Pancoast, and Vince Michael, in collaboration with the Municipality of Lima, Peru, *The Lima Project*, 2011–ongoing. Project to integrate urban agriculture into the Barrios Altos historic district. Detail of “La Huerta” at UNALM.



- 5 New forms of cultural expression will be generated that account for the logics, epistemologies, and ontologies of the future, the necessary emergence of **a new metaphysic**.
- 6 While there is an **ideology** at work, the research into forms and instantiations is only beginning. The long-theorized “both/and” model opens a space not only for ethics + aesthetics, but also for art + science, art + design, art + community.
- 7 It is also **pragmatic**. The expertise of artists, their cultural literacy and imagination, is required for survival. This is an opening, an opportunity to remodel culture at all levels and to evolve new practices and outcomes.
- 8 It is vital to our collective future that **artists step up**. What will be sustained and who will decide? How will these vital cultural decisions be made without our participation? Herein lies the urgency, our **call to arms**.

How (do we get there)?

- 9 There is **no opting out** of climate change.
- 10 Perceptions and strategies to the contrary are a function of the persistent myth of **artistic autonomy**, which ultimately limits art, culture, activism, resistance, subversion, agency, praxis, and culture change. All models that divide knowledges and essentialize “culture” exclusively into “artworks” should be examined. **Disciplinary autonomy** further limits what we can contribute; even collectivity largely maintains specializations of labor, knowledge, and practice.
- 11 The mindset of specialization obscures our deeper **agency**, our ability to identify conditions of receptivity. The symbolic economy of art, operating alone, has limited agency. What agency might be found by combining the symbolic with practical action?
- 12 Operating as cultural experts and innovators, artists can claim not only the cognitive and dispositional status of **creativity**, but also disciplinary **knowledge**. We must develop a new epistemology of art practice, one allowing a knowledge claim based on inquiry, expertise, and disposition.
- 13 Claiming knowledge, innovation, and creativity is not enough. We must perform our claim by **moving beyond critique**. Critical capacity is an invaluable tool, but critique alone is not going to deliver solutions.



The Phenologic Forest, 2008–ongoing. An interactive geocaching game for youth establishes a “citizen science” network for phenologic observation in the Hessian Forest of Darmstadt, Germany, based on the coordinate grid used by the Deutscher Wetterdienst.



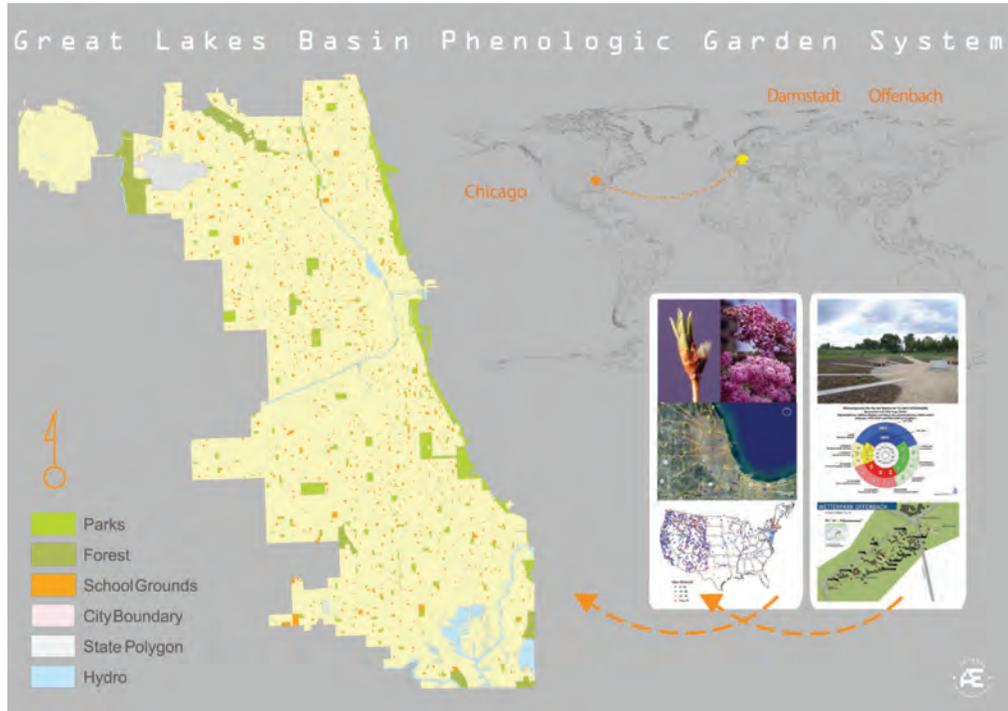
- 14 Our **alternative** visions **demonstrate** our synthetic skills. Here, we differentiate our knowledge and methodologies from anthropologists—artists both produce and evaluate culture—and from designers—artists both design and execute the work.
- 15 Our collective situation is fraught with “moral hazards,” but we must act *anyway*. We cannot claim creativity if we cannot **deliver models** for the future.
- 16 **Connecting the dots** is at the core of our work. Artists are adept at creating multi-criteria works that negotiate different audiences and points of access, that navigate the tangible and intangible. These skills can be used to integrate cultural aspects into all projects.
- 17 Artists possess the key skill of “not knowing”; we admit limitations. Climate change has precipitated a renewed interest in “wicked problems,” problems paradoxically unsolvable by the expertise that created them. We must be **suspicious of reductivist forms of expertise**, including our own. Artists give themselves permission to intervene in any system without invitation. This strategic irreverence is not merely cultural mischief—we must also look inward.
- 18 As we understand the systemic nature of climate impacts, we must evolve new ways to integrate artistic expertise, to move away from specialization toward dynamic and adaptive models. We must **redirect art practice**.

What (do we do)?

- 19 Emerging from evolutionary biology, **complexity** science is becoming a key influence on public policy and climate action. The ability to think in **whole systems**, especially closed looped systems, dynamic and metabolic, is crucial.
- 20 Understanding cities and their bioregions as **complex adaptive systems** forms a core competency for the future and opens possibilities for conceptualizing new modes of cultural activity—new sites and opportunities for engagement.
- 21 Adaptation and evolutionary innovation **favor diversity** of all kinds: a diversity of approaches creates alternative perceptions and feedback, more innovative systems, and additional **complexity**.
- 22 Comprehension of these interconnections foregrounds the need for **legibility beyond visualization**. The complexities

at work in the world are outside the scope of any single discipline. The traditional role of the artist, to make the invisible visible, takes on new dimensions, re-cast as “seeing systems.”

- 23 Much like the multi-level artwork, a “radically multi-functional” approach **that solves more than one problem at a time** is required for problems that lie at the intersections of interdependent sub-systems.



Great Lakes Basin Phenologic Garden System, Chicago Park District, 2008–ongoing. A phenologic planting and observation system for the Great Lakes Basin anchors a bioregional climate-monitoring system, using seasonal events like the Japanese Cherry Blossom Festival to re-establish a sense of “seasonality” in public consciousness while generating data.

- 24 The promise of “relationality” or of the “expanded field” is not yet manifest.² We must join our colleagues from all communities of practice at the **collective table**.
- 25 Multi-, trans-, and in-disciplinary **collaborations** that deploy a participatory model hold the greatest potential for systemic **innovation**.³
- 26 Artists are expert in qualitative assessment—how cultural values are represented and embodied—and in navigating subjectivities, activities largely eschewed in quantitative civic processes. Previously **unaccounted-for intangible valuations** can lead to policy formation and adoption of new methods.

- 27 This participatory model redirects disciplinary territory and subverts conventional artistic practice, the “**cultural quo**.”
- 28 Operating both inside and outside our disciplinary expertise, both inside “culture” and (possibly) outside “art,” is required to build an alternative platform for new cultural futures. We must be willing to **violate our own taste** in favor of the truly experimental.
- 29 Those who contribute to the task of re-imagining the future will become **comfortable with the discomfort** of participating in the unknown.

Where (does it happen)?

- 30 In an interconnected systemic paradigm, there is no privileged location, so **start where you are**. This adage offers a simple, but profound answer to the apparent enormity of the tasks ahead.
- 31 But this statement also reveals a transferable method. Extrapolating laterally from the **locavore logic** of the Slow Food movement, food miles and foodshed beget culture miles and culture shed, a **radical re-localization**.⁴

Frances Whitehead, David S. Graham, and A.P. Schwab, *SLOW Cleanup: Designed Civic Experiments with Phytoremediation, 2009–ongoing.* A whole-systems approach to cleaning polluted sites in Chicago, using plant-based phytoremediation. Piloting the use of ornamental, flowering, and fruiting plants, the project aims to increase the plant palette for this technology. Interpretive materials increase awareness of the interconnectivity of natural and cultural systems in urban ecology.





- 32 Resistance to globalized, commodity culture and its anesthetizing sameness is coupled with a reduction in the carbon footprint of transportation, signaling a future for alternative, **place-based practices**.
- 33 These new cultures of “place” will be geospatially interconnected (g)local hybrids, both/and/here/there. New **spatial literacies** are required for these practices.
- 34 We will learn to **work at all scales**, micro and macro, as we map practices of time, space, and system.
- 35 Sustainable cultural futures will be built on bioregional realities. Eco-migration and resettlement will demand the creation and demonstration of **situated knowledge** and practices, especially in areas not previously seen as cultural.



Top: *SLOW Cleanup*, 2010. Geo-technical survey of tank excavation and soil borings, Cottage Grove Heights, Chicago. Above: *SLOW Cleanup*. 3 views of Cottage Grove Heights Laboratory Garden: prior to development, 2009; after soil preparation and layout, May 2011; and after test-plot planting, June 2011.

When (will it happen)?

- 36 The **dynamics** of the natural world extend to the metabolic ecology of cities, the understanding of which must be approached with equally dynamic strategies. Comprehension in long time frames, coupled with the ability to work with scientific and social/cultural “uncertainty,” is required.⁵



Above: *SLOW Cleanup*, 2011. Digital rendering of Cottage Grove Heights Laboratory Garden Concept with gas tank excavation. Right: *SLOW Cleanup*, 2011. Greencorp, Horticulture Training Program participants installing large trees at the Cottage Grove Heights site, spring 2011; Martha Brennan, Project Manager.

- 37 Inventive climate mitigations and **adaptations** can be found that increase the quality of life and reduce impacts, replacing the quantitative economy with a qualitative one.
- 38 Research into “temporal discounting” in economics reveals a biological and cultural tendency to value the present over the future. This “hyperbolic” or “exponential” discounting **limits our perception**, creating a present-biased “temporal myopia” an invisible valuation that must be brought into consciousness.⁶
- 39 The inability to comprehend the present-ness of the **future, which arrives every day**, or the impact of decisions that inscribe some cultural futures and preclude others, has evolved into the shorthand method, “Work from the **future backwards** to the present.”⁷
- 40 The realities of climate change are beyond debate, but questions of timing, impacts, and strategy remain. As artists, we must learn to imagine the cultural policies and challenges of the future. **We are running out of time.**



Who (can we be)?

- 41 The designation of “artist” may not always be useful as we collectively re-**“make the world”** to achieve sustainability.⁸
- 42 **Working in the culture** at large may necessitate strategic identity shifts as a dimension of our role as **“change agents.”**
- 43 We will operate both inside and outside “art” and other worlds as **double agents** (or triple or quadruple)—an ontological project.
- 44 We bring the **proactive**, critical practices of art-making to tasks and disciplines not associated with activism, making (art) with purpose.⁹





<<http://embeddedartistproject.com>>

- 45** The prescription against artist as problem-solver becomes the art of systemic **problem-finding** (problem articulation).
- 46** If we are able to adopt these frameworks and bring our knowledge to this systemic task of world-making, we will find ourselves **at home in the future**, creating new, currently unimaginable art forms.
- 47** In this philosophical space of ethics and aesthetics, the artist's focus on **intentionality** remains critical. How to operate in this space is not clear. The "habitus" of art-making is a part of the problem.¹⁰ "Normal art," a parallel to Kuhnian "normal science," as a conservative and static impulse will be subverted.
- 48** This is where an experimental artist's ability to operate laterally, to boundary hop between disciplines and discourses, models the innovative outcomes that can arrive by **practicing in public**.
- 49** Admitting that **we do not have the answers**, and that we might find them through conversation with unlikely partners and collisions of disparate expertise, makes a case for the professional amateur.¹¹
- 50** The legacy of the avant-garde has positioned artists as key experts in idea development and innovation. We are professional producers of **new knowledge**, even though this dialect is not ours and we stand critical to its assumptions.
- 51** As both critics of and producers of new knowledge and contemporary culture, who hold agency and ability to **change culture**, we must join others in visionary redirection toward the sustainable.¹² **Climate change = culture change.**

Notes

- ¹ Jon Hawkes, *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's Essential Role in Public Planning* (Sydney: Common Ground Publishing Pty Ltd, 2001).
- ² See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (France: Le Presses Du Reel, 1998) and Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1986).
- ³ See Jacques Ranciere, interview with Marie-Aude Baronian and Mireille Rosello, 2007, available at <www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/jrinterview.html>, and Lee Fleming, "Perfecting Cross Pollination," *Harvard Business Review*, September 2004: pp. 22–24.
- ⁴ On the Slow Food movement, see <www.slowfood.com>. The concept of food miles appears in A. Paxton, *The Food Miles Report: the Dangers of Long Distance Food Transport* (London: Safe Alliance, 1994). For the foodshed, see Jack Kloppenburg, Jr., John Hendrickson, and G.W. Stevenson, "Coming into the Foodshed," *Agriculture and Human Values* 13:3 (Summer 1996): pp. 33–42, available at <www.cias.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/comingin.pdf>.
- ⁵ Union of Concerned Scientists, "Certainty vs. Uncertainty: Understanding Scientific Terms about Climate Change," <www.ucsusa.org/global_warming/science_and_impacts/science/certainty-vs-uncertainty.html>.
- ⁶ Larry Karp, "Global Warming and Hyperbolic Discounting," available at <<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/5zh730nc>>. See also <www.paulchefurka.ca/HyperbolicDiscountFunctions.html> and <www.theoilrum.com/node/2243>.
- ⁷ Gail & Medek and Tony Fry, "Proposal for Boonah Two—Redirective Practice and the City," 2007, available at <www.riba-usa.org>.
- ⁸ Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1978).
- ⁹ For more information on Make Art with Purpose (MAP), see <<http://makeartwithpurpose.net>>.
- ¹⁰ See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 78.
- ¹¹ See Charles Leadbeater and Paul Miller, "The Pro-Am Revolution: How Enthusiasts are Changing our Economy and Society," 2004, available at <www.demos.co.uk/publications/proameconomy>, and The Public Amateur blog site, with Claire Pentecost, et. al., <<http://publicamateer.wordpress.com>>.
- ¹² Tony Fry, *Design Futuring: Sustainability, Ethics and New Practice* (Oxford/New York: Berg Publishers, 2009).