

Mapping Groping

How can artists' practice become central to gallery based education programmes at the point of exhibition?

- What institutional support is needed for this to happen?
- How could a freelance agent intervene in this?

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Master in Education in the Arts

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This site is an online workspace and appendix. It contains additional aural and visual work, data from interviews, documentation of work with artists, additional research data from case studies and a guide to the exhibition presentation. They are intended to support one another.



Interim assessment, Piet Zwart Institute, March 2015

*My stomach churns
or turns
or drops
and I imagine the little bag inside,
tight
and plump
and comfortably encased
in its soft home of warm pumping*

and pulsing

and I think, what happens is it tenses and untenses.

*Like when a phone resting on a table on silent vibrates twice, the hard surface amplifying it embarrassingly. Not as violent and unexpected as that vibration, but similar. And in my chest there's an empty feeling, like all of the air has been exhaled but my lungs are not squeezed empty. I can still exhale
and so I do.*

Squeeze all the air out through my nostrils, all the parts of my chest squeezing for control.

Doing this I realise the capacity of my chest, and my breasts sitting on the outside of that capacity, two of them on the outside having nothing much to do with what's inside. Comical and annoying because they are not working during the squeezing out exercise.

*When I press out all the air everything is tight and hard in there and the stomach is still and I feel totally in control, except for the soft exterior that I can't control. But I straighten my spine and I think about the relationship, softness
and hardness of bones and guts - it's just guts and breath and skin.*

*And then the betrayal.
And I already recognise its presence without feeling it physically.
All of the tiny tubes of blood explode their contents blotchily,
mottled,
angry*

but quiet too, underneath.

*Spreading. A network - soy milk separating in coffee.
And I'm wrapped up inside it,
encased in it,
outwardly pale,
all the little pores,
little holes,
fed by these tubes,
pumping,*

*flooding them,
invading the pale,
to sanguine,*

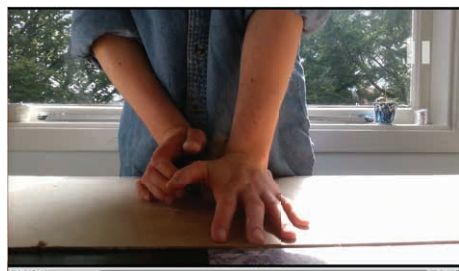


ruddy
red
blood
red
rosy
red.

Scarlet.

It doesn't hurt, it doesn't burn, it's not prickly, it's not hot, my cheeks recoil and my neck stiffens. But the tight, hard, squeezed, controlled interior work is voided and voided feels bodily and disgusting and correct and my annoying breasts are covered and it creeps up my neck, bypasses my chin and floods in. My tongue scrambles and teeth and tongue, pals together in there, tongue expertly regulating, negotiating spit, forming words, shapes of the words, gratefully stoic and resisting.

The exterior colour quickly approaching the interior colour.



Introduction

I used to get a rash when I stood up in front of people to talk about things I wasn't sure about but cared about. I often speak in front of people and I'm fine, in fact I enjoy it, the rash just happened sometimes. At a tutor's suggestion, I wrote about the rash. Afterwards I read the rash text aloud, before presentations, to just point to it as it came up, so people would have a good long look at it before I started to talk about my *real* work. Writing about the rash, to own it in some way, is a methodology I'd often employ when *making art*, a self-reflexive practice.

Unintentionally the rash text became performative. Practically it became an effective way of dealing with the physical discomfort of public speaking and it has also become a useful anecdote to begin my thesis. Though this is a simple example, I think there is great educational value in examining these kinds of self-reflexive, experimental methodologies that are integral to artists' practices. Education programmes in the contemporary gallery context are perfectly situated to support these conversations.

Over the past year I have been researching and writing about education, with specific focus on the role of artist's practice in gallery based education and working to locate my own practice in relation to the field. I have always considered these boundaries to be blurry: education in the gallery often intersects with artists' practices and at times they are inextricably linked. I believe that in order to avoid reductively simplifying a practice, or condescending to an audience - in order to stay vital - there needs to be a multiplicity of forms. The rash, for example, employs the performative use of a poetic form of writing to combat a physical reaction to formal modes of presentation. The spread of the rash, reaching into unwanted places, posed an obstacle. Writing and reading the rash text is an example of a self-reflexive practice - praxis. Although it is an older term, ancient Greek, I use Paulo Freire's articulation of praxis, "human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world... action and reflection occur simultaneously." (Freire, 1970, p.109)

Carmen Mörsch, who has written extensively on gallery based education embraces the elusive nature of defining the field of practice,

Gallery education is located ... at the edges of the art field and of the attention of those writing within it. Stating this does not necessarily mean lamenting the situation: operating at the edges and developing a semi-visible practice has special potentials and qualities. (Mörsch, 2011)

This thesis plots a map that strives to emulate this embrace and negotiate these edges, I am *groping* at the semi visible. *Mapping Groping* is a reference to method. This thesis is an exercise in orientation. I liken the writing process to *groping*, which means to feel about with the hands. Some of the research methods I employ are rooted in my own artistic practice - I want to take into account a multiplicity of forms.

My aim is both to better orientate my own practice within the field of gallery based educational discourse and to add to it. I want to tease out how the intimate, personal methodologies of individual artists' practices could become central to gallery based educational programmes, what would be required to support this and in what way I am equipped, as a freelance agent, to act in this context.

My chapters enact different modes of research. The first chapter is a theoretical overview unpacking the term *contemporary gallery based education*; the second reflects on field research, site visits and interviews to map the current relationship between artistic practice and gallery based education through three case studies of progressive practices of gallery based education; the third reports on the resulting applied and embodied research, practice and reflection undertaken in my educational project.

The central question of my thesis is how can artist's practice become central to gallery based education programmes at the point of exhibition? I will propose establishing co-constructive relationships, deeply rooted in dialogue between the artist and the public, as a strategy for this. I will reflect on what kind of institutional support is necessary to make this happen and from my precarious position as a freelance agent, I will also consider the efficacy of my position within the practices I propose and the discourse I use to support them.

Artistic research is not just an unnamed activity — as though we already know what it is but are just fumbling around for the right label. It is, in Samuel Beckett's word, more of an 'unnameable' because it has to invent its own methods each time rather than parrot pre-given ones. Mapping itself during take-off, it cannot be spelled out in advance of the processes of its making. (Maharaj, 2004, p.40)

I see the role I might take in a gallery educational context akin to a trian-
gulation' point between the artist and the public. I'm developing a practice,
rather than a series of projects, and using mapping to describe what I do.

About four years ago I graduated from a BA in Fine Art. I had a studio, I was trying to make work for exhibitions, I led art classes for children, but mostly I worked in a restaurant. It was grand, my first job as a manager, but it was kind of a tacky place. The food wasn't great, the owner was a bitch and I totally fancied the head chef (even though he was emaciated, exhausted and a bit sexist). On Friday nights I'd work till close in the restaurant, then collect up bits and pieces of cardboard, magazines, cans, plants, wires, whatever there was and cycle home with them on my bike around 1 am.

I might plan the class then, or in the morning.

Once we made a huge floor painting, stretching across the entire gallery. All the kids hunkered beside each other, noses almost touching the paper, touching the floor, boring holes into it, as it disintegrated, saturated by inky renderings of elephants and plants and robots. Their parents huddled behind them or beside them, sometimes taking the brushes out of their hands taking over the painting or drawing or cutting.

“Mam, will you do the outline for me?”... “Will you fill it in?”... “Will you glue it for me?”... “Will you cut it out?”

I used to dread it, the planning and preparation, I was so shitty at it. I almost always didn't do it till the last minute, till after the restaurant on Friday evening, with whatever I took from there, that's why they were always so intractably tied to one another, the gallery and the restaurant.

But I adored the class. Loved the making. Whatever it was. No one at the gallery gave a shit about me but the kids were honestly always brilliant in their amazing, tiny-handed way. Archie was hilarious, a massive handful, a buzzing, furious thing. His 'favourites' to draw with were pritt stick and scissors. Archie was about 4 and his Mam was about 45. She was exhausted. While all the other Mams and Dads would gather around and cluck “go on now, there you go, very good, ah well done, sure you're great, draw Ben 10 there, draw Elsa, how many dogs do you have now?”, Archie's Mam would sit there and stare at him blasting into the paint or glitter (he fucking loved glitter) or whatever he could get his hands on.

In those classes I had some of the best conversations I've ever had about art practice and why artists made the decisions they made, I learned a lot and I hope the children learned a lot. I had to begin a conversation about what was in the gallery and why it was there. After I'd begun that conversation, the making together did the rest. My preparation was not tied to learning outcomes or pedagogical theory. I visited the exhibition, thought about what the artist was making or doing and then reasoned through it with the children. They responded, at times indifferently and the task was in bringing them to some questions of materiality or intention - enforcing the value of conversation and making. They drew parallels for themselves between what they saw and what they took from me. The nagging disappointment, always at the back of my mind, was why the artist was was not there when this was happening, wondering what each could gain by experiencing the other experiencing and producing.

It was intuitive work that was tied to the slog of daily life, to my and their different routines – a situation inevitably bound and beholden to an economic necessity. Telling the story translates the experience into something else. Like writing the rash, it felt, although I didn't make anything and the exhibitions weren't mine, that we were producing knowledge, possibly even producing art, that we were producing it together.

¹ In mountaineering, coordinates are provided at a summit point from which a mountaineer can work out their geographical location themselves using other landmarks, maps and compass.



Chapter I

I.1 Introduction

To plot a route through the foggy context of gallery based education, I will stick some reference pins its historical and theoretical maps, as foundations or scaffolding, on which I will build theories and methods to support and situate personal projects.

I will first clarify what I mean by the term contemporary gallery based education, from hereon referred to as CGE. I will then make reference to Felicity Allen's, in her word, *intuitive* navigation of the context to point to the difficulties in clearly defining the field. I will outline two concepts fundamental to my understanding of the theoretical underpinning of the CGE context: Paulo Freire's banking method of education and the use of dialogue and praxis in overcoming oppressive pedagogies, and constructivism and its extrapolation to co-constructive learning as a methodology in CGE. Finally, I will summarise Carmen Mörsch's four discourses of gallery based education and three learning models in CGE as outlined in an *Engage* report on *Gallery Based Learning* commissioned by the Arts Council of England.

I.2 Museum vs Gallery – the terminology

The two words usually used to refer to institutions dedicated to the collection and exhibition of artworks are gallery and museum. There is often interchangeability between these terms, depending on the context. I use the term gallery, as distinct from museum, though there are many museum educational programmes and agendas that are resonant with the practices I will outline.

Museum comes from the Greek “mouseion”, which initially described a temple, dedicated to the *muses* - what we now usually refer to as the humanities. By most accounts the concept of the modern museum was, to quote J. Mordaunt Crook in his architectural study of the British Museum, the product of “renaissance humanism, eighteenth century enlightenment and nineteenth-century democracy” (cited by Alexander, 2008, p5) beginning with the establishment of the Louvre in Paris in 1793, which was free to all to serve the “common good of the man and woman of the New Republic” (Alexander, 2008, p29). The common good in this instance, being the intellectual and aesthetic enlightenment and improvement of the masses through exposure to the beauty and mastery of painting and sculpture. The public relationship to the museum was a hierarchical one, the museum housed objects and images of veneration, to be interpreted and transmitted by experts. In this context gallery usually refers to rooms within museums dedicated to the display of pictures. In these institutions, education was a fundamental objective.

Though it is difficult to pinpoint exactly, I am not concerned with museum or gallery based educational practice embedded in these enlightenment

aspirations, nor with later, Victorian, philanthropic tendencies. The institutions I am concerned with are usually referred to as ‘gallery’ and serve the primary function of displaying art to the public, regardless of whether or not they possess a collection or formally identify by the name museum or gallery. Many of these spaces are not for profit, meaning, wages are paid to the staff and artists but there is no excess of profit made by the institution, all income is redirected back into the development and provision of the space. Many of these spaces are registered as charities and often, though there are exceptions, they have no collection or acquisition budget. Though they do sometimes commission new works.

My focus is on spaces that primarily present contemporary artist’s work, and though the question of what is meant by contemporary is another discussion altogether, I strongly identify with Claire Bishop’s (2013) second model of contemporaneity, as outlined in *Radical Museology*. The first model, which is almost ubiquitous, is based on *presentism*: “the condition of taking our current moment as the horizon and destination of our thinking” (p.6). Embedded in this model is the acknowledgement and acceptance of our inability to fully comprehend this “current moment” in its global entirety. The second model is dialectical and politicised – “dialectical contemporaneity”, and has a more radical relationship to temporality. It does not designate styles or periods to artworks but rather refers to an overall approach, a “rethinking of the museum, the category of art that it enshrines, and the modalities of spectatorship it produces.” (Bishop, 2014, p.9) This approach of deconstructing and rethinking the museum as being critically self-reflexive in nature underpins my relationship to contemporaneity.

Felicity Allen, a prominent UK based writer, researcher and artist in the field of CGE, differentiates museum based practice from gallery based practice as institutions whose educational strategies and public programmes have their root in didactic, “victorian, philanthropic tendencies”, intended to convey only affirmative, “enriching” experiences of art as opposed to “strategies intended to shift art from a monolithic and narcissistic position into a dialogic, open and pluralist set of tendencies that renegotiate issues of representation, institutional critique and inter-disciplinarity” (Allen, 2008). Although I share this identification of two strategies, didactic vs dialogic, I do not see the differentiation of museum vs gallery so simply. There are many museums with their roots in Victorian, philanthropic tendencies that have moved forward to embrace the dialogic strategies so specifically delineated here.²

1.3 Felicity Allen — defining the context of CGE

Allen lists the fundamental characteristics of contemporary gallery educational practices in her essay *Situating Gallery Education*, while stressing the lack of academic writing on the subject. I summarise her list here as, in framing gallery based educational practices, she also frames the kinds of spaces that support and promote these kinds of practices; in a roundabout way she defines the field.

They are practices which embrace some common principles of education developed since the 1970s, especially those identified as having their roots in the legacy of the Women’s Liberation Movement. These include commitment to being self-reflexive and dialogic; to be collective, egalitarian and to create alternative networks; to challenge technical and aesthetic conventions of fine art; to cross boundaries and bring together different disciplines; to create open-ended dialogue with audiences; to agitate and advocate on behalf of others; to present multiple and alternate voices; to represent hidden histories; to critique and demand change of mainstream institutions by both interventionist and separatist strategies. Further important features of the kinds of gallery practices Allen identifies is that they often occur in spaces which are committed to nurturing a relationship between art practice and activism, and use education strategies that are constantly questioning institutional structures and play a significant role in critiquing the institution and developing creative learning practices that challenge the way art is taught.

In this way Allen alludes, although she does not pin it down precisely, to a shift since the 1970s towards a more politicised art space as opposed to the didactic, enlightenment functions to inspire and uplift.

I have focused on two theoretical references to deepen my understanding of the structures underlying this intuitive list – Paulo Freire’s banking concept of education and his commitment to dialogue and praxis and constructivist learning theory, extrapolated into co-construction.

1.4 Paulo Freire — the *banking concept of education*, dialogue and praxis

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian radical pedagogue, whose seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), is often quoted in writing about gallery based education and critical pedagogy. Freire advocates for education as a means to liberation from oppressive regimes and criticised the dominant modes of education at the time as being narrative in nature. In his most famous analogy, *the banking concept of education*, students resemble receptacles to be filled and posited that this form of education allows students the limited scope of only “receiving, filing and storing deposits”(Freire, 1970, p.53). He criticised this method as dehumanising because, “apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other”(Freire, 1970, p.53). Freire’s alternative is the dissolution of this teacher-student dichotomy that propagates the banking system, which makes way for the possibility of “acts of cognition” as opposed to simply receiving information.

He proposes the establishment of a “problem-posing teacher-student with students-teachers relationship”(Freire, 1970, p. 61) with dialogue at the centre.³ Through dialogue “the teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach”(Freire, 1970, p. 60). This creates a

² A report by the Arts Council of England cites a series of distinguishable evolutions in strategies of interpretation and reinforcement internationally in museum based educational practice. Museum 1.0 extends from the 19th century onwards and the characterizes the museum as a site for improvement and education with which the user has a benevolent yet passive relationship. Museum 2.0, which came to accepted prominence in the 1990s and 2000s, is characterized by a commitment to community based outreach, the establishment of educational departments and larger, durational projects. These were also the strategies which segregated the gallery team into groups who focus on the audience and outreach and those who don’t. Museum 3.0 is the most current paradigm, though it is not ubiquitous. It is characterized by the identification of the public as users, the dedicated response to users directly and is based on lots of web interaction and economic necessity. (Summarised from <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/museum-30>)

³ Dialogue means to reason through something, in a conversation, its roots are (dia: through) and (logos: speech, reason). Dialogue is often mistakenly thought to only involve two people, but it can refer to an exchange between many.

relationship of mutual responsibility in which the supreme authority of the teacher is no longer accepted. In this way of thinking, reality becomes process and transformation, rather than a static entity. Thinking is intertwined with action, in temporality without fear. Freire calls this dialogue, this action and reflection, which is always simultaneously occurring, praxis.

Freire's work gives a pedagogical, theoretical bedrock to the centrality of dialogue in critically reflexive gallery based education and the importance of praxis at the centre of this. Freire also states that only when love, humility, faith and critical thinking are present can true dialogue take place within a horizontal relationship of mutual trust.

1.5 Constructivism and co-construction

Eileen Hooper Greenhill (1994) contextualises constructivism in terms of museum based education in *The Educational Role of the Museum*. Constructivism is an educational theory accredited to the Swiss psychologist Jeanne Piaget, which has, according to Hooper-Greenhill, been enthusiastically taken up by museum educators to underpin the progressive teaching methods often employed there.

Hooper-Greenhill lays out the basis of constructivism in opposition to behaviorism⁴ or positivism. She predicates her explanation, with reference to George Hein, stating: “theories of education are composed of theories of knowledge (epistemologies) and theories of learning” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994, p. 68). Behaviourism and positivism have their roots in the modernist paradigm in which knowledge is external to the learner as articulated by Freire's banking concept of education. A constructivist epistemology instead sees knowledge as constructed by the learner in interaction with the social environment. Hooper-Greenhill goes on to emphasise the fact that there are few current museum based educators who would not adopt some form of constructivist approach. She defines this as a paradigmatic shift from the modern to the post-modern period, characterised by the exposition of dominant patriarchal meta-narratives by the feminist movement and the exposition of the “primacy of ... the euro-centric core of much history and culture we take for granted in the West”(p.71). Constructivism recasts the educator as a facilitator or an enabler in a culture that increasingly values those who are capable of thinking and acting effectively across many cross-cultural boundaries rather than having in-depth, specialist knowledge in one field.

Co-construction, is a term that extrapolates constructivism to encompass the idea that knowledge is constructed by the learner in interaction with a social environment to include the fact that as an extension, knowledge is co-constructed between learners in interaction with and within a social environment. Co-construction places great emphasis on dialogue as a means of sharing knowledge within a community of learners. In George E. Hein's words, learning is a social activity, “our learning is intimately associated with our connection with other human beings” (Allen, 2011, p.46).

These specific points flesh out Allen's *intuitive response* locating my own topographical reference points in the field of CGE.

1.6 Carmen Mörsch's four institutional discourses for gallery based education and three learning models of contemporary gallery education

Finally, two bodies of recent research, Carmen Mörsch's report on Education at Documenta 12 and an *Engage Journal* Report, *Learning in the Gallery*, commissioned by the Arts Council England in 2006, complete this scaffolding.

Carmen Mörsch, a German writer and researcher in art education, defines the practice of gallery education as, “inviting the public to use art and its institutions to further educational processes through their analysis and exploration, their deconstruction and, possibly, change; and to elicit ways of setting these processes forth in other contexts” (Mörsch, 2009, p.1). I identify strongly with this definition, especially the invitation to use “art and its institutions.” CGE is bound to its institutions, which in turn should also be committed to praxis, constant questioning of their parameters and the inevitability of constant change and development, as in Bishop's definition of dialectical contemporaneity.

Mörsch identifies four institutional discourses in gallery based education: affirmative, reproductive, deconstructive and transformative. The affirmative discourse is outwardly effective; it communicates the museum's mission in a way that is in keeping with the International Council of Museums⁵. Under the affirmative discourse art practice is a specialist domain and requires specialist knowledge to be transmitted from experts to the public.⁶

The reproductive discourse targets those who are not yet interested and so barriers that prevent the uninitiated from entering the gallery must be broken down; this often happens in the form of workshops, programmes for children and big public events.

The third discourse, the deconstructive function, is much less common. This discourse is closely affiliated with critical museology⁷, i.e. the production of counter-narratives that challenge and subvert “civilising rituals” (p. 17) such as hegemonic, patriarchal and colonial readings of history since the 1980s. In deconstruction, the purpose of CGE is to critically examine “together with the public, the museum and the art, as well as educational and canonising processes that take place in this context”(p. 17). In this discourse the inherent deconstructive nature of art practice is acknowledged; this paradigm is conceived of as “starting from art”. Artists often produce works in this discourse that smudge the lines between educational practice and artistic practice.

The fourth and least common discourse is the transformative, in which gallery education takes up the task of “expanding the exhibiting institution

5 An international network set up in 1946 to link museums globally to one another. They define a museum as a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment. (ICOM, 2016)

6 Common strategies for this dissemination of information are tours, films, exhibition catalogues and wall texts. The affirmative discourse is directed towards an already interested public.

7 Exhibitions and their institutions generate through an interplay of historical antecedents, behavioral norms, and curatorial staging.

4 “Behaviourist learning theory understands learning as the acquisition of facts and information in an incremental way while constructivism sees learning as the selection and organisation of relevant data from cultural experience”(Hooper-Greenhill, 1994, p68)

to politically constitute it as an agent of societal change” (Mörsch, 2009, p. 10). These institutions are much more fluid in their makeup and they naturally blur the boundaries between traditional institutional practices “against the categorical or hierarchical differentiation between curatorial effort and gallery education” (Mörsch, 2009, p. 10).

Usually, a combination of several of these tendencies are in operation in an institution at any given time. Most deconstructive and transformative practices will display elements of the affirmative and reproductive tendencies. However, instances in which the affirmative and reproductive tendencies are dominant often show no trace of the deconstructive or transformative tendencies.

Under the affirmative and reproductive paradigms many learning theories are adopted from the field of education. There is a clear differentiation between teacher and pupil, similar to Freire's banking concept of education. There are also “learning-through-play” methods adopted from elementary and kindergarten. In contrast, the deconstructive and transformative discourses become critical of and deconstruct both the art institution and the education methods. Within these four discourses Mörsch places emphatic value on the struggle towards the deconstructive and transformative methodologies with dialogical interaction and critical questioning at their core.

In 2006 the Arts Council of England published a report through the *Engage Journal* entitled *Learning in the Gallery*. Like Mörsch (2009), the *Engage* report identifies specific practices within galleries as opposed to museums, but unlike Mörsch, it does not give a clear definition of the distinctions between them. The report defines CGE as “characterized by experimental, open-ended, collaborative teaching and learning and draws on a specific understanding of creative practice that can be identified as conceptual” (Reiss, 2006, p.7).

Similarly to Allen's link to the women's movement of the 1970s, the *Engage* report makes the historic connection between community arts practices of the 1970s in the UK and the creative practices as a means of connecting with those outside of the art profession, thus empowering the artist as facilitator and collaborator. This means CGE will always be tied to social and political issues, regardless of the location. However, the report clarifies “the CGE model places emphasis on creative and cultural engagement, not the solving of social problems, although the latter may be alleviated in the process” (Reiss, 2006, p. 10).

The *Engage* report specifically stresses the commitment in CGE to the central role of the artist and the artist's practice which is often an experimental, fluid practice, which could include researcher, collaborator, role model, instructor, social activist, artist and educator.

The report identifies three models of learning in the gallery: instruction, construction and co-construction. I reiterate them here in order to reinforce the differences and to draw specific attention to co-construction, as it is a central point of focus for my practice. In instruction, as in the banking theory, knowledge exists independently of the learner and is transferred

to them through a process of assimilation. In construction, the individual makes sense of experience, constructing knowledge by constantly encountering new knowledge, considering it in relation to what experiences they have already accumulated, and constantly reorganising their understanding of knowledge in relation to the world. Teachers are positioned as facilitators, although the relationship is still one of “expert and novice”. In co-construction “knowledge is socially constructed and learning is identified as a collaborative, social process. Dialogue is central, as it provides opportunities for learners to share and question knowledge and thus take risks and change. In this model the teacher functions less as an ‘expert’ and more as a ‘co-learner’” (Reiss, 2006, p.17). Mörsch, Allen, the CGE Report and Hooper-Greenhil all acknowledge the educational value in engaging with artist's practice in the gallery context.

1.7 Reflection

Gallery based education is a difficult beast to define. As I negotiate my agency within the field, I become more aware of the blurry edges of the practice. I believe that artists' practices should be the central focus of a CGE programme. A gallery is neither a school, nor an academy; it is a space dedicated to exhibition of and meaningful interaction with artist's work. Thus a CGE programme should respond to this work, provide avenues of access to it for the public and support it by having a stake in the questions it poses. The question of this thesis is how can artists' practices become central to CGE programmes at the point of exhibition. The theoretical plotting pins I have dropped in this chapter — praxis, dialogue, co-construction and self-reflexive institutional practice embedded in the deconstructive and transformative discourses of CGE — form a basis of theoretical support for methodologies I propose in answer to this question.

This scaffolding will be furthered in the next two chapters by drawing together observations from three case studies I undertook to gain a more nuanced understanding of CGE practice in action today, and reporting on my own CGE project. This latter applies the theoretical scaffolding and case studies together into conversation with my own philosophy for building CGE projects, predicated on focused, intimate conversation around an artist's practice in order to extend the point of exhibition into a moment of co-constructive production between an artist and the public.

8 A tendency in contemporary art prevalent since the second half of the 1990s, in which different modes of educational forms and structures, alternative pedagogical methods and programs appeared in/as curatorial and artistic practices. Initiatives related to the educational turn revolve around the notion of education, gaining and sharing knowledge, artistic/curatorial research, and knowledge production. The emphasis is not on the object-based artwork. Instead, the focus of these projects is in on the process itself, as well as on the use of discursive, pedagogical methods and situations in and outside of the exhibition (“discursivity” “exhibition display” “performativity”). (Lazar, 2012, p.1)

9 A series of curatorial, art educational as well as administrative practices that, from the mid 1990s to the early 2000s, endeavored to reorganise the structures of mostly medium-sized, publicly funded contemporary art institutions, and to define alternative forms of institutional activity. At least on a discursive level, there occurred a shift away from the institutional framing of an art object as practiced since the 1920s with elements such as the white cube, top-down organisation and insider audiences (Kolb, 2013).

10 For instance, in a conversation entitled Pedagogical Curating in Gallery as Community Marike Steedman discusses her status as curator at the Whitechapel Gallery: “The title of curator enables me to have a fair amount of autonomy and critical space. It releases me from having to tether the programme to the notions of participation or knowledge transference... So we’re striving for integrated programming, but rather than all agreeing that we all curate, we could all agree that learning and knowledge production is our shared project” (Steedman, 2012, p. 89). Emma Moore at Chisenhale Gallery, expressed a similar sentiment “I think educational practice, is a curatorial practice. So I’m working on artist’s projects here and also making that interesting in terms of an educational practice... It’s an interesting problem to be trying to figure out and I guess what we’re [doing] in in Chisenhale, is to try and integrate the programmes a lot more...a much more cohesive programme that just happens” (Moore, 2016).

11 Full transcriptions of the interviews and the questionnaires are included in my appendix.

12 Arte Útil roughly translates into English as ‘useful art’ but it goes

Chapter 2 Case Studies

2.1 Introduction

There has been a further muddying of the already murky waters of CGE practice since the 1990s. The destratification of institutions in terms of divisions between curatorial practice, educational practice and artistic practice, and the educational turn in curating⁸ and new institutionalism⁹ further complicate the issue. I regularly encountered expressions by gallery based educators of a desire to replace the *education department* vs *curatorial department* dichotomy with a more holistic approach to programming.¹⁰

This chapter brings together three case studies of atypical CGE practices that are indicative of this current climate of transition and redefinition of institutional structures. I am interested in the relationship in each case study between the educational programme and artists’ practices. I have put these cases into conversation to better locate my position. By reflecting on their relative merits and shortcomings as institutional practices, I then consider the kinds of projects I could develop through my particular freelance agency that could intervene in this context. Towards the end of this chapter I will describe a project that I consider exemplary of a flexible CGE practice with the artist’s practice at the centre.

The case studies are mima (The Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art), PRAXES Centre for Contemporary Art (a nomadic institution currently based in Norway) and Chisenhale Gallery, London. In bringing these three cases together, I propose a spectrum of CGE practice, with mima and PRAXES at either end providing oppositional models and Chisenhale offering a mid-point on this spectrum.

I visited mima and Chisenhale and conducted interviews via skype with staff members at mima and PRAXES and in person during my visit to Chisenhale. In each case study I will expand on an excerpt from these interviews. I sent questions in advance of each interview to indicate my area of research. I tried to let each develop into a conversation¹¹ and so these selections are not objective, they feature my own voice prominently. I wanted to speak openly in a way that could probe areas of the interviewee’s practice that I wasn’t yet aware of.

2.2 mima

Alistair Hudson became Director of mima in 2014 and has reprogrammed mima as the *Useful Museum*. mima has also become the headquarters for the *Arte Útil* movement¹² in a bid to evolve into a kind of institution that leads the field in testing new approaches to making the museum and the artworks within it useful¹³. mima’s vision statement for 2015- 2018 is deeply committed to its location and to being of use to the community. They claim to embody a *holistic educational approach* – “everything we do is education, to show that art is key to creating and evolving where and how we live” (mima,



further suggesting art as a tool or device. The movement was initiated by the artist Tania Bruguera through an academy in Havana which spread into a series of international residencies and exhibitions. The criteria of Arte Útil state that initiatives should Propose new uses for art within society; challenge the field within which it operates (civic, legislative, pedagogical, scientific, economic, etc); be ‘timing specific’, responding to current urgencies; be implemented and function in real situations; replace authors with initiators and spectators with users; have practical, beneficial outcomes for its users; pursue sustainability whilst adapting to changing conditions; re-establish aesthetics as a system of transformation. (Arte Util, 2016)

13 In interview with Axisweb Hudson has said; “everything is a project - in order to reprogramme we need to make it more useful. Rather than the galleries/ collections being the focus, flip it, what if the main focus is the cafe, the shop, the education prog, the community prog - these float around the core usually: the human programme is the core” (Axisweb, 2015).

14 Which is growing evermore pervasive in institutional practice, for instance Making Use: Life in Postartistic Times in Warsaw, in May 2016. A roundtable discussion took place during this exhibition which identified itself as “part of a broader debate on the useful value of art, manifest in such projects as the Arte Útil archive launched by Tania Bruguera in cooperation with the Queens Museum in New York and the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the activity of Grizedale Arts in Coniston and the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art in England, the exhibition Really Useful Knowledge prepared by the WHW collective for the Reina Sofia in Madrid, the international research program The Uses of Art implemented through the museum network L’Internationale, and Stephen Wright’s book Toward a Lexicon of Usership (one of the fundamental texts accompanying the Making Use exhibition), as well as events like the award of the Turner Prize in the UK to the architectural studio Assemble”

2015). mima is at the epicentre of what Stephen Wright (2013) coined the “usological turn”¹⁴.

In February of 2016 I visited mima and in March I conducted an interview with Helen Wickens, a member of the education team. I wanted to unpack the Useful Art agenda’s impact on institutional relationships to artists’ practices and consider what is at stake when an institution positions itself as an “inspiration to artists” (mima, 2015) and only exhibits art that fits with that vision.

I’ve focused on this excerpt to problematise the notion of use-value and to consider what mima’s new vision statement means for artists’ practices within an institution that positions education as the bedrock of their program.

Clare: *In the vision statement it says that mima aims to become an inspiration for artists, can you elaborate on that a little bit? I’m curious what that means? ... I think the role of an institution (and maybe this has got everything to do with my background) is a supportive structure. So I’m curious about that phrasing, what that means. And I know it’s not your phrase per se, I just wondered if you could say something about it.*

Helen: *It really means that artists would look on this place as a place where they wanted to show their work, but in a different way, so in the mima useful way, rather than putting the pictures on the walls, so they would want to come here and make their work here...*

Clare: *In the way of mima?*

Helen: *Which is the part of mima that Alistair’s really keen on, that mima becomes a place where we make, artists could come here and make and a part of their work might be that they make a plate and it’s used in the cafe. Or they might look at another way that they can show their work... So it’s also about changing artist’s perceptions of themselves as artists. And that’s not easy, but yeah, it’s about changing that way of thinking. (Wickens, 2016)*

I kept returning to this moment in the conversation and the repercussions for artists’ practice if an institution considers the legacy of an artist’s work to be its use value, flippantly defined here by its functionality in a cafe. This statement may be reductive, but this conversation is an example of how a concept like use value can become a shortcut, a simplification. If an artist’s practice must conform to an institutional agenda, this leads to an unequivocal programme that is closed to dialogue, critical self-reflection and potentially leads to the instrumentalisation of artists work and a lack of value placed on the time, dedication and expertise required for the development of an artists’ practice.

If *everything mima does* is education and the institution dictates the kind of work the artist can make by defining for itself the parameters of what qualifies as useful, then the institution and its community are closed to the potential deconstruction and transformation of institutional structures that interaction with an artist’s work could engender. Instead, mima is dedicated to a new structure (that arguably, in its formation, takes on critical museology’s objective of subverting “civilising rituals” by building

(Warsaw Museum of Modern Art, 2016).

15 This exhibition is the most significant recent international iteration of the “usological turn”. Hudson and mima have been cited in the exhibition publications as affiliate institutions and Hudson was a keynote speaker at a roundtable discussion during the exhibition.

counter-narratives - a strategy fundamental to the deconstructive discourse of CGE), which, following its establishment is only interested in affirming and reproducing its own structure. This new structure, Museum 3.0, (Wright, 2013) , to quote a glossary published in conjunction with an exhibition entitled *Making Use – Life in Postartistic Times* in Warsaw, May 2016,¹⁵ “will be comparable to data and research centres, focusing mainly on investigating trends, building networks for the exchange of information, stimulating imagination, negotiating the systems of evaluation, and constructing discourses” (Warsaw Museum of Art, 2016).

Alistair Hudson reiterates his position in many interviews, proposing, “what if the artist comes down from that position and becomes involved with everyone else, they still have a great contribution to make in terms of skills etc. [coming] ... up with ideas ... enhancements, to be critical but much more involved themselves as users of a system which they inhabit ... We need to look at art and projects that are not based in the idea of the sovereign genius artist ... If the artist learned to let go, if people could run with that project it has a lot more likelihood of continuing in a sustainable way” (Axis, 2015).

The institutional agenda is above all else dedicated to realising its own vision, which has at its heart a deep engagement and commitment to the locality and to questioning and redefining institutional structures, but a lack of engagement with the process of developing artistic practice. mima’s institutional agenda realises the destratification of the art gallery and the dissolution of CGE, but in doing so it is transformed into another type of institution: the Museum 3.0.

2.3 PRAXES

PRAXES Centre for Contemporary Art is a nomadic institution and curatorial practice, previously based in Berlin but now based in Bergen, Norway, run by Rhea Dhall and Kristine Siegel. The programme is in its *second chapter*. The institution was established in 2013 with the *first chapter* which exhibited the work of two artists for a six month period. They were “modular exhibitions - several exhibitions by the same person to take you through an artistic practice, which is everything from works to archival material to sketches and models and unfinished proposals and collaborations over the years” (Siegel, 2016). These exhibitions ran parallel to one another. Siegel and Dhall, explained in our interview that, “so many institutions out there, so many in the artworld’s larger discourse, are still defining exhibiting as a final point, and we’re trying to say, no it’s not, it’s a process, it’s a knowledge production moment... the idea is to take and use it, to make the next exhibition happen” (Dhall, 2016). The *second chapter* engages with two artists over the course of a year rather than six months and moves between venues in Bergen during the 2016 Biennale.

In contrast to mima, PRAXES are deeply engaged with artist’s practice but do not directly reach out to their local community. They do not have a returning audience, nor do they focus on building longterm relationships with the public; their audience are specialised and constantly changing depending on the work they show. In my interview with Dhall and Siegel they explained:

Kristine: *We’ve sort of eliminated this whole idea that we had to cater to an audience. We knew that we would probably have shifting audiences then we also allowed ourselves to have panels where we didn’t really care if there was 10/20/200 people, and so we allowed all of these weird digressions ... and so in a strange way the educational part was also very much directed towards us. And there’s always this discussion ‘is this elitist?’ ... we start with the artwork, the practice may somehow take us to something where an involvement with the local community somehow makes sense, but we will not go out and invent an audience for this. So as soon as you abandon this idea of ‘an audience’ then I think this whole idea of education becomes a very different one ... I think we also offered an educational element to the artist (Siegel, 2016).*

While mima are committed to their community and to the production of useful artwork, PRAXES are fully dedicated to flexibility and compromise in order to give centre stage to artists’ practice. PRAXES do not have an education programme, yet they consider everything they do to be education, education for the artist, the audience, and the institution. Their format and structure has been built and adapted directly through the process of exhibition making, dwelling on practice and on reflection.

Clare: *What do you think the role of your institution is? Is it supportive? Is it a space for production?*

Kristine: *the question is can you make an institution where this question is answered every time anew. Of course that’s almost impossible if we stay. We somehow become part of the structure ...*

Rhea: *Over time there is sort of belt of particular rhythms, particular patterns ... it’s healthy to have some structure but obviously what happens to most institutions where one director/ two directors stay, is that slowly there is this signature way of doing everything and ... if the idea of the institution is that it moulds itself always and again to the artistic practice. Then somehow that stops. (Dhall and Siegel, 2016)*

PRAXES has taken on the form of a self-reflexive artistic practice, tied to and embedded in all of the uncertainties and failures and active work of flexibly thinking through praxis, rather than establishing themselves as a static institution. However, in doing this, their ability to foster a sustained, public engagement with different artists’ practices is lost, which means their audience can only ever be a specialised audience already engaged in the discourses of contemporary art. Thus, as a CGE practice, the institution can only ever affirm and reproduce itself.

2.4 Chisenhale

Chisenhale Gallery’s mission is to enable “greater access to contemporary art by developing new audiences - all projects position the gallery as a local resource where people are provided with opportunities to engage with contemporary art through the agency of artists” (Chisenhale 2016). Chisenhale supports emerging artists’ practice by commissioning new work. In most cases a solo exhibition at Chisenhale will be the first significant solo show for an artist. Chisenhale’s director, Polly Staple, has said that, “Chisenhale is a place where art is not collected for presentation but

made – and this provides important learning opportunities for audiences to critically reflect and participate. All our activities have an educational remit” (A Sense of Place, 2012). Chisenhale aims to serve as a support for contemporary arts practice and as a resource to their locality.¹⁶

In February 2016 I met with Emma Moore, the Offsite and Education Curator at Chisenhale, to talk through their relationship to artists’ practice and how Chisenhale commissions and develops new projects.

Clare: *Something that I’m really trying to pay attention to is how education programmes in galleries could be a little bit more intimate and I think a way that that can happen is when the artist is really directly engaged in trying to learn something from the audience in their interaction with the work. It seems like that’s been happening for a long time at Chisenhale, without even labelling it as ‘that’s the intention’...*

Emma: *If there’s an artist that we are really interested in working with but we have no idea how to do it, we just have to figure it out. It’s more about the work that they’re making, thinking that that’s an important work that should be developed or shown, that person should have an opportunity to really push themselves and then we just have to figure out how we would actually make it happen, because ... having this sort of top down “we want to make exhibitions all about x or y” you are immediately limiting yourself in how you’re thinking about artist’s work. So you’re not allowing yourself to be open to how you could interpret it in a really abstract or a really left of field way.*

Alongside the exhibitions Chisenhale also have an Offsite programme.

Emma: *[The offsite programme] has come out of the Sense of Place programme¹⁷ and that’s with artists who are interested in collaborative practices, or ... actively engaging with things that are happening outside ... we want to work with artists who want to work in a slightly different way and maybe their work doesn’t lend itself.*

Clare: *Absolutely, to the kind of exhibition space here?*

Emma: *Yeah, but maybe it will at the end. Maybe they’ll produce something and actually yeah, we could make that a show if that felt like the right thing to do for that project. But it’s having another platform for those sorts of things to happen ... it’s more like sustained support over the course of that period. (Moore, 2016)*

Chisenhale want their programme to be accessible to many different groups of people, though, rather than reducing or interpreting the artist’s intentions, they place the artist at the centre of the programme and facilitate dialogue between the artist and many public groups, they provide a platform to extend practice and they strive to remain agile enough to do it. As I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, an example of one of these successful, holistic CGE projects is Amalia Pica’s exhibition at Chisenhale and the public sculpture *I am Tower of Hamlets, as I am in Tower of Hamlets, just like a lot of other people are*, commissioned as part of the *A Sense of Place Project* (2011–12) which included a series of workshops in three local schools. She orientated the workshops around the questions “what needs to be improved about the area? What can a sculpture do?” (Haynes, 2012) – questions at stake in her own practice. In the workshops she taught her methods of material process to the students and thus facilitated a co-constructive relationship between herself and the students. She equipped them to engage in a

16 A recent example of this is the establishment of the Offsite Programme, part of the educational programme which includes “commissions, collaborations and residencies all taking place outside the gallery with a core focus on artists with specific interests in collaboration and direct engagement with social and cultural contexts.” (A Sense of Place, 2011)

17 The programme ran from 2008 to 2011 across three academic years and involved 108 young people from three schools in the borough: Bishop Challoner Catholic Collegiate College, Langdon Park School and St. Paul’s Way Trust School. It gave participants the platform to engage with their immediate environment through research and collaboration with five professional artists.

multiplicious dialogue. Through conversation and the production of objects they reasoned through Pica’s conceptual concerns. Pica posed her questions which were extended by her physical sculptural work and the students responded with their answers and further questions extended by their physical sculptural work. Those participating in the workshop became more articulate about materiality through dialogue and making – co-construction, and developed a more nuanced understanding of the artist’s practice and her exhibition through her direct facilitation of the process.

In presenting questions that were resonant with her own concerns during the workshops Pica reasoned through what she would produce for her public sculpture commission in direct conversation with those she was producing it for.



"I am Tower of Hamlets, as I am in Tower of Hamlets just like a lot of other people are" – public sculpture by Amalia Pica, photographed by its hosts, the residents of the borough of Tower Hamlets.
Images: Chisenhale Gallery



The granite public sculpture *I am Tower of Hamlets, as I am in Tower of Hamlets, just like a lot of other people are*, travelled around the area being hosted in resident’s houses in the year preceding Pica’s exhibition. Conceptually the work was formed in her workshops with the students, who articulated that the most important places for them in their community were domestic. In response Pica redefined her concept of a public sculpture “as something that might expand how community is lived, rather than try to define it” (Pica, 2012), The sculpture activates collective experience and connection.

Pica and the students learned from one another, through praxis. The collaboration with Pica also impacted on the school’s relationship to contemporary art practice: “Making this link between the exhibition and the public artwork travelling the borough has brought fresh audiences to the gallery... Chisenhale invited the participating teachers to join a Think Tank: a forum that gave resident artists and teachers the opportunity to speak regularly and in depth. One teacher reports that the ‘Think Tanks were a great opportunity to meet other heads of art, not only to discuss the project, but it also gave us a forum to share ideas and develop our pedagogy’” (Haynes, 2012).¹⁸ A report produced by Cathy Haynes’ claims that the project impacted the institution and “forged a closer relationship between its educational and curatorial activity... By overcoming traditional gallery divisions, Chisenhale has created a coherent, non-hierarchical organisational model... commissioning, presenting, educating, collaborating and raising debate around contemporary art” (Haynes, 2012).

18 The teachers who participated in the Think Tanks continue to meet regularly to discuss pedagogical ideas and strategies. They also continue to increase their knowledge of contemporary artists by attending Chisenhale’s teachers’ exhibition previews, and have described the gallery as ‘a fantastic resource to have in the borough’. They identify one of the most important legacies of participating in A Sense of Place as bringing them an ‘increased confidence [in] using contemporary art in lessons’ and in developing experience based learning outside of the curriculum. The programme has also enabled the art teachers to forge ongoing links with teachers in music, history and geography. (Haynes, 2012)

2.5 Discussion

These CGE practices are atypical: they are not representative of the traditional model of a gallery with a curated programme of exhibitions, interpreted by the education programme. They redefine the parameters of CGE as destratified institutional practices through the potential relationships between artists’ practices and the education they engender, but also in their visions for the future of art and their relationships to the public, or lack thereof.

A CGE programme should offer avenues of access to the work they exhibit and have a stake in that interaction, devising educational projects that neither reduce an artist’s work nor condescend to the public. As evidenced by Chisenhale’s project, this could potentially expand and support not only the public relationship to the work but the artist and the institution itself, setting up a mutually beneficial relationship in which the public, the institution and the artist themselves can all learn.

Mima’s transformative institutional practice is challenging and redefining the field. The artists they work with must share their aims. This is not a flexible model and it will constantly reinforce itself with each project, growing evermore solid in its foundations. In contrast, PRAXES define their institution as loosely as possible, to provide maximum flexibility for artists; they mould themselves “always and again to the artistic practice”(2016) Though these projects themselves are supportive to the artist they do not offer support to the public; the public are consumers of the programme.

Chisenhale, while being a structured institution, work at remaining flexible to artists’ practices. This happens through interdepartmental conversation and by providing support to artists at the point of public interaction with their work, to develop more sustained dialogues with the community that engage with the concerns of the artist’s practice rather than an institutional agenda.

CGE practice should be concerned with methodologies devised to harness the potential of dialogue in and around artworks that occurs in the context of an exhibition and to nurture it, to provide open, supportive environments for those dialogues to occur more frequently. Chapter 3 is a report of my own CGE project that responds to elements of these institutional strategies by considering how my position as a freelance subject could intervene in an institutional practice.

Chapter 3

3.1 Introduction

What makes the texture of visual art thinking quite its own, its difference? What is its distinctive thrust in contrast to other disciplines at the more academic end of the spectrum... Does it spawn "other" kinds of knowledge they cannot... What I am trying to finger eventuates not so much in the well-trodden terrain of the academic disciplines or in the so-called gaps, chinks and cracks between them... It is distinct from the circuits of know-how that run on clearly spelled out methodological steel tracks. It is the rather unpredictable surge and ebb of potentialities and propensities - the flux of no-how... No-how embodies indeterminacy. (Maharaj, 2009)

The following chapter takes a reportage approach. I will outline the steps I took in formulating my method, I will bring theory from the map plotted in the first chapter alongside some new voices that are specifically pertinent to the actual doing of the things, rather than the theorising of them. Through the articulation of this process, my aim is that others might draw from and expand on my ideas. This is not a recipe for a finished project, it is the map of the route I took including the mis-placed steps and redirections.

The questions in education in general, and in art education in particular, the questions that we have not yet begun to deal with are not those of specifying what we need to know and how we need to know it... I would like to pursue a set of alternate emergent terms that operate in the name of 'not-yet-known-knowledge'. Terms such as potentiality, actualisation, access and contemporaneity,... a pedagogy at peace with its partiality. (Rogoff, 2006)

My method does not resolve itself; it embodies potential, acknowledges that exhibition-making is often just a moment of intervention at a point in a practice. My project recalibrates the development of a CGE project in a way that emulates this irresolution. I propose that an education project could be open-ended and could intervene in practice and change it at the point of exhibition. An educational project could redirect the trajectory of a work by facilitating co-constructive dialogue between the artist and the public.

My education project was the development and trial of a methodology for bringing an artist's practice to the centre of a CGE programme. The first part of this report deconstructs this methodology. With conversation at the core, as a freelance practitioner, I developed a process that focused care on an artist's practice in order to extend that practice, at the point of exhibition, through a co-constructive workshop with the public. The question of my thesis is: how can an artist's practice become central to gallery based education programmes at the point of exhibition? My project aimed to produce an intimate workshop at the point of exhibition, from which the artist, the public, myself, and potentially the institution could all learn.

Part I

3.2 Situating Conversation

Monika Szewczyk (2010) deconstructs the role of conversation in dialogical practices in art in two essays called *The Art of Conversation*. She begins, "conversation is often understood as a rational, democratic exchange that builds bridges, communities, understandings and is thus a way for people to recognise each other". Her formulation here puts me directly in mind of Freire. She continues, "[but what if] conversation is understood not as the space of seeing, but of coming to terms with certain forms of blindness?... What drives the reticence for conversation is the acknowledgement of non-knowledge rather than recognition... [if] conversation is the creation of worlds, we could say that to choose to have a conversation with someone is to admit them into the field where worlds are constructed. And this runs the risk of redefining not only the *other* but us as well" (p. 2). This focus on blindness, on reticence and non-knowledge and the inherent risk in "redefining not only the *other* but us as well," is what is at stake in positioning dialogue around the artist's practice at the centre of a CGE programme. This is what makes Mörsch's deconstructive and transformative discourses so radical and is the nebulous place where the potential to activate the gallery as a site of co-constructive learning lies.

3.3 Writing the Rash

While groping to define provisionally and partly, what a particular concept may mean, we gain insight into what it can do. It is in the groping that the valuable work lies. (Mieke Bal, 2002, p. 11)

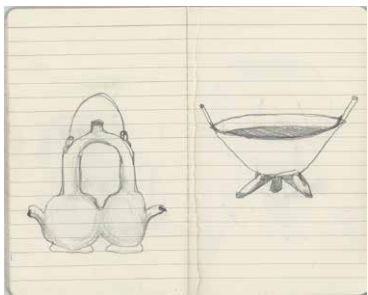
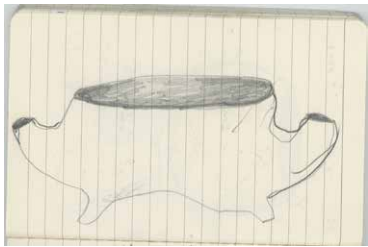
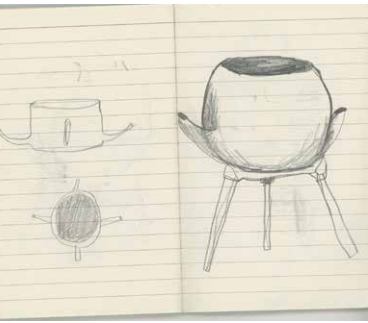


To return to groping and feeling about with the hands, I began to work with clay. This strategy was much the same as writing the rash — bridging a gap. It was a way of articulating ideas in a more abstract, multiplicitous form, zooming into the potential of dialogue, the site of conversation, as a basis for co-construction. With the clay I was thinking through physical forms that focused on dialogue. A methodology for developing these conversations with artists' practices was fundamental to beginning my project because, unless the artist and I trusted each other and I became intimate with the ways of thinking and working at play, it would be impossible to develop a workshop that would truly become resonant with their practice.

Shaping clay is a satisfying, tangible, physical exercise and a great material to work with in thinking through forms. It can grow and expand in an extremely malleable way and when it becomes unsustainable, when it collapses on itself, it can be easily squashed back together and you can start again.

3.4 The Feel of a Friendship of Sorts

The artist Celine Condorelli, has written extensively about friendship as a supportive structure in art-making practice. Beginning this project I had misgivings, considering my position as a stranger in a new country



Preparatory drawings for companions

without the ties of friendship as support or a grasp of the language, about how to trial a project involving the public. For Condorelli, friendship is “a condition of work in [her] practice - even though it may never be the actual subject of [her] work - but a formative, operational condition that works on multiple, simultaneous levels” (Condorelli, 2012, p.222). This friendship she refers to speaks of both her collaborative practice with other artists and her relationship to her own working process and what she produces. She *befriends issues and artworks* in her research, making pieces that work by, “articulating a complexity of material... in both form and content ... doing things that create close ties and connections between things, people, and myself, and that is something that more often than not has the feel of a friendship of sorts. I work by spending time with things I have collected” (Condorelli, 2012, p.222).

Taking time to befriend objects and issues, bringing them together in a way that spans many forms, enforces a non-hierarchical consideration of the components of her practice. I would like my own research to emulate this multiplicitous voice.

I had never worked with clay before, so each new object was a learning process in itself. I made very simple shapes. They were funny in a way, disgusting objects, though intimate. They were vessels, made to be used to share a meal. They were doubled: for example, a cup that two people could drink from, or a bowl with two straws and two spaces for two spoons. When they were glazed and fired they were functional – I called them *companions*.

I wanted to produce an object that could *befriend* through conversation - bring a physicality to the exchange, draw attention to the body, to the mouth and to the proximity and compromise required to eat together. It would therefore mimic the compromise required to understand one another and share thoughts in dialogue. Clay also holds within it traces of touch, of skin, hair and saliva - bodily intimacy.



Prototype companions

3.5 Starting with the Artist

Within the gallery context, every part of exhibition making is loaded. Institutions are many-armed machine, and regardless of the size or existing CGE programme, each has its own particular hierarchies and agendas influencing decisions. The very act of placing a work in a gallery is already the result of a complex series of actions. Mörsch defines her deconstructive and transformative discourses of CGE as tied not only to the analysis of art but also to the analysis of the institutions of art: deconstructing the institution is inextricable from deconstructing the artwork that is exhibited.

Janna Graham, projects curator at the Serpentine Gallery in London, expresses her exasperation at the proliferation of the use of Freire and Jacques Ranciere’s theories in CGE in a conversation around Pedagogical Curating in *Gallery as Community*. She reminds the group that “in the making of exhibitions the banking concept is used without question; the idea that they should come in and look at it.... Or be influenced by it is very common” (quoted in Steedman, 2012, p.92). Marike Steedman, education curator at the Whitechapel Gallery responds to this observation, “what we’re articulating to people beyond the institution, if they’ve never encountered it before, in the first instance it is not really the art. It’s about articulating the institution to them”(Steedman, 2012, p.93).

As a freelance agent, I was entirely free to devise my own methodology, my own CGE practice. It was an opportunity. to develop my project from within the artist’s practice, rather than from within an institutional practice.

3.6 Breadfellows’ Chats

Companion, comes from com-panionem. *Com*, from the Latin meaning with and *panionem*, from the French, *panis*, meaning bread. Companion literally means sharing bread together - breadfellows.

I wanted to invite artists share in conversations about their practice, the companions offered a platform for this - to meet with me and use the companion to share a meal, while talking through their practice. I called these meetings *Breadfellows’ Chats*. I then speculated whether making the companion itself could be a co-constructive process. “At the point of encounter, there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know” (Freire, 1996, p.71). I invited artists to meet with me to make a companion together, to talk through their practice, unpack what they were making while making - embracing irresolution and potentiality from the outset.

I met with a number of artists for Breadfellows' Chats. During these conversations the artists and I produced companions together as we talked through their practice and considered how we might devise a co-constructive workshop with the public that would be resonant with their practice and extend it at the point of exhibition. In these conversations a companion was produced - an object that held within it the promise of a second meeting, or more, to fulfil its practical function. The simple circularity of this interaction and production is contingent on many factors; full of potential, including and acknowledging failure and the necessity of taking time.

The earliest Breadfellows' Chats were with artists I knew personally, about their practice, in which we speculated on developing public workshops. Following these trials, in order to practically realise a public workshop, I approached artists who were in preparation for an exhibition.



Breadfellows' Chat with Angharad Williams



Breadfellows' chat with Angharad Williams and bowl companion



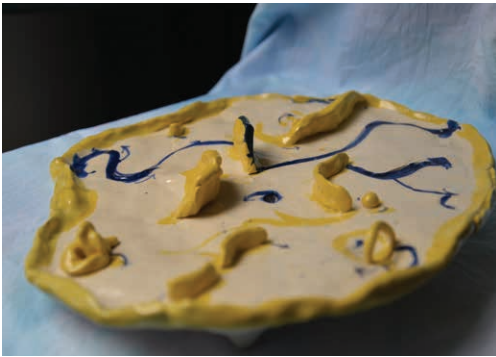
Breadfellows' Chat with Tracy Hannah and whiskey cup companion



Breadfellows' Chat with Lorah Hoek and Mezze plate companions



Early companion, two spouted jug



Breadfellows' Chats and companions with Raluca Croitoru, Vasiliki Sifostratoudaki, Sjoerd Westbroek and Simon Kentengens

Part 2



Breadfellows' Chat with Anni Puolakka

The following is a report of one complete cycle of my CGE project, with Anni Puolakka at TENT Gallery, Rotterdam in April, 2016. A project cycle consists of two parts: the Breadfellows' Chat with artists about their practice prior to an exhibition, out of which grows an artist-led workshop during the exhibition.

3.7 Breadfellows' Chat with Anni Puolakka and Developing a Co-constructive workshop at TENT

Anni Puolakka is a Finnish artist based in Rotterdam. I approached Anni while she was in preparation for an exhibition at TENT Gallery. Anni was developing a piece called *Attention Spa* in collaboration with Jeanna Sutela for a group exhibition commissioned by TENT Rotterdam, in March, 2016. When I approached Anni, I was also in conversation with a number of other artists. We had a Breadfellows' Chat together and the decision to develop the workshop together was based on mutual interests — the intention to facilitate a co-constructive workshop was resonant with conceptual concerns in her practice.



Attention Spa. Image: TENT Gallery

3.8 Attention Spa

Anni's piece was part of the group show *Spending Quality Time with my Quantified Self* which presented a number of works that relate to the "human condition, bodily development and the physical body to which we are inescapably bound... in relation to the technological and economic systems of which they are part" (TENT, 2015).

Attention Spa consisted of an installation and a performance programme.¹⁹ The work juxtaposes our shared human composition of 70% water, and our relation to the moon and its gravitational pull, with a futuristic, potentially alienating and controlling aesthetic environment that mimics formal aspects of a spa, yet feels distressingly oppressive. Anni's practice is concerned with notions of collectivity and the interaction of the bodymind²⁰ with its physical and sociopolitical environs.

The work was a focal point of the exhibition, intended as a place for people to come together in and around the pool over the course of the exhibition, a platform for artificial intimacy in the gallery space - to pose questions of what constitutes genuine, physical togetherness.

3.9 Working with Children

In our Breadfellow's Chat, Anni and I spoke about the conceptual development of her work and how we could plan a workshop that would push the parameters of the piece beyond what she had initially envisioned. While we

19 The installation included a wooden pool filled with tap water, aquatic plants and plastic jellyfish. There were two white bathrobes embroidered with the text *Attention Spa* and small towels for the public to dry their feet. Anni and Jeana, performed a text, sitting by the pool wearing the bathrobes and the towels were handed to people during events where people sat by the edge of the pool with their feet in the water.

20 Bodymind is an approach to understanding that the relationship between human body and mind are not separate as, for example Descartes suggested, but rather form an integrated, single unit. This position was formulated by, for example Spinoza, who argued that while the two attributes may be conceived independently, this does not imply that they exist separately. (Puolakka, 2016)

talked, we made a large, wide cup together. In an *Attention Spa* performance Anni had served chaga mushroom tea, at the back of our minds was the possibility that the companion might be used in a performance in the future.

From the outset, Anni wanted to make a workshop with children. We discussed approaching a number of groups²¹ but because, over the course of the exhibition, TENT had programmed a series of interactive, public events that dealt with ideas slightly tangential to the subject matter of the work. – to reiterate Mörsch’s discourses, they affirmed the institution and depended on an audience who already possessed specialised knowledge of art²² – we agreed that working with children offered the most potential. In working with children we intended to bring about an interaction with the physical materiality of the pool, through conversation and co-con-structive making. We posited that children might initiate new conversations around the work, for instance, physical engagement with the water at a level of remove from the loaded connotations of a spa was possible without compromising the conceptual content of the work precisely because of their unique spectrum of associations. Anni was excited to learn from these new interpretations.

Tea cup companion made with Anni Puolakka, it was broken and repaired.



3.10 Relationship with TENT

I approached TENT to propose the workshop and they were enthusiastic for Anni and I to proceed. TENT’s only proviso was that I give a tour of some of the other works in the exhibition. Initially I declined this suggestion as I wanted to focus only on the deconstruction of Anni’s piece, rather than engage with the complicated conversation of the institutional frame. To counteract this, I proposed to Anni that we begin the workshop at the gallery in conversation around the *Attention Spa*. We would then move to her nearby studio, to make work in response to the ideas and conversations that came up in the gallery. It would also give an opportunity, in the studio, to talk through her practice.

3.11 Triangulation

Following our Breadfellows’ Chat Anni regretted that, although she would be present on the day, she could not dedicate a lot of time to the development of the workshop, nor did she want to deliver it. I respected this position and planned a workshop that responded to Anni’s conceptual concerns. However, despite this initial reticence, we talked further and frequently and eventually Anni pushed for the workshop to happen in TENT, rather than the studio “I wonder if we could have it in TENT, because I’m still fantasising about making something with them around the pool in that actual

space and then placing the objects in the pool at the end of the workshop. This is because for me the piece is largely about human presence activating it.” (Anni, from email conversation following our Breadfellows’ Chat) She went on to suggest materials and activities that would be resonant with the work and though I had made a preliminary plan for the content of the workshop, through genuine interest in the potential of the project, Anni gave input on all aspects of the conceptual and material development of the workshop.

3.12 Developing the Workshop

Following Anni’s request I returned to TENT, who were happy to let us conduct the entire workshop in the gallery. I agreed to give a short tour of the other work in the show and repositioned this in my mind as a helpful opportunity for the children to become comfortable in the gallery, to spend a short time orientating themselves through conversation and movement in the space. I did not want to directly interpret the works, rather I aimed to coax a freer dialogue amongst the children around the artworks. This was desirable in itself, but also provided the potential corollary effect of prompting speculation about the formal or conceptual relationships between artworks. I intended the tour as a warmup, to introduce thinking about form and to encourage greater confidence of interaction in the space and conversation to develop organically. I tried to bring together as diverse a group of children as possible, who had varied experiences of galleries, to allow for antagonism that might bring up questions about the work in Anni’s presence.

3.13 An Account of the Workshop

The workshop began in TENT at 11 am, with a warmup game for 10 minutes, involving the children and their parents. I adopted this game from theatre exercises. For most of us, it was the first time we had met and the children did not know each other. It was an easy way to get to know names and started things off in a cheerful, giggly way. We played a second game inside the gallery, to enforce the names and to encourage them to speak directly to one another. They became quite excited and we moved into the short tour, I asked questions such as “What do you think this is?” “What colours/ shapes are there?” This short tour turned out to be very useful, because while some had seemed shy and intimidated at the outset, the looseness with which we moved through the gallery and the multiplicity of forms encouraged them.

The following is taken from a recording on the day of one such exchange at Kate Cooper’s installation *Experiments in Absorption*:

²¹ For instance, specialists in psychology and wellbeing, in a workshop that engaged in an open conversation around the pool and responded to Anni’s text based performance.

²² For instance, a researcher named Lisette de Senerpont Domis of the Dutch Institute of Ecology gave a presentation about intertwinings between human life and aquatic organisms and ecosystems. There were also a series of interpretive tours for school children designed to simply transmit the exhibition and it’s curatorial frame.

Clare: *Does anyone know what this is? What does it look like?*

Raad: *A fake face*

Clare: *Wow, a fake face? How do you know it's fake?*

Davey: *It's a bronze head, a bronze head can't move.*

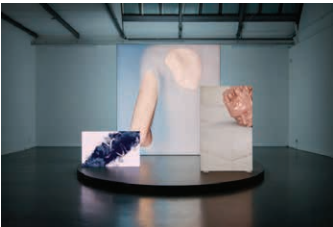
Clare: *Is it a photograph?*

Shea: *No from a computer*

Clare: *And it's stuck?*

Inara: *It looks more like a bed*

Raad: *In a technology bed*



Experiments in Absorption – Kate Cooper
Image: TENT Gallery



Dialogue during workshop at Kate Cooper's Installation. Image: Erica Volpini

Raad made this technology reference through association with other works in the show, he intuited that the constellation of objects was thematically linked. The exhibition press release stated “The video explores the various ways in which we subject our way our life to technology and how, as a result, the body develops an increasingly isolated and passive relationship to its surroundings” (TENT, 2016). In this brief exchange the children made pertinent observations relating to the conceptual content of the work.

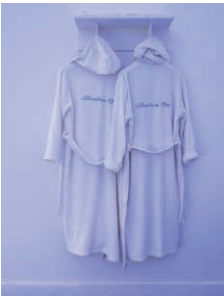
They built confidence in each new encounter, though they were brief. They were confused by the form of *Attention Spa* but as we deconstructed it, they began to engage. I prompted them:

Clare: *Does anyone know what a spa is?*

Inara: *It should be relaxing.*

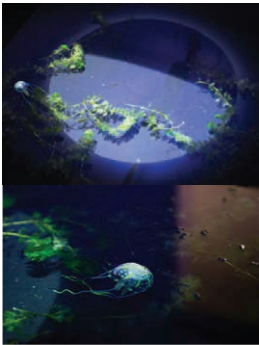
Shay: *This is not relaxing cause it's cold.*

Tristan: *It looks like oil.*



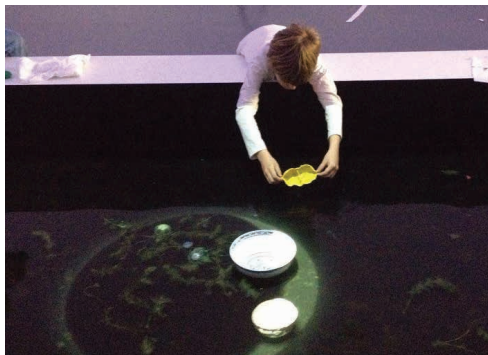
Bath robes at Attention Spa
Image: Anni Puolakka

Though these observations were short, they were very pertinent to the conceptual content of the work. I didn't want to push the conversation in a way that they were not voluntarily participating in, as they were growing distracted by the materials for the workshop. We began by making chromatography flags to introduce physical interaction with the water. I demonstrated the process, drawing attention to the physicality of the water being absorbed by the paper and when they had understood they continued to experiment themselves throughout the workshop. We floated ceramic bowls on the water which introduced the shape required to make a heavy substance, like a piece of clay, float. We then made small plasticine model boats together. This was truly a trial and error process. The children experimented themselves, and conversed in the attempt to refine and improve their methods. At one point Shea could not make his boat float and Davey suggested that it would be a better as a submarine. After an hour the workshop slowly wound down; they left a beautiful mess in the gallery.



Moon clock in the Attention Spa. Image Anni Puolakka





All images by Erica Volpini and Katherine Mc Bride

3.14 A Kind of Canvas - Reflections

Clare: *Did it change your thinking about how the piece worked?*

Anni: *I saw more possibility in it. Acting as a kind of canvas. With the other events it was more like a platform or stage. It definitely inspired me to think of working with children in the future.*

Anni's relationship to her work was reframed. "I saw more possibility in it - acting as a kind of canvas." Whereas there had been an intended outcome when the work was installed; talking through the work, developing the workshop and executing it, then experiencing the children experiencing the work, turned the static point of exhibition into a moment of co-construction with the children through conversation and production.

I had postulated that through the Breadfellows' Chats, dialogically developing an intimacy with the artist's practice could lead to the artist having a stake in the education programme and this became the reality. Anni, despite her initial reticence, contributed to every aspect of the workshop. In this way I embodied the triangulation role I proposed at my outset. I provided support and assistance at a point, which allowed for the public and the artist to come together, co-constructively forming a triangle with the artwork at the centre.

Working with children enacted a simple example of Mörsch's deconstructive discourse, and provided an opportunity for co-constructive learning that also refers directly to Freire's notion of praxis. We aimed to sidestep an instruction-based workshop, built on interpretation, to make way for the possibility of *acts of cognition*, with dialogue at the centre. We aspired to a relationship of mutual responsibility in which the hierarchy of the artwork, the artist and the institutional framing might be gently questioned, to extend the point of exhibition into a point of transformation through conversation and production. To return to my first chapter and Freire, we aimed to develop a relationship in which "thinking perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity - thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved" (Freire, 1996, p.73). Approaching children offered a simple investigation of the potential of co-constructive production.

I am acutely aware that the work I have done with Anni and the knowledge generated during our chats has not been optimised. If I had been based within an institutional relationship this might not have been the case. Although the knowledge was not lost within our personal relationship, the insight and potential further development of a series of projects extending from Anni's installation is contingent on future circumstances and possibilities for continuing the collaboration.

Each of the Breadfellows' Chats provided so many enriching insights that could have been expanded on and would provide generative material for other projects to extend from an exhibition within an institutional context. For this reason I believe if this methodology was employed within an institution these conversations could become far more embedded in the fabric of the programming, which would result in greater intimacy between the artist and the public. This could potentially facilitate a more engaged critical

conversation between the public and the artist's work and a more nuanced and exploratory programme of events over the course of an exhibition.

I had intended to introduce the companion piece to the conversation at the *Attention Spa* as a segue into the making workshop. The companion is produced during the focused intimacy of a conversation. They are ambiguous, transitional objects. They are functional yet also embody some didactic potential. For instance, in the workshop I wanted to explain that Anni and I had made it together while talking through Anni's work and then would use it again in the future to share a conversation when reflecting on the workshop. I wanted to use the companion to introduce a slightly more abstract layer to the exchange, to bring another interlocutor to the conversation and use it to propose a conversation around the objects in the space in relation to one another and in relation to the objects the children might potentially make. I was also interested in their opinions regarding my methodology. However, at TENT this was not possible due to time restrictions. I aim to explore this potential in the future. These irresolutions in method are akin to what Carmen Mörsch describes as gallery education through art, in which "avoidance of theoretical closure, acknowledging, instead, the inconclusiveness of interpretation processes in the discussion of artworks" is essential. "Thus, speaking about art is conceived as the inevitable, productive, and forcibly inconclusive handling of lack, a desire. Falling, stuttering and *speech-gaps* in the confrontation with the limits are regarded as constitutive of learning and educational processes." (Mörsch, 2009, p.18)

My position did not allow for in-depth conversation with the institution about the public we would approach. We did not speak about their current programme or audience. As Anni was involved they were happy for us to proceed. We did not reflect together on the outcomes of the workshop, nor was it possible to interview the children who participated. The trial had positive outcomes for the artist, but became a static experience for the public and a relatively static experience for the institution. There are so many external factors at play that my position as a freelance agent does not lend itself easily to sustained engagement with a public group. The intimacy I cultivated with the artist has not been fully extended to effect the public I engaged with. I don't see this as a failure. Each of the steps I took was a learning process and these inform reflections and future actions. If I was positioned from within an institutional structure (which might take many forms, it need not necessarily be a contemporary gallery) it would be possible to facilitate ongoing engagement in order to build on previous relationships.



Conclusions

At the beginning of this chapter I said that the map is beginning to take shape. The point I have come to feels more like a beginning than a conclusion. I have been developing a practice that is precarious, dependent on spending time building intimacy and founded on self-reflexivity and process. My aim is to continue to develop the relationships I have begun with artists' practices and to conduct workshops that develop the format I have begun and continue to reflect on it.

Though the particularities of the *Breadfellows' Chats* developed from within my own artistic practice, at their core is the intention to build an intimacy and awareness of an artist's practice with a view to developing an educational programme that is resonant with and aims to extend that practice at the point of exhibition through co-construction with the public. To this point I have conducted one trial, with many positive results. This aim is infinitely adaptable in institutional contexts .



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