

Collaboration as Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy

Connected by a shared interest in interdisciplinarity, collaboration, and experimental pedagogies that may offset the hierarchies and limitations often found in conventional educational spaces, we - [Gabo Camnitzer](#) (CVPA) and [Katie Krafft](#) (CJS) - were inspired to develop an opportunity for ourselves and for students in our courses to come together and work collectively, despite - and also due to - the Pandemic Period and its isolation and distance. Our shared sense of urgency in response to that moment, added to our commitment to teaching as a practice of Transformative Justice that fosters collective action rather than competition, led us to envision an environment where students' experiences, knowledge, presence, and forms of creativity are not only centered but also recognized as fundamentally indispensable. What happens, we wondered, if students from Art & Design and from Urban Studies could come together to work collectively at the intersection of theories and practices of cultural production and social change?

With all of this in mind, during the fully-remote semester of Spring 2021, we brought our classes together. Social Practice (AXD 217) and Introduction to Urban Studies (URB 201) met jointly for two weeks, working with multiple mediums and conceptions of justice, access, and how we share the world. Guided by the principles and practices of [the Black School](#), students collaborated in group of 5-6 to envision interactive and interdisciplinary projects meant to not only create community in a context where we were all abstracted from one another, but to recognize that in many ways, our collective experience of that abstraction created a unique sense of sharing the moment. Though we could not physically manifest the projects, they were heavy with substance, with the voices and visions that emerged in the process. From pop-up spoken word performances addressing racial violence and incarceration to a collaborative painting project inspired by Hands Across America, each envisioned project engaged with topics central to URB 201, activated by practices central to AXD 217.

Now, in Spring 2022, we once again brought students together, this time with a new set of conditions and questions: now that we are back in person, how do we revisit - or maybe reinvent - the ways that we share and shape physical space? This time together in person, we worked with students to repurpose underused spaces on campus and transformed them into interactive spaces that drew from the content of AXD 217 and URB 201, and asked: How do we carve out spaces to respond to our needs as individuals and as a learning community? How do we collectively navigate and name this moment, particularly in ways that will then help us collectively navigate, name, and collectively create the next?

Students got together in groups of 5-6, working across their various disciplines (including Art & Design, Biology, Crime and Justice Studies, Engineering, English, Health and Society, Liberal Arts, Marketing, Physics, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology, and Urban Studies), with the opportunity to fold their skills and ideas together to address topics central to

Social Practice and Urban Studies via interactive projects. Groups worked together each class period for two weeks, with each project going live on the final joint session.

We provided them with starting points relating to content (eg, access to healthy and affordable food and clean water; safe and affordable housing; physical and mental health; or deindustrialization and gentrification) as well as methods of engagement (eg, performance; photography; creative disruption; or disruption). The process of collaboration itself was as or more important than the finished projects, as it was in the process of working together that new confluences and ideas could emerge and take shape, guided by each group's unique set of skills, experiences, and areas of expertise.

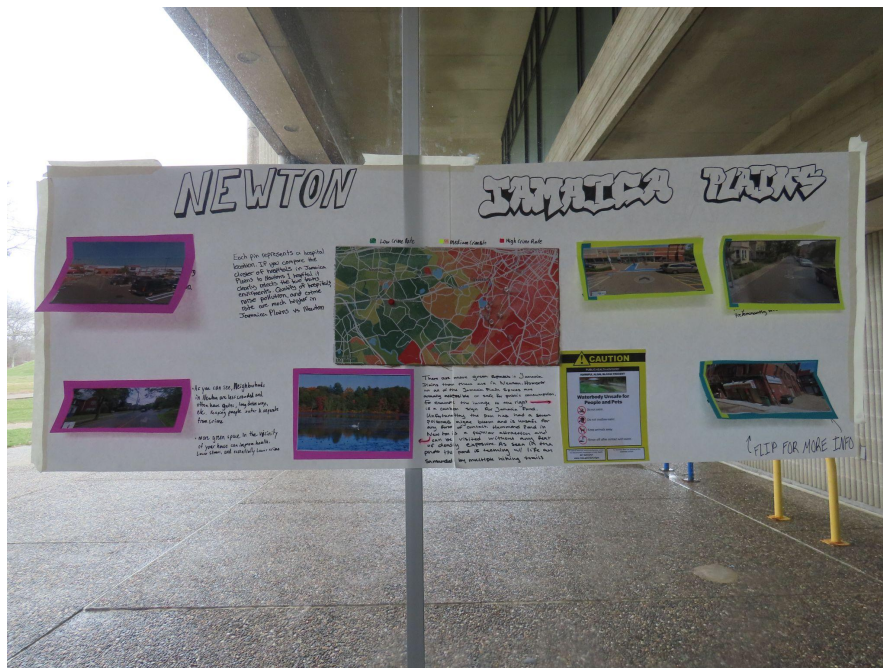
In our final joint session, each project came to life, and everyone took turns attending to their own interactive projects and engaging with others'. While the following snapshots cannot capture the energy of the day, they illustrate the dynamism of what was created.



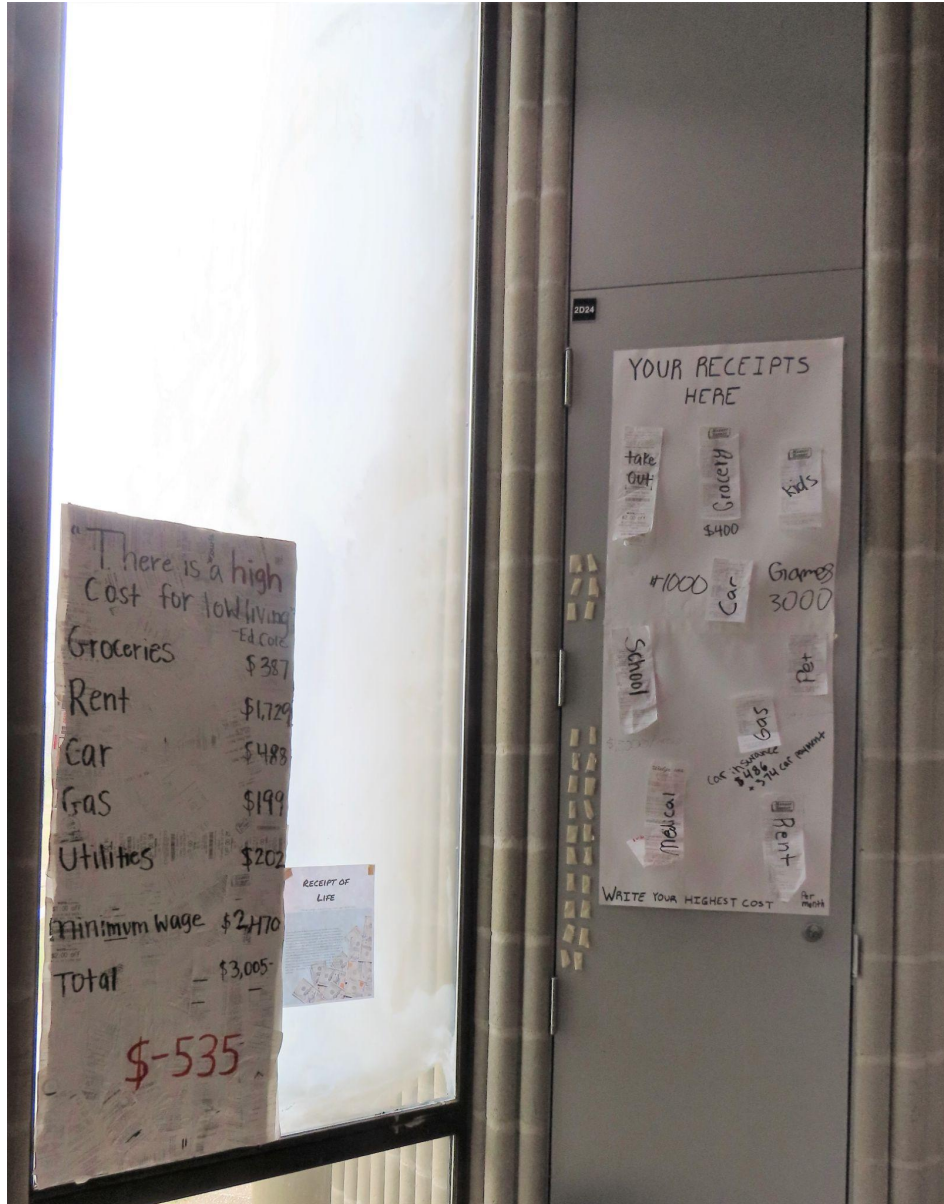
A participatory performance piece engaging with “culture-contact” (as W.E.B Du Bois calls it in his 1904 essay [“The Development of a People”](#)).



An interactive piece on housing, homeless, and intersecting forms of oppression, with an unpictured digital component.



An interactive installation highlighting the intersections of deindustrialization, gentrification, and public health in and around Boston.



An interactive installation highlighting the relationship between cost of living and minimum wage.



A (fully functional!) "Chore Wheel" to be used by those sharing living space to others, meant to facilitate communication, accountability, and community-building.



An installation highlighting food insecurity in an era of global trade and highly imbalanced access to wealth and stability.



A multimedia and interactive installation highlighting the fact that a lack of access to clean, drinkable water is still a pressing issue in many U.S. communities. (Photo credit: Sam Ettayfy)



A highly-interactive installation on global practices of physical and mental health care that invited participants to make their own tea bags. (Photo credit: Sam Ettayfy)



An interactive installation inviting participants to share both struggles and successes, highlighting the collective nature of our struggles and the importance of mental health support.

Ultimately, the time that our groups spent together allowed us all to plant our processes of learning within a simultaneous process of collaborating on rebuilding our connections to each other and our local community after a prolonged period of remote learning and isolation. Such interdisciplinary collaborations offer the opportunity to thoughtfully consider: what does it mean to be back together? How do we make the most of the moment and tap into the most valuable part of being together in groups again, namely the multiple perspectives and forms of brilliance present? And how do we move forward together?