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Master Education in Arts

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The possibilities of integrating queer pedagogy in a fine art curriculum

To Isi and Micas, thank you for always being there during the ups and downs I went through

To Karin and Juan, thank you for believing in me, for the trust, for all our long and lovely feedback sessions

To my family, thank you for the unconditional love and support

Thank you Michelle, for what ever you did that actually made me start writing

To my family from Istanbul, thank you for helping me become the person I am today

And thank you to all who helped me (keeping it together) throughout this master

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Abstract

This master thesis explores the possibilities of integrating queer pedagogy in the first year of a fine art curriculum, specifically the impact it can have in informing the students' social and artistic identities.

I address fine art mostly from a perspective that focuses on the students' self-development at an intellectual level, reflecting in its turn on their personal and artistic growth and maturity. Furthermore, I explore modes through which education can facilitate frameworks for individuals to build their intellect and personality by informed choices and not through presumed parameters that constrain individuals to non-negotiable positions.

Here, queer pedagogy is concerned with the weight mainstream education has on the students' identity formation: it questions how knowledge is taught through western canons, it strives for social inclusion without the imposition of norms or names, and it aims at the empowerment of the students' agency. Having these principles as the core, I structured my research around the following question: how to design a combination of critical theory and contemporary art that confronts students with their identities?

The practical side of my research suggests a set of lesson-workshop(s) in order to activate queer pedagogy as a method of content delivering, moderating a discussion, and exercises that help reaching the content itself. I tested three lesson-workshop(s), showing that students gain verbal skills to better articulate what their work entails and to position themselves within their own social context; it generates new forms of coexistence through and thanks to their mutual sharing. Moreover, it suggests a combination of critical theory and contemporary art that help students informing their social and artistic identities.

Building on what queer pedagogy can be, this research aims at integrating and exploring ontological differences that amplify notions of respect and compassion within class. Yet, it also leaves room for further research to explore long term effects that can work towards creating a more respectful environment within educational art institutions.

I. <u>Introduction</u>

This master thesis explores the possibilities of bringing (a) queer pedagogy (QP) to a fine art curriculum, specifically the benefits for the first year bachelor students. I have conducted a research at the Willem de Kooning Academy (WdKA) in Rotterdam, yet what I am proposing can be applied to other art educational institutions.

Fine art education is perceived mostly as a visual practice. Throughout my thesis, research and educational project I address fine art education mostly from a perspective that focuses on the students' self-development at an intellectual level, reflecting in its turn on their personal and artistic growth and maturity.

The definition of the term QP that I am using is based on Deborah P. Britzman's text *Is There a Queer Pedagogy? Or Stop Reading Straight*. I translate what I see as key points of QP as a method into an art learning setting. Britzman suggests an ethical project that embraces difference as the commonality between individuals, she strives for an education that disrupts the system of social norms and the way it affects the representation of what exists outside of the mainstream (1995). Limitations often come in the shape of assumptions individuals have about one another. Thus, what queer has to offer within an educational setting is an active attempt to dismantle the limitations brought upon identity, the embracement of ignorance and failure as part of knowledge, the struggle for a social inclusion without imposing knowledge, norms, or names (ibid.).

Some of the points addressed in QP overlap with feminist or radical pedagogical approaches. The reason why I focus on queer pedagogy is because it encompasses a broader spectrum of concerns, allowing to merge ideas in a way that reflects what Angela Davis (2016) calls *solidarity across differences.* On an identity level, QP is concerned with politics of gender and sex, but it is not constraining, as it is open to talk about ethnicity, religion or ageism inside LGBTQiAP+. The way

contemporary art is read in the lines of some sub fields of critical theory, how people influenced by postcolonial studies look at art and, therefore expose critiques to colonialism, is extremely necessary to have in the first year of a fine art curriculum.[1]

When working to disrupt a system of connotations that conditions the way knowledge is imposed on certain bodies, the work of Judith Butler (1997) helps grounding the importance of a pedagogically queer method. One is named, formed, given an identity and recognized by the way an other addresses us. Educators have the possibility to incite a conversation about the consequences of 'description' and 'recognition' by using artworks as a starting point. I will dive further on how these discussions help students to better articulate their work and their personal stand in chapter VI.

The goal of trying a pedagogically queer method is to have the students discussing how they look at something based on their own reality, background or life experience. In a response to a student stating "I don't believe in mainstream, I don't think it exists", another student reacted with "yes it does, that is why my friends are bullied for being trans". This happened during the second lesson - workshop I gave during the research.[2] The acknowledgement of different perspectives and the debate about those various opinions helps recognizing alterity[3] as a characteristic of each individual that is part of a group (classroom or society). In order to explain the need for alterity, for difference as a crucial part of our existence (starting in the classroom), I will refer to Tariq Ramadan's (2011) notion of *conviviality* to unfold the relevance of starting an informed group relation in the first year of the course.

If QP is a method that follows certain ethical concerns on the way humans engage with each other,

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1 In order to trace back some of the work done on pedagogy, I researched authors such as Paulo Freire or Jacques Rancière. In order to understand my own literary references I read chapters from Deleuze and Guattari, Stuart Hall, Antonio Gramsci and Friedrich Nietzsche. Yet, for the purpose of this master I want to focus on a combination that allows me to propose an approach to art education that translates daily effects of human relations into the classroom. I follow principles informed by a direct relation with street politics, and propose an option for education to read contemporary art in the lines of some sub fields of critical theory, such as the influence postcolonial studies have on reading artwork by revealing how the effects of colonialism are still inherent and performed in the way humans relate to one another.
2 The meetings with the students had a short presentation at the beginning, and then changed into a conversational mode of debating the works presented. I am calling the format of these meetings lesson-workshop.
3 I follow a meaning of alterity as it is defined in philosophy: a state of difference, of being different in contrast with another; the ability to see distinct viewpoints.

then how can one translate that into a way of being, content delivering or moderating a discussion in a way that empowers students' agency as opposed to constraining it with other ways of thinking? To answer this question, I formulate a hypothesis based on Rosi Braidotti's A*ffirmative Power*, making a passage from a criticality focused on raising awareness of negativity to a creative affirmative position. I will elaborate on how that can be done by using some of Judith Jack Halberstam's reviews of pop culture elements and Braidotti's *affirmative ethics*.

Merging my thesis with the educational project (EP), I give examples of content delivering/ workshop giving and partly a guide to reach the content itself. Although there are several studies influenced by radical pedagogues, as Paulo Freire or bell hooks, and attempts of queer pedagogies influenced by key theorists, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick or Judith Butler, I could not find any research that had the same parameters as the ones I outline in my thesis: queer pedagogy as a method to integrate and explore ontological differences during the first year of a fine art bachelor. I wanted to test the possibilities of these ideas and pedagogical approaches at a practical level. The EP allowed me to test and learn with the students, as they have a critical role in shaping what happens in our conversations. What the lesson-workshop(s) suggest is just the beginning of what can be built during the first quarter of the first year of a fine art bachelor. Discussing contemporary artwork via a pedagogically queer approach is one possibility to help students inform their personal and artistic identity. It is thanks to the students' distinct perspectives and characteristics that multiplicity becomes evidently uncountable. The reason why it should begin in the first year is explained in parallel with Ramadan's *conviviality*. Art theory lessons that give topics of critical theory, like postcolonialism or feminism, are extremely necessary to generate debates that do not focus on a canonized version of art history: learning history from a worn out European angle. Nevertheless, 'lessons' do not put the students in dialogue with the subject. What I propose both with the thesis and EP is a conversation about contemporary artwork, an exchange that allows learning more about social realities through the students themselves. I will elaborate on the impact this exchange has on enabling students' agency and demonstrate the

importance of QP as a method to use within an educational art institution for the students self-development. Throughout that path I will answer my research questions:

- How to design a combination of critical theory and contemporary art that confronts students with their identities?

- How can a queer pedagogy help first year fine art students informing their artistic and social identity?

In the context of this master program I focus on working with first year students. The conclusion of this thesis leans on the theoretical framework to sustain my argument, whereas the conclusion of the EP looks at the results of the practical side of my research. Yet, I would like to keep an open door and speculate on the impact QP in a combined qualitative research can potentially have in the long-term, throughout the student's academic journey.

II. <u>Personal and political motivation, influences</u>

Having to chose one label is always an unfair task. Perhaps that is the reason why the thinkers I feel drawn to resist notions of fixed identities and draw from a wide range influences and sources.

In 2011 I was introduced to a text called *Theoretical Polyamory: Some Thoughts on Loving, Thinking, and Queering Anarchism*, by Abbey Willis and Deric Shannon. The authors make an interesting analogy by suggesting that politics have a lot to learn from polyamorous relations by understanding how to respectfully relate with each partner. Polyamory is possible when both, the three, or the multiple partners of a relation agree, want, and accept the dynamics between them at an individual level. Translating that into politics, one can see how anarchist groups, feminist activists, or environmental politics are influenced by Marxism, but still criticize a certain authoritarian tone of

communism, its inherent patriarchic values, or its lack of agenda regarding the environment. It showed the possibility of distinct fields being able to learn and absorb ideas from each other while having mutual respect, honesty and consent on the type relation the poly- (multiples) have between themselves.

In the following year the authors launched another collaboration called *Loving-Teaching: Notes for Queering Anarchist Pedagogies*. It was only at the end of 2014 that I read that text and, despite not being very articulate regarding the direction of my research, I knew that those *Notes...* would be part of my bibliography.

Influenced by Emma Goldman, Willis and Shannon (2012) speak of a queer anarchist pedagogy that emphasizes the ways life refuses to conform to claims of authority: a *modus operandi* that recognizes the way authority is implemented, and actively fails to comply. Fail to vote, although it is meant to be part of what makes 'us' citizens; fail to become institutionalized by not registering at the local municipality, by not marrying, by forming alternative communal modes of living that do not obey to the standard modes of family (father, mother, children). In an institutional educational setting, the alternatives can start with actively breaking the student-teacher hierarchical binaries, or give an effective support that informs about the consequences of study loans (debt).

The authors follow Judith Butler's work on *performativity*, the way gender roles are socially constructed and institutionalized, and the possibilities that can come from mis/performing expected behaviors in contexts those gender codes are foreign. In combination with an anarcho-queer desire of not bowing to institutional hierarchies, Willis and Shannon explain how they apply their influences at a practical level, by changing the class room setting to a more 'comfortable' conversational circle as opposed to the common students facing teacher disposition of tables (ibid.).

Mis/performing behaviours to break that binary position is not easy, it is embedded at a social, institutional, and even physical level through the way we submissively perform the student role and dominantly the teacher role. As much as one can argue against this hierarchy, the fact that teachers are asked to give grades is enough of an argument to clearly expose the inherent authority within the

educational system. Moreover, grading can generate a type competition that reflects an unproductive way of working and thinking: aiming for a higher grade instead of aiming at having a support structure that enables one's practive to develop.[4]

Loving-Teaching: Notes for Queering Anarchist Pedagogies draws a path using key thinkers, as Emma Goldman and Judith Butler, aiming at more egalitarian modes of education. One can get lost between the quotes used, and despite finding these 'Notes' a beautiful tribute to those who love teaching, there is an important gap in this path. Before thinking of "iterat[ing] roles and identities differently and subversively" one must first discover oneself, one must understand why to act differently and under which circumstances one wants to act differently (Willis & Shannon, 2012, p.21). One does not simply choose to change, there is a motivation, a 'why' to begin behaving differently in comparison to the current/ past way. The switch I speak of is based on a confrontation, an awareness that enlightens one's stand in a specific surrounding or context.

What are the confrontational moments that make 'us' change? Moreover, how can education facilitate, at an institutional level, confrontational moments that allow an understanding of heterogeneity? And how can those confrontations boost *subversive performativities* that dismantle prejudices brought upon identity?

An individual choice to iterate differently and subversively emerges from a never ending process of going through life itself. It is a circle, a path that crosses several moments without having a guide that explains the sequence one must follow. It is unpredictable and fluid, as it depends on the unforeseen that is yet to happen. Considering that there is no fixed course of action, I draw possible steps using my literary references so I can identify moments that occur within that circle. From there on, I use that terminology to articulate possible sequences that flow through the endless circle.

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4   Yet, there are ways of disrupting it. As Juan Beladrich argues in his thesis, the teacher does not know more than the student, they all know different from each other. He states that in the first moment he meets a class for the first time. In the Master Education in Arts at the Piet Zwart institute, to which this thesis belongs to, one of our teachers decided to give all of us a 9, on a 1 to 10 scale, in order to express his opposition regarding the grading system. These are the statements that actively disrupt the hierarchical system. It is through them that students will feel empowered to disrupt the system themselves.

Before taking a decision to change the way one acts (iterate), it is necessary to understand distinct positions and stands (alterity). Following that, one defines one's own position in relation to others, this identification of a stand comes for relating to some ideas and not to others. There is a recognition of alterity that is imperative to express one's stand. Dwelling through diversity one must understand and respect the existence of various views regardless of one's own (*conviviality*). I it is the *depersonalization* as described by Rosi Braidotti (2011) that I will later refer to: take a stand and at the same time be humble not to put 'yourself' in the center of action. In order to explain lived, physical experience, one must voice and hear how the type of vocabulary that hurts oneself (words such as homo, Chinese, retarded, etc.) so that 'we' and 'them' understand the impact of those words. Thus the never ending circle, composed of moments impossible to predict, is a course of happenings that envision being prepared, a constant learning process on how to deal with one another.

Within the classroom, one can open the way for what bell hooks defines as *critical thinking*, an interactive process, aware that knowledge is constantly changing, a process that "involves first discovering the who, what, when, where and how of things" (hooks, 2010, p. 9). If critical thinking is encouraged and the who/ what/ when/ where/ how are discussed from each student's perspective, the confrontational moments that occur are negotiated in a way that enables students to chose how to iterate without having an (hierarchical) imposed vision (by a teacher).

How can 'we' recognize the multiplicity of the classroom by exchanging readings of contemporary artwork? The format I have been working on, lesson-workshop, allows a recognition process about the implications and impact of specific behaviors, like photographing subjects without permission or using a political event as the source of inspiration for one's work.

With the educational project, I aim at "creat[ing] a climate for optimal learning [where] we understand the level of emotional awareness and emotional intelligence in the classroom"(hooks, 2010, p. 19). The students share their views from analytical, emotional and political angles. We, the ones present in the room, reveal ourselves allowing an understanding of where we stand and what does it mean to have such a stand, whether animal right defender or muslim pro LGBTQiAP+ rights.

I am interested in the conditions within the classroom which potentially create *solidarity across differences*, a type of relation between people that is based on notions of respect (Davis, 2016).

What shaped my way of thinking and led me into the position I have today were the nearly thirteen years of activism I went through until today. Taking part in the anti-Bologna movement inside my university in Lisbon taught me how to believe in utopian scenarios: just because it is a lost cause it does not mean that we should stop protesting. The LGBT street activism in Turkey showed me how unconditional support is performed, a way of taking action without having second thoughts.[5] I do not want to use concrete examples about how this 'support' takes form, it is enough to say that if I would be in trouble and ask for help, no one would ask me 'what happened?', they would just come as fast as they could.

- Why art education?

In the following section I refer to selected examples of artwork in order to highlight positions and perspectives without any intention of caricaturing the subjects/ objects of the work/ discussion. I chose those examples not necessarily because I like them, but because they expose certain perspectives or positions which the students can then respond to and, therefore, become a catalyst for conversation.

Art speaks, represents, voices, reaches, it has the privilege of wilding freedom of speech (mostly) without being prosecuted for it. Thus, art education should have a structure that enables students to develop an informed position regarding what their work can do. Regardless of wanting to become artists or not, art students should be aware of the potential consequences of their work at a social and personal level. Social consequences encompass the opportunity to use art as a platform to perform freedom of speech, voicing an opinion, making a statement visible, and the practical effects of making

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5   LGBT are the initials used by the platform I had contact with.

that happen; the personal level refers to an awareness of what/ how the artwork can reach someone, and the relation the artist has with what is being transmitted, as well as with the individual being affected. The way the audience of an exhibition thinks can be affected by what that audience sees, and this is an important point to discuss inside art school. Parallel to the potential effects of art, it is necessary to discuss the way subjects, themes, topics or interests are shown through art.

So far I have verified that first year fine art students need more support concerning the social effects contemporary art has. There is a lack of awareness on the impact that objectifying a subject through one's work can have. Whether to give visibility to a cause or to give voice to a type of oppression, students must know the difference between (ab)use and solidarity.

Looking at Aernout Mik's work *Cardboard Walls*, meant to point at the consequences of a post Anthropocene human attitude, in contrast with Tania Bruguera's *Tatlin's Whisper*, taken as an opportunity to give voice to citizens of a sovereign dictatorship.[6] The image and imitation of the materiality under which the survivors of Fukushima live(d), represented in an installation, can never transmit what it actually entails physically living under specific conditions as the only option. On the other hand, Tania Bruguera used her 'artist privileges' to generate a platform, a room staged with a podium and a microphone that Cuban citizens could use to voice their thoughts.[7] Predicting that the utterances could have political statements against the current regime, she planned an event where people could be safe from the police and did not have to fear for being honest regarding their stand.[8]

The result of Mik's work ended up in the Venice Biennial where the audience got to see how the Fukushima survivors were living. The consequences of Bruguera's work were hundreds of people marching to the Havana's Biennial thinking that the podium was still there for people to speak only to find out that it wasn't possible anymore (they also had something to say and wanted to use that

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6   The images of every artwork can be found in the Appendix.

7   I am considering being an artist who can exhibit in a biennial as privileged position due to the possibility of voicing nearly any message. In Tania Bruguera's case, it is even more evident, as the artist was offered a position in the European parliament. She didn't take that position but uses the connection with the parliament to make suggestions through another work: *Citizens' Manifesto*.

8   The safety was assured because the artist handed out two hundred disposable cameras so that people could document the event.

opportunity but the police had shut the work down after two hours).

What did the works do, practically speaking, for the people who were used in order for these works to exist? Personally I disagree with Mik's approach to the chosen subject, and of course my opinion is biased by my ethic and moral values, but I can also say that he used part of his funds to 'help' the survivors that he photographed and filmed. Nevertheless, taking *Cardboard Walls* to a Biennial exposes a situation that serves as an example to question the ethical concerns artists must take into consideration when they use people in their work. It is important to be clear about the fact that one might not be entirely in control of the direction one's work can go and, therefore, using images of people, let alone people under debilitated surviving conditions, must be carefully thought.

- Why is it important to know the difference?

In short, so that students do not, artistically and socially, reproduce the type of behaviors that objectify events in time or subjects in matter. Also, because not knowing the difference is a major barrier to establish a *solidarity across differences*.

To answer this question, I need to unfold three positions: activist, human, student. These positions are situational and articulated differently depending on the context. They can overlap or have slight nuances depending on the tone of the addressee and the situation where I am.

As an activist, I would unapologetically claim that it is important to allow students to find out about the consequences of both works so that they do not perpetuate the objectification of subjects without achieving any empowerment of those subjects. I would claim that knowing the difference is part of a fight for change in social relational engagements. I would explain that I am intervening to make that happen, in the field I believe that can incite ethical changes at a social level.

As a human, and as someone who falls under an LGBTQiAP+ umbrella, I oppose anyone who dares

saying that we live in an equal society (The Netherlands/ EU context). I join forces with anyone whose notions of respect do not invade personal borders generating suffering and pain. I would answer that it is because I want to see a change in the way people address one another, and a pedagogically queer method can contribute for that.

As a student of art education, having to follow a frame of academical requirements, the answer is based on the findings of my research so far, and grounded through literature review. The queer pedagogy I am proposing has an impact on the students' self development, it helps informing their artistic, social and personal identity. This possible QP, as a method, gives students an agency that is built by themselves, as opposed to constraining students with alternative readings, visions, or positions. It demonstrates, especially within class, the effects and, therefore, the importance of building notions of respect.

The position I take as a student has a different way of articulating an answer then when I am the activist, human or 'educator'. If I take a position against the way knowledge is transmitted, not necessarily diving into an epistemological debate, but more looking from an ontological angle that focuses on the *performativity* when passing knowledge, then I must question any position that imposes a view. Having said that, the choices made on which artwork to show in the EP were clearly influenced by my theoretical references. Hence the need to make a distinction between imposing a vision, which is what I fight against regardless of the position I embody, and showing that each individual has a distinct way of reading the world, which is the argument I focus on in this thesis. Moreover, as a student I refuse to accept examples that strengthen ethnical or gender stereotypes in the same stubborn way that as a teacher I refuse to give examples that perpetuate successful white male artists.

Thinking along the lines of Angela Davis, more emphasis should be put on connections, on *intersectionality*, on how humans relate to one another and how it is important that different activist movements support each other (Davis, 2016). Mutual support and respect is as important to have

between activist movements as it is between religious, ethnical and different class groups, between distinct embodied identities or age groups. Making this apparent is essential to build notions of respect not only within the classroom, but within the educational institution as well.

- What is my role?

As someone who strives for a society in which labels are not used to categorize and confine identities, the question of *my role* always comes to me as ironical. My understanding of my own position is fluid, non stagnant, composed of multiple or maybe of one single identity. I shift from one to another without avoiding any escapism. Considering a conversation the context in which (positive or negative) confrontations can happen, I embody a non-fixed position due to a distinct way of responding to the dynamics it can have. Therefore, I do not define my role with words that would add to or steal from my own position, "as if, in-searching between one's legs, the 'answer' would at once shout forth: pink! or blue!" (Sue Golding, 1993, p.81).

The problematics of defining one's position do not emerge when terminologies are understood by the people involved in a discussion, at home when I say "I am a faggot" it is as common as saying "I'm making coffee". The problems emerge when the addressee is not able to find a word to characterize what they see. It becomes a daunting process leading towards offensive utterances that are usually poorly elaborated, as saying something like "You weirdo!". What is important to note is that we are all 'weirdos', all composed by multiple categories, none of which actually defines us and at the same time all of them could. So what can education learn from polyamory? Perhaps not limiting itself to one system of connotations. The assumption of performing a horizontal mode of education, where student-teacher binary is allegedly nonexistent, is not enough. Education can learn how to deconstruct labels that constrain individuals to non-negotiable positions, where they can no longer dynamically engage or transform, by using multiple names; it can abolish grading, as it does not contribute to the student's professional outcome; it can be more sensitive to the use of language to iterate in a subversive, yet

educational way.[9]

When speaking of queer pedagogy as a method, and taking the EP as a practical exploration of the ideas behind it, the embodiment of the method morphs the position throughout the elapse of the quarter. In the introduction meeting I had with the students, I was someone who proposed an exercise so that we could get to know more about each other: I introduced myself as Mariana and I was introduced as a guest tutor. The two meetings that followed had a lesson-workshop format (presentation and discussion). I was a tutor/ teacher doing a presentation during the lesson part and a moderator during the workshop. A word that encompasses both positions would be 'facilitator'. A facilitator is also a developer, a coordinator, a planner, which can be a less fancy word for 'researcher'. Within the context of the Master Education in Art I am a researcher. As a researcher, I am analyzing the impact of using a queer pedagogy within an art academy, I am conducting a practical research to put QP as a method into practice and I am using literature review to ground the choices of the method and content.

What is my role? A researcher, a facilitator, a moderator, a tutor/ teacher.

III. <u>What is a queer pedagogy?</u>

For the purposes of my research, I am going to situate queer pedagogy along the lines of three texts: *Queer Pedagogy: Praxis Makes Im/Perfect*, *Queer Pedagogy? Or, Stop Reading Straight*, and *Queering/ Querying Pedagogy? Or, Pedagogy Is a Pretty Queer Thing.*

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9   The Staatliche Academie fur Bildenden Kunste Kahrlsruhe, in Germany, does not grade Fine Art students. Half of the students graduate to become artists and manage to live from their work; at least a third choses to be a teachers. I do not want to argue that it is better or worse to grade, I look at this example as an alternative as much as the examples described in the footnote 3.
   These findings are result of the contact I have with students and alumni since 2007.

The term was first brought up in 1993 by Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell in *Queer Pedagogy: Praxis Makes Im/Perfect*. The authors expressed it as "a radical form of educative praxis implemented deliberatively to interfere with, to intervene in, the production of 'normalcy' in schooled subjects" (Bryson & de Castell, 1993, p.285). Nevertheless, this first attempt was extremely cautious, it voices the need to disturb the curriculum, but it alerts for the dangers of separating individuals by precisely speaking of distinct identities. Quoting Rosi Braidotti, Bryson and de Castell gravitate towards the right of using specific words to mark one's identity: "In order to announce the death of the subject one must first have gained the right to speak as one" (Bryson & de Castell, 1993, p.288). The importance of visibility whilst striving for an abolition of labels is a very pertinent debate amongst queers. Yet, one of the characteristics of 'queer' is the impossibility of having a definition, a conscious decision of rejecting one. When thinking of the work of Tania Bruguera, one must contextualize it in terms of historical geography, political purpose and the artist's personal stand. Why is she doing what she does? For whom? What is the purpose of the title? When thinking of gender identity, I strive for a world where labels are irrelevant. Still, when I go to the women's toilet and someone tells me that I am in the women's toilet, assuming that I am in the wrong one, I make sure to imply that I am a woman. In order to deconstruct the connotation of the word, one must misplace it into contexts where it does not belong (Butler, 1997).

In an art educational context, it is important to address the implications labels have when chosen by the 'user' and when set from an outer eye.

In 1995 Deborah P. Britzman introduced *Is there a Queer Pedagogy? Or, Stop Reading Straight*. She identifies QP as a method to question one's own reading practices facing what is learned and taught within educational institutions. Considering human social relations, the author problematizes the tension between education and "crucial cultural and historical changes that concern the constitution of bodies of knowledge and knowledge of bodies", moments in which knowledge was imposed on how to perceive specific subjects. Britzman exemplifies this through examples of the anti AIDS campaign in

the 80's, which in the lines of the gay and lesbian struggle for civil rights rejected categories of literacy, legality or citizenship, she tried to articulate a type of pedagogy that questioned synonyms of stability and production of normalcy.[10] The author quotes Michael Warner to trace the meaning of 'queer' that emerged during the Bush – Thatcher – Mulroney era, defining then the "use[s] in street activism and cultural production, queer politics is meant to disturb and provoke pleasure" (Britzman, 1995, p.215). Through Judith Butler's *Critically Queer*, she builds on an ambiguous understanding of the term 'queer', causing opposite feelings depending how and by whom it is used, and moves towards a re-signification of the word as "it signifies first and foremost a social relation and not sheer positivity..." (Britzman, 1995, p.215). Butler explores the transformational use of injurious utterances towards a subject: how individuals who were once attacked for being part of group, later use those same offensive discourses towards another group. At this point Britzman calls for a fluidity in queer to negotiate an ontological debate on the dubious, yet inherent, sociality through which the empowerment of some subjects is built at the costs of others (ibid.). Nearly twenty years later the debate continues, it has been an ongoing negotiation on what can or cannot be part of 'queer', which brings the never ending path where one flows and adapts, gains shape and then loses it again.[11]

Just like Bryson and de Castell, Britzman searches for a path that leads to a sociality in which alterity is the commonality between all subjects. She sees QP as a space within education, a pedagogical possibility to go beyond the already existing knowledge and its steadiness. A space that allows confrontational readings to work together, exceeding the boundaries that format those readings and giving rise to new relations.

Queering/ Querying Pedagogy? Or, Pedagogy Is a Pretty Queer Thing is part of a compilation brought up by William F. Pinar in 1998. The author, Susanne Luhmann, builds on the aforementioned articles

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10 The way a 'common sense' regarding what is known of certain bodies is unquestionably grounded has been repeatedly shaping public opinion. The attacks that occurred in Paris in November 2015 had an enormous impact on islamophobia, the persecution of individuals with possible/ assumed islamic connections increased tremendously. I am interested in exploring the position of education when the effects of certain events shape and condition the ways bodies are perceived, especially in direct relation the notion of 'safe space' inside educational institutions.

11 For a recent debate on what queer can encompass: http://conversations.e-flux.com/t/judith-butler-on-updating-queer-to-be-trans-inclusive/3527

in search of a concrete definition, or making concrete questions of what QP is. Most of her arguments revolve around gender identity and a heterosexual/ homosexual binary deconstruction. Luhmann claims QP and queer theory as a possibility to generate alternative ways of thinking that dismantle "[w]estern modes of meaning making, learning, teaching, and doing politics" (Luhmann, 1998, p. 127). She describes pedagogy when linked to feminism or anti-racist, assuming a critical position towards the social inequalities produced by mainstream education. Moreover, she mentions the commonality between these linked possibilities, which is to actively "make education part of a process of political empowerment and liberation of students" (Luhmann, 1998, p.125).

Luhmann quotes Judith Butler's *subversiveness* to imagine a pedagogy that questions how do we know what we know and how can that pedagogy be used to resist imposed knowledge.[12] These questions are the core of what Luhmann considers QP.

The eminent pitfall in questioning how identity is formed lies in the need for a type of labelling that contributes for separation. The distinction I speak of, and see as a rupture that brings negative consequences, happens when groups are teared apart and take positions against each other. One can look at how the legalization of same-sex individuals marginalizes the trans- community breaking the union between many 'LGBTQiAP+' individuals. Hence the need to build respect and compassion for one another through the recognition of difference regardless of one's own identification.

Out of the three texts, Britzman's is the one that, to my understanding, best articulates the lines through which a QP can emerge, its principles, what it can do, and how it can promote social changes. I feel closer to Britzman's words, especially when bringing those ideas to an art education setting. Educational platforms, definitely art schools, academies, or universities, should be the incendiaries for questioning how knowledge is transmitted and perpetuated, enabling the possibility for new connections and new ways of thinking to emerge. In order to understand how QP can impact and

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12 For Butler, subversive is part of acting (*performativity*) with the intent, or attempt, of altering, changing, deforming, misusing what is expected from a 'recognizable' gendered individual. Enacting with the intent of deconstructing what is imposed by the male – female binary regardless of succeeding or not.

influence knowledge exchange, I developed and executed a series of lesson-workshop(s) for the first year students of the fine art bachelor of the WdKA as my educational project. Its goal is to generate a space that explores ontological differences through contemporary art, and the way education can help developing notions of solidarity and respect regarding human relations. The WdKA, particularly the fine art department, has the students' self development at its main goal.[13] Therefore it allows flexibility in the curriculum to explore new ways of thinking and knowledge sharing.

As I describe in my EP, it is through the students' distinct readings of an artwork and through the debate on their distinct opinions that learning about discourses of difference takes place. There were confrontations incited by the artworks, the students explained their own positions in contrast with what was being shown, and concluded (for that time being) that there were several possibilities to connect or relate to the artwork(s). This is the recognition of 'alterity' I aim at, the inherent notion of otherness becomes clear and is taken as a vital point allowing the debate to happen. In this way there is never one knowledge being explained, but several (necessary) visions building on each other reinforcing the idea that "being cannot be anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the with and as the with of this singularly plural coexistence" (Nancy, 2000, p.3). So what would be the role of art education when providing a space that allows expanding the student's self-awareness?

By looking at artists that use their work to voice and expose their social contexts, it is possible to acknowledge distinct ways of 'giving meaning' to what surrounds 'you'. The students are the ones giving meaning, debating the different opinions facing the artwork that we look at. Having them freely discuss their thoughts is the key not to impose yet another way of thinking, but letting them become aware of how each of the peers sees the same. It is precisely from these debates that a new form of 'educating' emerges, a form that questions positions, situates events, understands relational consequences and, therefore, provides the possibility of developing an informed position through art.

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13 This statement emerged and was debated in a conversation with Karin Arink, a classmate from the Master Education in Art. She is also an artist, a collaborator at the B.A.D. foundation, and course leader of the autonoom and photography department of the Willem de Kooning Academy.

According to Deborah Britzman, what queer has to offer within an educational setting is an active attempt to dismantle the limitations brought upon identity, the embracement of ignorance and failure as part of knowledge, the struggle for a social inclusion without imposing knowledge, norms, or names (Britzman, 1995). These are the principles taken into account in my research, combined with examples of contemporary art with which the students can relate to due to sexual identity or ethnical background. From there we explore what are the possible meanings of *failure*[14] in a social context and the way individuals can cohabit whilst having various positions.

IV. <u>What are the benefits for the students?</u>

- How can a queer pedagogy help first year fine art students informing their artistic and social identity?
- How to enable a student's agency, as opposed to constraining it to an other person's view?

The EP allowed to explore these questions, but was also a very limited experience. Despite still having contact with the class of the first year, we met only three times to talk and discuss in the lines planned for my research. I consider it too limited to understand more deeply the possibilities of the lesson-workshop format. However, I could have not predicted that it was going to be too short because I did not have my ideas outlined as I have now. One of the core questions that emerged after testing the workshop part was 'how to enable student's agency as opposed to constraining it with an other's reading?'

A characteristics of what I am outlining as a QP focuses on the student's self-development. In order for one to mature, to grow, one must experience, 'go through' and learn how to get by events that compose life itself. Be it renting a house or producing a work for school, there is a certain need to

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14 *Failure* in the lines of J. Jack Halberstam.

physically experience an event that teaches how to deal with the situations encountered.

Thinking of the student's path inside an art academy or university, I want to focus on the self development that is oriented to an intellectual growth. The ability to think about their own work, their own selves, how the work influences the self and vice versa, how work and self can be the same or have antagonist positions. The QP I am working on looks at the ability to think of all these questions while positioning them facing the social context or influence under which they take place. It is what bell hooks (2010) sees as *critical thinking*, adapted to an art educational context, and following principles of a QP. These principles would be taking into account the student's ethnical background when choosing artists to talk about in class, as being able to relate to the person that embodies the artist strengthens the student's self confidence and diminishes the weight mainstream education brings upon identity.

I am interested in the way education can facilitate frameworks for individuals to build their intellect and personality through informed choices and not through presumed parameters of how one is expected to be. Taking that into consideration, I question the position of an educational art institution in heightening the importance of reflecting about what one goes through in life. Furthermore, how can one situate the type of historical events Britzman refers to, and contrast the impact these can have when voiced from distinct perspectives. This would enable students, individuals, humans, to act and think beyond types of normativity imposed by the aforementioned mainstream. I am not searching for a way that helps students how to think, but the creation of a space, especially in the foundational year, that demonstrates the importance of reflecting about what one's work while negotiating positions about artworks. In this way, an institution can facilitate experience exchanges by using artworks, leading towards a thinking process that is not based on 'grounded' knowledge and, therefore, taken for granted in its 'truth'.

The practical part of the research taught me that agency is enabled by triggering students to learn

through their own experiences and their own views. When debating how each one perceives a certain artwork, or a certain artist's body of work, it is possible to start thinking about one's own position in relation not only to the work being discussed, but in relation to distinct positions people in the same room have. It was possible to contextualize oneself and negotiate opinions by discussing why the distinct opinions are formed.

The lecture-workshop(s) conducted with the first year students gave examples of what some artists want their work to embody, what they want to achieve or who they want to address with their work. In the first part, lecture, I introduced the works of two/ three artists, the second part, workshop, we all had a discussion about how we perceived the work. There were agreements and disagreements, confusion and clarity, boredom and curiosity. Nevertheless, there was never a right way, 'the' way, let alone 'the best' way. We all got to know a bit more about where each of us stands, regardless of agreeing or not with the positions each one had.

- Why is learning about difference, compassion and respect important for the student's self-development?

One of the side effects of sharing and learning through each other's experiences and positions was the development of respect for one another. Certain values and sensitivities, like respect and compassion, take a lifetime to understand. I am far from arguing that what happened is an example to change the world's notion of how to achieve a definition of the term 'respect'. Yet, when a student started crying for feeling touched and connected to an artwork and what it represents in this student's understanding, the part of the class that perceived the same work as something almost banal, in the sense of being 'just' another artwork, questioned why was this student so touched by that work and what does it mean to relate to an artwork to the point of crying.[15] My argument is that these kind of confrontations raise questions, they lead to a desire of understanding social stands, political identities,

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15 This happened during one of the lesson-workshop(s).

emotional connections, and by the same token, a deeper understanding one's own position.

 - Why is it important to have this program (method) in the first year (of a fine art bachelor)?

The first year of a bachelor program is a transitional year. In most cases it is a passage from high school, a period in one's education, to a study program that one decides to enroll in, a step to enter a field by choice.

When entering a new context, despite having an idea about how it can possibly be, there is still an uncertainty about what one will encounter. This uncertainty can reflect both fear and pleasure for the unknown, and it is precisely in the unpredictability of what can happen that lies the potentiality of introducing and exploring discourses of difference. When one does not know exactly what will happen and enters a 'what' that has conversational modes of negotiating distinct positions, one is more receptive to what is being discussed. I argue that the earlier the confrontation between positions is motivated, the earlier one enters, or perhaps continues, to move in the path that shapes one's character.

The entire process is a never ending circle. One needs to understand the position of the others in order to understand why they have that position. Consequently, one starts shifting, shaping and understanding one's own stand. After understanding one's own stand one can understand what one wants to change, that being based on how one perceives the positions of others. It flows and adapts, it gains shape and then loses it again. It is a conversation that keeps morphing, a 'living' process in which we keep learning, absorbing, unlearning, selecting, and floating around the possible shapes of one's personality.

I explore throughout my research how can debates around contemporary art be incited. I have tested in the EP how the students were able to enter a dialogue in order to explain why they related to an artist or not, and that enabled an awareness on how some concepts are imperceptible to some and urgent for others. The contrast between opinions became evidently positive and was identified as a

gap in 'our' ability to understand voices that are alien to 'us'. The recognition of that missing link sparkled a desire to understand more about what each position entails.

The learning outcomes of what happened in the EP are a sample of what can potentially happen if what I address in my thesis can be explored throughout the first year of a fine art bachelor. The students would gain verbal skills to better articulate what their work entails, they would be able to position their work within their own social context, most importantly they can generate new forms of coexistence through and thanks to their mutual sharing.

V. From critical to affirmative!

- What is an affirmative position?
- How and why to adapt to an affirmative position?

The title of this chapter is inspired by Rosi Braidotti's work on *Nomadic Theory,* which later developed into *The Posthuman*.

Building on what a QP can be, or perhaps adding to why the method emerging from the previous texts is considered 'queer', I call for the support of a more philosophical approach on the way humans relate to one another. I focus on Rosi Braidotti's *Powers of Affirmation*, Judith Butler's *reversive performativity[16]* and Tariq Ramadan's *conviviality* to elaborate on what I see as an affirmative position that puts into practice strategies of change.

Although Braidotti's body of work navigates towards what she calls a *sustainable future*, which entails an anti-Anthropocene view, against the socially embedded hierarchy between species, as well a post-Humanities, in which the human is not the measure of all things, I am mostly interested in the way some notes on affirmative ethics can contribute to a pedagogically queer method.

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16 See footnote 10.

Braidotti (2011) states that the notions of good and evil were converted into how positive and negative affects are perceived. She describes how notions of pain and trauma are reproduced via public speeches of mourning, giving continuity to rituals of complaint, and preventing to overcome those histories of suffering, which in her view can be done by converting them into creative affirmative action. Affirmative ethics is not about preventing or diminishing pain (negative), it is about overcoming a certain fear of negativity imposed by "moral rules and protocols as a form of self-protection: one has to endure" (Braidotti, 2011, p. 289). Following the words of Spinoza, and a psychoanalytical line of thought, she describes endurance as the ability to deal with positive and negative emotions. She claims that overcoming restrictions brought by notions of 'positive' and 'negative' is a requirement to be able to feel compassion for the suffering and pain of others. It is necessary to reach a depersonalization of events, which entails stepping out of oneself to actually share and embrace commonalities.

Building on the work of Deleuze and Guattari, she explores the concept of becoming a minority as a strategy that "seeks forms of non-unitary, nomadic, accountable strategies for ethical interaction" (Braidotti, 2011, p.301). This ethical interaction calls for the ability to feel compassion for one another, it recognizes 'difference' as necessary within society as a whole, and reinforces commonality as opposed to a selfish individualization. She focuses on how minorities, in a Deleuzian way, can dismantle the existence of a mainstream by purely abandoning the/ a center and locating oneself/ themselves outside of what is considered a center. Moreover, she shows the urgency of embracing our commonality, our common humanity, our destiny in this earth we all inhabit and accept that "we are in this together!" (Braidotti, 2011, p.121)

Yet, to reach that compassion one must be able to be humble and respectful to one another. Hence my choice to follow Tariq Ramadan's concept of *conviviality* (taken from Ivan Illich).

Ramadan also speaks of the dangers of sensing fear, as it leads to the desire of protection, moving consequently to selfish behaviors disregarding minorities. He believes that one must understand what an other's values mean for that same other, that there must be a mutual acceptance to reach respect

for one another.

What is useful for QP is the author's belief that integration is not reachable by debating about it. As *belonging is a feeling*, the way of reaching that integration is by living it (Ramadan, 2011).

When translating this idea to the classroom, it might seem that it is exactly the opposite of what I argue for. Sharing experiences is not the same as going through those experiences. Nevertheless, when the experiences are shared first hand, by the one who went through the event, and emotions are projected, then 'sharing' cannot be undermined as 'simply' talking about what is far from us: what one assumes to know but did not go through. It becomes an exchange, one describes what one went through and the ones who hear are confronted, in a conversational mode, by a reality that can only be imagined and, therefore, assumed to be in a certain way.[17]

Continuing to follow Ramadan, he states that social status (class), cultural backgrounds, religious choices and gender inequality are for long known as the main marginalized groups. He shows concern about how minorities, at times, fall into pointing differences between them: how groups who are marginalized by a certain discourses, reproduce those same discourses to marginalize other groups themselves.

In daily life, facing new or known forms of cultural and religious discrimination prevents social achievements and unfolds two negative consequences: the self-oppression of the oppressed - *victim mindset* - the embodiment of a submissive inferiority, generated by a social discourse that implies that minorities are worth less; and the belief by the *symbolic majority* that the 'other' is real and therefore needs to be treated differently (Ramadan, 2011).

In an educational scenario, the affirmative position I speak of, calls for an activism from within the institution in order to cultivate interaction through *conviviality* and conversation. To build a kind of pedagogy that focuses on cultural and social transformations generated because of, and thanks to

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17 The idea of someone being beaten up by a stranger is not so alien as a topic of conversation, but if I describe how it felt to be hit in the bathroom by a man who tried to 'make a move' on a friend and me, if I describe the pain and the bruises we got while defending ourselves, then the idea of what it means to be beaten up becomes more accurate.

groups that do not confine to what the norm prescribes, allows a reversal of status through embracement of what is considered negative facing social impositions. A pedagogy that facilitates sharing of first hand experiences allows *conviviality* to happen, which in its turn cultivates notions of respect and compassion.

Why would one adapt to an affirmative position that strives for an ethics of relational changes? What I take from Braidotti's *Posthumanism* is an academic activist position, aiming at an ontological research that is not focused on the negative, that does not portray and perpetuate the existence of minorities, but that empowers them through a demystification of the majority.

In order to test and activate the practical side of my research, I lean on the EP developed in parallel with this thesis. The research conducted for the EP has the parameters required to put what I have been describing into practice.

To sustain my choices regarding 'how to be present in class', I look at Judith Butler's work on the potentialities of *reversive performativity*, and the way J. Jack Halberstam analyzes elements of pop culture.

According to Butler (1997), the precondition for one's existence is being perceptible to others. This entails that the ones who look at 'us' must be able to name (understand) what 'we' are. Therefore, the problematics of 'naming', of finding words to categorize individuals, do not emerge from the individuals themselves but from the ones who are unable to put a label on what they see. As a result, one's identity gains shape and recognition by the way pre established conditions (normatives) confine how one is addressed. Moreover, the way words are used to label individuals is problematic because they are substituted by the assumption of what that word represents.[18]

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18 Butler exemplifies it by describing how 'homosexual' was perceived by the military and the supreme court. At that time, 1997, it was forbidden to 'be out' as homosexual and join the military, exposing a fear of homosexual interactions, and leading to an understanding of homosexual self-definition as claiming to have same-sex sex, "'I am homosexual,' [was] fabulously misconstrued [by the military] as 'I want you sexually'". (Butler, 1997, p.)

In the same way that in order to iterate differently one must first understand where one stands, in order to bend the concepts that cause injury one must first locate the normatives of language to understand where to bend them. Butler suggests a misuse of concepts and words in new contexts to trigger the possibility of exposing non-universal truths, which in its turn would lead to a recognition of multiple positions regarding what is assumed as universal (1997).

Within an art educational platform, university, or learning setting, if the facilitator brings a conversation about contemporary artwork that falls outside of the mainstream (of our social context: Rotterdam, the Netherlands, EU), artwork that embodies a political opinion, artwork that expresses alternatives to what the normative prescribes and possibilities to socio-political changes, then this is an affirmative intervention with a pedagogically queer method.[19] It acknowledges difference instead of confirming identities. Art can be used to expose how a certain power imposes a form of knowledge over an art work's content. If one avoids following (exclusively) a white male Art History timeline, for example not showing only Duchamp, but mentioning the Baroness Elsa von Freytag as well, and makes connections with historical moments that changed society, like Rosa Parks or the ACT-UP movement, it is possible to twist the curriculum. Making changes regarding what art to show, is a way of widening how one looks at art by having multiple historical backgrounds, broader social perspectives and, therefore, break the 'aesthetic' tradition that passes to the students. The inability to reach a consensus on what the work means shows that there is not only one way of understanding it or giving an ultimate meaning. Through analogies between art works and identity, one can emphasize a divergency of parallel knowledge when a group looks at the same artwork.

Butler's work on the *performative* and *performativity* indicates the need of questioning the signifier instead of the signified as one of the most powerful assets to generate new contexts where revised concepts can temporarily exist. She exposes the way how one is addressed becomes a truth, a common belief set from the outside: "[o]ne need only consider how racial and gendered slurs live and thrive in as the flesh of the addressee, and how these slurs accumulate over time, dissimulating their

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19 Method here refers to the way of content delivering; inciting critical thinking, in confrontation with the normatives brought upon identity.

history..."(Butler, 1997, p.159). If labels are imposed through social constructions of how individuals are perceived, it is precisely by questioning the signifier that the imposition of certain bodies of knowledge can become evident and, therefore, deconstructed.[20] In the introduction of this thesis, I mentioned a discussion regarding the existence of 'mainstream' that happened between two students in class. The one who tried to explain why, in their opinion, there was indeed a 'mainstream', pointed out that from the moment a group of people (majority) decides who falls under what category, everyone who does not comply (minority) to a known category will be considered an outsider, a weird thing or, in that example, bullied. It was a clear example of an individual who was attacked not for being the way they were, but because the majority that cannot fit that person in a majorly known, standardized category. Breaking 'common knowledge', or perhaps common assumptions, is the awakening moment when one questions what is taken for granted. It is what boosts awareness of what an embodiment different from our own entails, and when one begins to consider acting *reversively*, "the moment that founds a future through a break with th[e] past" (ibid.).

VI. <u>A Note on *Failure*</u>

> *In a world where success is counted in relationship to profit, how much money you have; or success is related through heteronormative marriage, failure is not a bad place to start for a critique of both capitalism and heteronormativity.*
>
> <div align="right">(IPAK Centar, 2014)</div>

In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam explores notions of success built by capitalism and how

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20 Looking at the past five years, one can find examples that mirror the strength of social constructions within specific contexts, demonstrating that the addressee still dictates how meaning is given. One can contrast the type of freedom of speech performed by the Pussy Riot with Charlie Hebdo, what happens when considering the *who, what, when, where and how of things*, and what becomes socially embedded through these events. One can question why the Charlie Hebdo shooting is terrorism but the Germanwings flight 9525 a suicide.

it is majorly connected to profit. The author explains the way 'we' are all part of a system where profit is equal to success, and the way these achievements are built at the cost of others. She explains that the routes aiming at success contribute to an increase of selfish behaviors, lack of care for one another, and contempt for those who 'lack' a sense of 'ambition' and 'desire' to pursue a 'winner's' position.

I interpret Halberstam's definition of heteronormativity as seeing heterosexuality not as a practice, but as a political regime that pushes individuals to specific forms of family, marginalizing in its turn who ever falls outside of that picture, like single mothers, pregnant teenagers, children of divorced parents and communal modes of family.

Halberstam (2011) develops the concept of *failure* as an alternative way of being in life, a positioning that challenges social relations in the format that is given. She uses cartoon characters as an example to articulate the potentialities and 'benefits' of not complying to the norms. In my understanding, Halberstam performs what I see as a QP as a method: looking at examples from our daily life, elements of cinema or pop culture that are embedded in our surroundings, finding the potentialities of non normative within the normative, and exploring the positive impact those non normatives can have on human behaviours. In the analysis of animated movies, like *Chicken Run* or *Finding Nemo*, he shows how these children stories transmit values of friendship, alternative family compositions, and shows existing gender neutral educational possibilities. Moreover, she shows how these animations focus on values of 'togetherness', of solidarity and care. At the end of *Finding Nemo*, instead of going home, the three fish end up helping a huge group of sardines to run away from the fishing net of a boat. Jack argues that these actions propose relations based on help and compassion as opposed to indifference and conformity, she dares to say that the generation educated by movies like *Monsters Inc.* or *Finding Nemo*, is the generation who occupied Wall Street, she thinks that this is where hope lies and where alternative strategies are found (Halberstam, 2011)

- How does all of this relate to education?

An "open" pedagogy, in the spirit of Rancière and Freire, also detaches itself from prescriptive methods, fixed logics, and epistemes, and orients us toward problem-solving knowledge or social visions of radical justice.

(Halberstam, 2011, p.16-17)

Openly talking about what is expected from 'us', according to 'our' social context, within the classroom allows opening discussions on what happens when 'we' do not fit the appointed expectations. Consequently, it is possible to expose the harm caused to those who do not fall under the preset parameters and brainstorm possibilities to revert that harm. Through individual discussions with students, when I asked for feedback on the lesson-workshop(s), I observed that some students with backgrounds and identities that are in minority in terms of percentage do not feel welcomed in the school, they do not feel comfortable or that they can belong, they feel stared at, have trouble adapting to the surroundings and do not have means to expose and express that reality. This is not an isolated case and it does not have a pattern.

Talking about *failure* inside an art school, in relation to the expectations students believe to exist regarding their future, helps understanding their own position and, by consequence, helps the students understand what kind of agency they want to have at a personal and (if so), at an artistic level. Furthermore, talking about *failure* as an alternative position facing capitalism and heteronormativity, helps empowering students' knowledge on alternative forms of art: the non normative within the normative. By showing artworks from artists as Cassils or Zackary Drucker, the facilitator can bring discussions about gender that break the binary while using art as a platform to do so; by showing artworks of Patricia Kaersenhaut it is possible to discuss about ethnicity and the way society voices its racism; using artists as Tania Bruguera or Omer Fast allows to build dialogue around the way artists use their work to expose topics of urgency in their social contexts. Failing to follow the

influence art history's canon has on us means being concerned with how the student can connect with the artworks shown in class.

As I explain in the educational project, the choice of artists should be done in a way that respects the students' interests, which has the 'introduction lesson' as the starting point of getting to know one another. The reason why I chose the aforementioned artists (so far) is because they are able to engage the students interests, while having the ability to be a catalyst for conversation.

VII. Conclusion

Throughout my research I have been sketching a queer pedagogy that can be used both as a set of principles and as a method that puts them into practice.

Having tested the practical part at the WdKA helped me to confirm that integrating QP in the curriculum of the first year of a fine art bachelor is indeed beneficial for the students.

- How can a queer pedagogy help first year fine art students informing their artistic and social identity?

The way normalcy and stability are inherently transmitted at an institutional level are a consequence of following a western perspective on how the world is seen, and transmitting that perspective as grounded knowledge. Thinking specifically of the WdKA, the first year fine art students should be introduced to more artists that they can relate to due to their background. Bringing artwork examples that the students can connect to on an emotional, identity, ethnical, social, or religious level will enrich the students self-development and it will contribute to the creation of a space where students coexist while feeling that they can all belong. As a consequence, it will reduce the impact mainstream education has on the students' identity formation.

- How to design a combination of critical theory and contemporary art that confronts students with their identities?

The combination of critical theory and contemporary art that I suggest communicates the principles of queer pedagogy and at the same time relates to the students' interests and identities.

I am exploring the contribution education can have to what I addressed before as the unpredictable circle, the events that shape one's personality, specifically focusing on the way people relate to one another. This entails facilitating a framework that allows confrontation with diversity through *conviviality*, experience sharing and depersonalization of events, contextualization through critical thinking, notions of good and bad in contrast with respect, and gaining the ability to question how 'we' position 'ourselves'. The *conviviality* and experience sharing should happen in a safe and comfortable manner, using dialogue to emphasize emotional connections. Critical thinking shows the consequences of situating the *who, what, when, where and how of things*. Good and bad must be debated when contrasting the effects of the aforementioned points. As a consequence, the facilitator provokes the development of compassion, solidarity and respect through which one choses one's own position.

The thoughts followed on *affirmative ethics*, *failure*, and *reversive performativity* are core to the queer pedagogy I aim at. Developing a path that overcomes a certain fear of negativity, which entails failing as well, a path that deconstructs and demystifies social constructions of 'negative' and 'failure' helps empowering the students by not constraining their agency. Moreover, talking about *failure* in relation to the way knowledge is transmitted, in relation to the grading system, or in relation with the nature of our expectations, will help the students situating themselves as social and art related individuals. Overall, the students can locate themselves, can understand distinct perspectives, and can make informed decisions on how to 'be' in life in relation to others.

In my educational project I describe the program and outcomes of the practical side of my research in

more detail.

The most valuable results come from the ones who can actually benefit from what is proposed throughout this thesis and EP. The third and fourth year students and alumni stated that having queer pedagogy in the first year, in the lines I suggest in the educational project, would most likely have affected the way they think and produce art. The first year students approached me after every meeting to say that they found the topic of discussion relevant, that they want to know more about the concepts we discussed, or even to thank me for bringing the artwork of someone they can identify with.

What started as an attempt to combine critical theory with contemporary art, using a pedagogically queer approach, ended up raising questions of a greater weight regarding the benefits for the students as part of a class(room), as part of school, and as taking part in the social relations we all engage in.

- How can queer pedagogy help transforming the space inside educational art institutions into a safer space for their students?
- Art education as a potential catalyst for social change.

It is important to state that queer pedagogy works as a whole, following one of the principles is not what makes it queer. It is in the embodiment of a set of values, as much as they may change, together with the way one lives and manifests those ideas on a daily basis. By the same token, it is tested or applied as an educational approach when the teaching program supports the method and its ideas. Karin and Juan believe that this research is valuable for the student's self-development. It is thanks to people who care and show concern for the students that alternative modes of education, which have the student's growth at its best interest, can emerge.

The findings of my research so far can only demonstrate a small part of what queer pedagogy can contribute when brought to a fine art curriculum. It is impossible to measure long-term self-

development within an eight-month research. Yet, the feedback from first year students, third, fourth, and alumni assured the relevance of continuing the research and indeed bringing this suggestion of queer pedagogy to the first year curriculum of fine art.

The next steps of my research aim at exploring the long-term effects: what changes will occur regarding how students engage with art, how they look at and produce art; how can queer pedagogy help creating a more respectful environment within educational art institutions, and in its turn become a catalyst for changes at a social level.

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Master Education in Arts
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Educational Project

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Appendix

I. <u>Introduction</u>

The educational project (EP) I have developed consists of a six lesson-workshop program for the first quarter of a fine art bachelor.[1] This program was developed at and for the Willem de Kooning Academy (WdKA). Yet, it can be adapted to other fine art bachelors.

I have tested three of these lessons in September and October 2015. The first was an introduction exercise, the second was about notions of success and failure, the third was about artists that use their work to mark their social or political stands.

Fine art is perceived mostly as a visual practice. Throughout my thesis, research and educational project I address fine art mostly from a perspective that focuses on the students' self-development at an intellectual level, reflecting in its turn on their personal and artistic growth and maturity.

Throughout my thesis I build on a possible queer pedagogy based on the first three texts written about the possible definitions the term can encompass. Those are: *Queer Pedagogy: Praxis Makes Im/Perfect* from Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell, *Queer Pedagogy? Or Stop Reading Straight* from Deborah P. Britzman, and *Queering/ Querying Pedagogy? Or, Pedagogy Is a Pretty Queer Thing* from Susanne Luhmann.

For the purpose of the educational project, in the section *from theory to practice* I provide the vital points that relate QP as a method with its practical implementation.

I will describe the lesson's initial plan, what actually happened, the evaluation of the lesson according to the students' reactions and peer feedback, and a new plan that takes the previous into account in order to make the lesson-workshop as helpful as possible for the students, while leaving space to adapt to further development.

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1   The meetings with the students had a short presentation at the beginning, and then changed into a conversational mode of debating the works presented. I am calling the format of these meetings lesson-workshop.

The assessment is done through the students, they point out what they want to learn more about or explore deeper; peer review was used to improve my (dis)abilities in giving presentations, engagement with students and content delivering; literature review, mostly critical theory – critical pedagogy, feminism, queer - is used to explain the significance of the research, ground the need for the type of method and content. This last part is explored deeper in my thesis.

The target group of the research are the current first year students of fine art at the WdKA (2015/ 2016). The target group of my educational project are their teachers.

The gap that can be filled with what I propose in this educational project is the lack of communication between students and theory. It is important to introduce students to branches of critical theory through contemporary art in order to explore distinct readings not only on art, but as a strategy to negotiate distinct perspectives. By sharing each one's vision facing the artwork being shown, each person gradually reflects their own position not only as a student, but as an individual as well. It is of utmost importance to provide a space where students are free to discuss their opinions, regarding the topics given in the lesson, a space where students feel free to judge, speculate, debate and question what kind of connotations, implications and problematics they see in the topics of discussion.

The initial plan for this EP was to introduce first year fine art students to certain branches of critical theory, through the work of post-structuralist thinkers, like Judith Butler (influenced by several post-structuralist philosophers herself), or to queer theory by the work of J. Jack Halberstam. After the practical side of my research, through which the three sketched lessons were tested, the goal of the EP became to generate a workshop based format that would bring a topic of discussion via artworks in the first part, and turn it into a debate using the artworks as trigger. My goal is to use QP as a method of content delivering, while choosing that content as I get to know the students. These choices are made according to the interests the students reveal, their background, and the kind of artwork they feel drawn to. Following this structure, the content of the second lesson was chosen after the

introduction meeting, and the content of the third lesson after the second lesson. Some of the topics mentioned were feminism and punk-rock, the type of work was mostly video and photography.

I refer to selected examples of artwork in order to highlight positions and perspectives. I chose those examples not necessarily because I like them, but because they expose certain perspectives or positions which the students can then respond to and, therefore, become a catalyst for conversation.

The six lesson-workshop(s) I propose are part of the research conducted to substantiate my thesis. What I propose both with the thesis and educational project is a conversation and exchange about contemporary artworks, which allows learning more about social realities through the students themselves. With my thesis I describe the importance of queer pedagogy as a method to use within an educational art institution for the students self development. The theoretical part allowed me to elaborate on the possibilities this method provides to enable students' agency as opposed to conditioning it with an other's reading. The EP was used to conduct a research that allowed me to test the method I propose. Although there are several studies influenced by radical pedagogues, as Paulo Freire or bell hooks, and attempts of queer pedagogies influenced by key theorists, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick or Judith Butler, I could not find any research that had the same parameters as the ones I outline in my thesis: queer pedagogy as a method to think and integrate ontological differences in the curriculum of a first year fine art bachelor. A research that brings 'queer' out of gender studies or queer studies departments to fine art due to the potentialities it has in aiding the students' self-development. My research revolves around two questions:

- How can a queer pedagogy help first year fine art students informing their artistic and social identity?

- How to design a combination of critical theory and contemporary art that confronts students with their identities?

In the context of this master program I focus on working with first year students. The conclusion of this EP looks at the results of the practical side of my research, whereas the conclusion of the thesis leans on the theoretical framework to sustain my argument. Yet, I would like to keep an open door and speculate on the impact QP in a combined qualitative research can potentially have in the long-term, throughout the student's academic journey.

II. Lesson-workshop: what happened

At its best, then, participatory action research is a social process of collaborative learning realized by groups of people who join together in changing the practices through which they interact in a shared social world in which, for better or worse, we live with the consequences of one another's actions.

Kemmis and McTarggart, 2005[2]

First encounter: Introduction exercise.

The first time 'we' met was in the third week of the academic year. We sat in a broad circle, with 25 people, I proposed that each person should introduce the person sitting on their left side.
The introduction should focus on information that would tell about the character of the person; I asked to try to avoid the usual pattern of 'comes from… studied…' and gave an example by introducing their tutor, Karin Arink, as someone who sometimes wakes up at five in the morning in order to be able to reply to all the emails from her students; someone who likes to dance once in a while.[3]

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2 Although I do not use the term 'action based research' in my thesis and educational project, I do identify my research with some of the guidelines Kemmis and McTarggart use to define the term.

3 Karin Arink is a colleague, we studied in this master together. She is also an artist, a collaborator at the foundation B.a.d, and course leader of the 'autonoom' (fine art) and photography departments of the Willem de Kooning Academy. She

The goal of following such suggestion was to generate a situation from which the class would get to know more about each other. I mentioned most of them would be part of the same class for the next four years, that they would learn a lot from each other, even from the colleagues they might not feel close to. I explained that as part of the same class, all of them have a voice, and each individual voice is important when thinking about the group they form. They will get to know one another throughout their academic journey, this exercise was a space to boost that process.

Despite being already in their third week, students realized they knew very little about each other, making the exercise was useful for all. Some students were surprised about the way people were introduced due to the following: kind of information the colleagues knew/ didn't know; surprised by seeing how they were perceived, positively/ negatively.
No borders of respect were crossed, no one was offended, even though some did not identify themselves with the words they were described with. The fact that there was no negative provocations happened due to the space to disagree and explain why they did not like certain descriptions.

By using this setup, I wanted to avoid the way people usually introduce themselves is by giving a short summary of their background, where they come from, what they studied, and other information about the higher achievements of their careers, if applicable. I wanted to question the reasons why this information is chosen when one meets another for the first time. What are the notions of power and hierarchy implied within the transmitted information? Why do most people opt to follow a certain format to present themselves to others?
I find these questions pertinent due to the fact that they mirror a social standard, a pre-established form of communication that affects the way people relate to one another, I wanted to point out that 'we' follow these standards without knowing why.

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gave me feedback on this work through our peer group sessions.

After the exercise I shared this concern with the class. They did not agree neither understood why I

considered the way people introduce themselves as a 'standardized' behavior. This disagreement

allowed us to discuss modes of introduction and the 'why' or 'why not' providing personal information

in first meetings.

The discussion worked as a feedback session, we contextualized 'first meetings' and concluded that

the physical space, the occasion and the purpose are relevant factors that shape one's introduction.

Following that, it was easier to understand why possible blocks of information might be useful or not.

I received the following feedback from the students:

- "It doesn't make sense to say I'm a feminist or an animal right protector, because it might

  create a distance, it is too much information for a first meeting."
- "People get to know each other with time."
- "It is about being shy."

The feedback from Karin was more focused on how and why the exercise was useful for the students.

It became apparent that they knew very little about each other, even the names of each other were

unclear. For Karin it was positive because the entire class engaged in a discussion, they were very

keen in explaining why they disagreed with my form of questioning why people don't give relevant

information in first introductions. Providing such space for discussion is vital for students to feel that

they can and should voice concerns, opinions and positions. Karin mentioned that there are classes

where students hesitate to speak up, to express their feelings and opinions. In that respect, inciting

group dialogue from the first meeting, an 'us' that includes myself, was very positive.

Before saying goodbye I suggested they think about the assumptions they had about the WdKA, about

what they thought it was expected from them there, and where could these assumptions come from?

Second meeting: the first lesson-workshop

After nervously greeting the students, I began with the question with which we had left: what did you think it was expected from you here (at the WdKA)?
There was no answer.

The initial plan was to give a short presentation about precarity as a human condition, neoliberalism, and end up discussing notions of success and failure within society and how that is pictured in the arts.

I introduced the topic, notions of success and failure, and did not explain what we were going to talk about, what was the content of the presentation, something to learn for the following encounter.
I pointed how society implies certain standards that one is supposed to work towards, and how those expectations affect notions of success and failure. I did not give any examples 'standards', 'success' or 'failure'.
I tried to give an historical background of the term precarity, its origins, and its eruption period in the 70's as a consequence from the neoliberalist regime connected with Margaret Tatcher's period.
My intention was to explain how the maximization of profit within a capitalist society conditions each human's life style, incites levels of consumption regardless of social class. As a consequence, how cultural standards are implemented by a governmental period, making people believe that the compliance to a certain form of life is synonym of happiness. I wanted to explain that the way cultural standards are build affect social hierarchies and, therefore, has an impact on how humans relate to one another.
Instead of making clear why I chose the aforementioned terms and why I wanted to know their opinion

regarding those terms, I made an unarticulated connection with the way responsibility is set on each

individual, giving examples of job positions that have the word 'manager' in the title, like assistant

manager director or facility manager. I focused on the kind of weight the name 'manager' has on self-

monitoring, having an implied responsibility on the positive or negative outcomes of one's work when it

comes to generating value. By the same token, how the word manager suggests being in a good

position.

I showed some pictures from Tracey Moffatt's *Fourth*.[4] Following some guidelines of Jack Halberstam

(2011), I wanted to show artwork that could open up a discussion around the consequences of not

complying to 'social standards', as a consequence, how people are perceived and portrayed. I

introduced Moffatt's work around the olympic games and how she chose to photograph the 'losers',

the ones who "Almost [became] a star[s]!" (Halberstam, 2011, p.93).

Although I did not explain all the concepts neither articulated my argument well, after the discussion

students approached me individually to ask if we could talk about their work, they wanted to engage in

further dialogue. I did not expect ending up having individual tutorials, but that door stayed open, as I

still meet some of the students to talk about their work.

I wonder about what triggered the students in approaching me, why did they feel like discussing their

work, why was the 'lesson' relevant to the point that they wanted feedback about their work. These are

points I want to explore further as the research continues, it is an ongoing process in attempt to

analyze and understand what was their motivation.

Third lesson-workshop: How artists use their work to make a stand in socio-political realms.

I was influenced by the individual talks with the students and tried to structure my presentation in a

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4   All the images of the artworks mentioned can be found in the appendix.

way that they could relate to it. I tried to explain how some artists embody socio-political realities by showing the works of Tania Bruguera, Omer Fast and Patricia Kaersenhout.

In the introduction I briefly described the lesson plan. I began by mentioning how some artists approach themes of a social realm with their work. How some artists share their views on social and political realities, exposing inequalities facing immigration, ethnicity or sexual identity.
I explained my choices regarding the artist's' work in connection with their potential interests. Moreover, how these works had the ability to reach audiences that are not necessarily from an art field; how they could address contemporary realities; and how they can have a positive approach in the sense of proposing alternatives that convert and empower what is perceived as negative.
My intention was to introduce artists that use art as a platform to voice ideas they support and believe in, ideologies and values that are not necessarily related with the art world. Through this line it was possible to explain how art can raise a social awareness, in the sense that it can affect the way people relate to one another.

I began by introducing Tania Bruguera. I gave a brief description of her geographical reality, pointed out some of her artistic motivations, and showed part of 'Tatlin's Whisper' (Havana version).
When talking about the artist's social context, I explained terms like communism, sovereign state and art-as-activism; it was possible to explain the differences between manifestos, statements and reports.
I mentioned a few works, as the 'Behavior Art School' and the 'Citizens Manifesto for European Democracy' to provide a better understanding of Tania's work, as well as an introduction to terms that students will encounter in their academic path.
When talking about 'Tatlin's Whisper', we had a chance to discuss a work that used the Havana biennial as a platform to give voice, literally, to people, a place that was meant to be used by anyone to express their dissatisfaction with the political regime. More importantly, how this work found a way to reach an audience outside of the art world, and how that audience took action, fueled by the energy

from what had happened inside a biennial perimeter.

The discussion that followed Bruguera's work was focused on the technical means by which the work was broadcast and therefore made possible for any citizen with a television to watch, the ways citizens used to try to continue expressing their views on the governing party (Castro family), and a line of art that uses its field to intervene in the socio-political realm.

Afterwards, I introduced Omer Fast's work 'CNN concatenated'. I explained his style is a mix of fiction and documentary, why and how he is interested in topics like surveillance (drones), military and trauma, truth and paranoia. Further on, I focused on how the artist used a medium that allows editing and transforming the information transmitted by the Media. How the artist intended to twist information that he considers twisted, and how he generated a fake speech as a reaction to broadcasted speeches in a post 9/11 period. In short: be careful with what you see.

The following discussion focused on students' opinions on what is transmitted by the Media. It was important to talk about systems of surveillance and see that, despite not being very familiar with this reality in Rotterdam, the amount of cameras in the street for example, they were still very keen in discussing it.

The last artist was Patricia Kaersenhout. I wanted to show the work of an artist that closer to home, closer to their social context.
I tried to introduce Patricia in the way I saw her introducing herself. She has a Surinamese migrant background, and the racial prejudices she faced when growing up in The Netherlands. In her work, she explores themes related with African diaspora, colonialism and womanism. This allowed me to explain these terms that the students were not familiar with and were very interested in knowing more about. At this point we engaged in a dialogue to distinguish feminism and womanism.

I showed them 'The Image of Me', a work done in collaboration with the Danish artist Jeannette Ehlers. I described how the work reveals an affirmative action, the ability to revert a stereotype without reproducing ethnical prejudices.

The work had a great impact on one of the students. When I noticed that she was crying during the video I thought I had done something wrong, I should have given a trigger warning, I felt guilty for hurting someone. Afterwards I approached her to apologize, she said that she had actually seen the video before (without knowing who were the authors), but did not expect that it would be shown in class. Her assumption comes from not expecting, within a classroom context, to see a work stating 'being black' as being beautiful, she didn't know that one of the artists has a Surinamese background, same as herself. She thanked me for bringing that video.

The following discussion was the richest of the lesson. Students were very interested in knowing more about the terms. It was clear that they had identified themselves with certain ideas, but were unable to articulate them. The non-white people who had shown a certain hesitation in using feminism as something they identify themselves with asked several questions about womanism (in the classroom and outside).

We had a discussion about what it means to subvert a prejudice, what it means to 'objectify' a subject or a situation and therefore, reproduce a prejudice. Students posed several questions about other works of art in relation with these terms.

It was of utmost importance to explore the aforementioned terminology because, regardless of the gender, ethnical background, or their own ideologies, the students opened up and said that they were not familiar with some terms, like 'objectification', and that they felt the need to know more about it. Patricia's work is great to exemplify the empowerment of a subject as opposed to its objectification. I explained this and shared my own concern regarding the dangers of not having an informed position regarding how one presents a topic of one's work.

In retrospect, the debate allowed us to deconstruct and compare artworks, some shown by the students, in order to understand what these 'new' terms entail.

III. Evaluating the research/ methodology

1. Peer Review

2. From theory to practice

0. Under false impressions

The experience gained through my research was inestimable and unpredicted. I had a very sketchy plan, and for some reason I thought that it would go as drafted.

In the first meeting, the introduction, I was shocked to see that the students were not that young, most of them are around twenty and I was expecting only eighteen year old students. That was the first slap in the face, I struggle against unfounded assumptions and there I was, falling into the same trap. "Living and learning" I told myself. When we sat down on the floor to do the round of introductions the 'slaps in the face' continued. Those not so young people had political convictions, no fear or shame to say what kind of movements they identify with, no shame or fear of sharing what kind of troubles and struggles they had to go through to be in the place they were on that day: in an art academy.

Not only the students were surprisingly 'mature' and unapologetically outspoken, they also smashed my argument regarding modes of 'introduction'. I was the one who had to grow up, aka step up my game and make sure that what I had in mind to deliver as content would be as useful for the students as possible!

I was glad there was such comfort in expressing opinions. That allowed a deeper understanding of their positions regarding 'group discussions', it gave a certain insight about the group dynamic, and

most importantly, it helped me shape the following classes according to their interests. This first meeting was vital to draw the content of the next ones because the students begun to speak about their own position. By giving a bit of insight into who they are, it was possible to understand what their interests were/ are, which in its turn helped me to chose artworks that could possibly incite discussion around their interests. Half of the class showed interest in video and photography, some of them came out as feminists, one of them made a surprised face when the colleague used feminist to characterize her. The conclusions drawn for the following meetings were: show artwork that uses video or photography; manage to contrast feminism and womanism in order to show how similar movements have overlapping ideas, but can have different aims and reach distinct people.[5]

Reflecting on the workshop and my initial aims, it was evident to me that my questions were not clear enough. It showed that I need to explain the 'introduction' at a meta-level in order to understand what each student considers 'relevant' information to provide when they meet someone for the first time. As a consequence, we, the class, can agree on the terms we communicate, even if we disagree with the content, making the exercise more beneficial, as we situate ourselves in a more understandable way to the group. Facilitating a space where students can discuss their stands regarding which kind of knowledge they want to share was a great step for them to position themselves in relation to each other. Moreover, it helped Karin and me to understand this dynamic.

1. Peer review

The overall feedback I got from my colleagues, was focused on how to engage with the students and being (un)able to translate the concepts I used.
Juan was present in the second meeting, where my 'performance' in content delivering greatly

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5 The term womanism, when compared to feminism, is more embracing towards people of color; it is more inclusive regarding struggles of groups that face discrimination due to their class, age, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Womanism

matched part of the title 'notions of success and failure'.[6] He explained me that I need to clarify the

concepts better, precarity, mainstream, queer, to be sure that their meanings are understood.

Moreover, the interaction with the students can be boosted with exercises and questions, that will help

passing from a presentation to an actual debate. Having a strong interaction will help the students to

develop a sense of belonging, that their opinion is important, that they can ask questions and be

honest regarding their thoughts.

I will changed the introduction of the presentation and ask the students what they understand as

'success' and 'failure' within a social context, and then within an art academy. I will give concrete

examples of what social standards are, like having a smartphone to be able to use the latest forms of

communication (Facebook/ Whatsapp), models of family that automatically imply a father, mother,

children.

The feedback I got from the current first year students is based on the importance of being introduced

to 'new' concepts, like objectification or art-as-activism. Some people mentioned how positive it was to

have a space, already in the first weeks, to address social related realities, like the existence of

mainstream(s) and minorities and their impact on one another. Some students expressed discomfort

regarding a 'general' choice teachers have to pic white male artist to use as examples in class, this is

an assumption some students voiced when we met outside of the classroom. In that respect, they said

it was "nice" to be introduced to more female artists and/ or from a non-white background.

I asked some former students from the WdKA, and current students from the fourth and third year

what they think about the lesson-workshop(s) I proposed. Some of them I met individually, some in an

informal group setting. I wanted to know if, in their opinion, these lesson-workshop(s) would have had

any impact in their self-development, in their work, and in their position as a student inside the

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6   Juan is also colleague from MEiA. He is a teacher for the 'autonoom' (fine art) and photography departments at the
    Willem de Kooning Academy. He also gave me feedback on this work through our peer group sessions.

academy.

At first, some of them were debating whether it fits the first year program, or if it is better to have this approach only in the second year. They said that the first year is dedicated to experimenting formats and materials, and the second year is more about finding 'yourself'. They questioned if it would be 'dangerous' in the sense that students might want to start doing work in the same lines of the artists shown. In reply I stressed the importance of letting the students negotiate their positions themselves, that I showed artworks that students could relate to and asked questions about the influences, consequences and effects it can have as a way to start a dialogue. By asking 'what do you think it is expected from you here, at the WdKA?', the students converse and share their assumptions and, therefore I have a neutral position. I explained that, although I try my best not to impose my personal view, my entire research mirrors a socio-political stand: I do think that art can incite changes at a social level and express that my urgency focuses on the first year, now perhaps second as well, curriculum of fine art.

Some of them focused in answering how it could have affected their self-development. They stressed the importance of developing a feeling of belonging inside school, which can be achieved when one can identify with the artists, artworks and contexts addressed in a classroom setting. Not being 'left out' by being able to comfortably share one's opinion, by felling that there is a space where students can be honest with their opinions strengthens one's self-confidence. At a pedagogical level, having a space that introduces students to terms like queer, respect, social hierarchy, etc., is certainly, according to this feedback, going to change the way the members of the class approach one another, it will affect the way they talk with their peers, and it will contribute to a more overall respectful interaction.

When answering if it would have affected them, the answer was common to all: yes, it would probably

have affected the way 'I' think; I maybe would have made art in a different way. There were no concrete examples regarding what that 'different' could be, only the note that this 'different' only becomes evident later on, when one finds out what kind of artwork one wants to develop in the long-term.

I had the opportunity to talk about my work with scholars from other departments, like cultural studies, gender studies, sexual education, film studies, law, people who are connected with the teaching system in The Netherlands, but also people who work in other and multiple contexts. This helped me understand the relevance of my research when seen from eyes out of an art educational context, while at the same time being able to verbalize the importance of a pedagogically queer approach to departments other than gender or queer related studies. These sometimes informal, other times formal meetings all touched on the need to create a safe space inside the academy/ university, a space where individuals treat each other respectfully, where students 'feel at home', a space that embraces each one and where people know that they can 'be' regardless of who they 'are', without facing discrimination.

Having such support made me see that this educational project, as well as the thesis, are just the beginning, it strengthened my wish to continue this research.

The points above are relevant for the choices made in the re-plan section for when I conduct the lesson-workshop(s) again, from September to December 2016.

2. From theory to practice

A pedagogically queer approach is concerned with the impact mainstream education has on the students identity development, which means following a specific set of examples that do not take into consideration the student's ethnical background. This set of examples, in an art academy are reflected

in the dominance of white male artists represented in the canon of art history. A simple solution is to, regardless of the purpose of the class, show artwork from artists of multiple ethnical backgrounds as well as multiple gender identities.

By mainstream education I mean the inherent influence of capitalism and heteronormativity, which I address using J. Jack Halberstam work on *failure*. The author explains the way 'we' are all part of a system where profit is equal to success, and the way these achievements are built at the cost of others. She explains that the routes aiming at success contribute to an increase of selfish behaviors, lack of care for one another, and contempt for those who 'lack' a sense of 'ambition' and 'desire' to pursue a 'winner's' position.

I interpret Halberstam's definition of heteronormativity as seeing heterosexuality not as a practice, but as a political regime that pushes individuals to specific forms of family, marginalizing in its turn who ever falls outside of that picture, like single mothers, pregnant teenagers, children of divorced parents and communal modes of family.

Openly talking about what is expected from 'us', according to 'our' social context, within the classroom allows opening discussions on what happens when 'we' do not fit the appointed expectations. Consequently, it is possible to expose the harm caused to those who do not fall under the preset parameters and brainstorm possibilities to revert that harm. After conducting my research at the WdKA, when I met some of the students individually, I realized that several students with backgrounds and identities that are in minority in terms of percentage do not feel welcomed in the school, they do not feel that they can belong, they feel stared at, have trouble adapting to the surroundings and do not have means to expose and express that reality. This is not for every student, but it is something that must be addressed, and it reinforces the benefits of using a pedagogically queer approach, starting at the foundational year.

One of the ways of applying queer pedagogy inside an art academy is by talking about failure, in relation to the expectations students believe to exist regarding their future, helps understanding their

own position and, by consequence, helps the students understand what kind of agency they want to have at a personal and (if so), at an artistic level. Furthermore, talking about failure as an alternative position facing capitalism and heteronormativity, helps empowering students' knowledge on alternative forms of art: the non-normative within the normative. By showing artworks from artists as Cassils or Zackary Drucker, the facilitator can bring discussions about gender that break the binary while using art as a platform to do so. By showing artworks of Patricia Kaersenhaut is possible discuss about ethnicity and the way society voices its racism. By talking about artists as Tania Bruguera and Omer Fast allows to build a dialogue around the way artists use their work to expose topics of urgency in their social contexts.

QP aims at social inclusion. Following the previous examples is a way of working towards that social inclusion. Yet, one must embody that notion as well, and this is done by generating safe spaces of discussion, which means continuous dialogue so that each student knows that their voice counts. Asking for opinions, engaging in exercises, being in a vulnerable position will empower students to speak up, to claim their space and negotiate opinions with their colleagues. The vulnerable position I speak of implies mostly the teacher, so that the hierarchical positions are deconstructed. Sharing cannot be sharing if the facilitator suggests an exercise and does not take part.

Throughout my research I became aware that these notions of social inclusion, or sociality explore the way humans relate to one another. It entails a process of recognition and awareness of what surrounds 'us'. In order to develop this point I used Tariq Ramadan's notion of *conviviality*, which entails respecting the colleagues; dialogue, in order to understand each one's position; and negotiation, as we are all different. The only way of understanding that difference is if 'we' verbalize our own position.

Queer pedagogy uses examples of activism to explain how to move towards a social change   that

recognizes that all individuals matter (Britzman). In this respect I use the work of Rosi Braidotti on *affirmative ethics* and Judith Butler's work on the *performative*. These authors gravitate towards an idea of social change that does not mourn about or perpetuate suffering, it is based on an active desire of deconstructing social hierarchies and prejudices, and it questions the history through which 'we' came to relate to one another in that hierarchical and prejudiced way. In my thesis I explore deeper the contribution these authors have for QP as a method, I add bell hooks' definition of critical thinking, an interactive process, aware that knowledge is constantly changing, a process that "involves first discovering the who, what, when, where and how of things" (hooks, 2010, p. 9).

This possible method has the flexibility to adapt each year to the students' needs, it has the students' social and artistic development at its best interest, it reflects a belief that individuals can relate to one another with respect and compassion, and it acknowledges the need for multiplicity to exist (alterity, difference) because "being cannot be anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the with and as the with of this singularly plural coexistence" (Nancy, 2000, p.3).

Identity recognition requires social awareness, which in its turn leads to the empowerment of an individual. The layers unfolded by 'identity' are endless. Nevertheless, queer pedagogy as a method encompasses the ethical values, the activist energy, and the desire for social changes regarding the way individuals treat each other. Therefore it is a method that can be extremely beneficial to develop inside a fine art department.

IV. Lesson-workshop: plan again

1 – Introduction: exercise

In the first workshop I had the chance to talk with some of the students about their work, which

allowed me to know them a individually. Karin said that every year, in the third week, Learning from that experience, the 'introduction' exercise will happen again in similar circumstances, but this time I should take notes of concerns/ characteristics expressed through the students' artwork.

The introduction exercise exposes how each one perceives another colleague. It is an exercise that generates surprising confrontations when understanding that one assumed another to be in a certain way, which can match the person or not. Moreover, doing this exercise together puts us, in the room, at the same level, there is no hierarchy, it is not mandatory to participate and we are all in similar position of describing a person we don't know very well. This should be clear so that I can express my proposal of having an introduction exercise. It is important to explain further how the group dynamic plays a huge role in the way each person will produce work, how they can influence each other; it is important to be honest without invading each other's borders of privacy by purposely hurting or offending.

I would like to take more detailed notes about each student's interests in order to adapt and chose what to approach in the following meetings. Ideally I introduce the program itself to the students, but always leaving space to possible changes and suggestions.

The introduction is extremely important for the group dynamic, each person gives a bit of themselves by trying to introduce a colleague, it is the embodiment of a vulnerable position for not knowing exactly what to do. Yet, in that exercise 'we' were 'all' in the same vulnerable stand, 'we' were equals, and it was from there that we begun to share our assumptions about others.

I can clearly understand this exercise as a possible entry to a circular path of shaping and reshaping one's character. It is a beginning for group discussions, a beginning to build trust, it is a trigger to start revealing the differences between students and the importance of those differences when it comes to accepting diversity as something natural among groups of people.

Karin gives an introduction lesson, more focused on getting to know the work students made before coming to the WdKA. This helps her to get to know more in depth the work of the students, and the students to get to know better the work of their colleagues.

Karin suggested that I bring the introduction exercise on that say, so we can have more points related to the 'getting to know each other'. This combination is something we will talk more about, when the date is closer.

2 – Notions of Success and *Failure* (how it is portrayed in art)

There will be an introduction exercise to explore what success and failure mean for each of us, those who feel like sharing. I will ask what it means to succeed or fail, in their understanding, within an art school and as part of society. The latter has to be unfolded beforehand with warming up questions, what makes 'us' part of society? (The Netherlands, EU context) What do you think we should do as part of society? Is that the same as what is expected from us (in a social context)?

After a discussion, I want to focus on how notions of success and failure were portrayed by Tracey Moffat in her work *Fourth*. Aiming at a more interactive session, I want to ask why would an artist chose to take pictures of the athletes who finished in fourth place at the olympic games? I will follow Jack J. Halberstam's analysis on the work to establish a position when moderating a possible discussion between the students, which focuses on the artist's wish to give visibility to the athletes who almost made it, in contrast with the emotions transmitted by their faces when realizing they stayed seconds away from success (Halberstam, 2011).

The goal of this lesson-workshop is to build on each one's notions of success and failure within an artist's practice, and by the same token, the consequences of achieving and performing these concepts. Although in my thesis I explain and analyze deeper possibilities of J. Jack Halberstam's notion of *failure*, in class I don't want to explain further, as it can influence the students' opinion on

capitalism and heteronormativity. If the educational project eventually reaches the possibility of lasting one academical year, then the concepts of capitalism and heteronormativity will emerge, as they are vital to explain what happens to groups that fall outside of definitions brought up by them.

3 – How artists use their work to make a stand in socio-political realms

I envision the third encounter happening through similar lines. Although I have been gradually thinking of showing more 'local' artwork examples, the artist's shown can also be the same as before. This can't be a fixed decision for the time being, it is imperative to know the students before making choices, as it risks selecting examples that students might not relate to.

Regardless of the artwork to be shown, the most urgent point to emphasize is the notion of objectification. It was evident that the students were unaware of the consequences of using a subject, an object, or a theme to approach in their work. As explained in my thesis, it is an ethical and political choice to explain what it means to (ab)use subjects or matters through ones work. I believe that this position should be taken by educational institutions to avoid precisely the objectification of subjects by future artists.

The discussion around uses and abuses of topics can be done by explaining how and why works as *The Image of Me* and *Tatlin's Whisper* give voice to the subject(s) as opposed to merely using it/ them as a topic. This is informed at a theoretical level by the work of Judith Butler on *reversive performativity*, Rosi Braidotti's *affirmative ethics*, and bell hooks' definition of critical thinking. All of these terms take into account the situation in which a certain event occurs, the way concepts can be misplaced/ misused, and an overall attempt to reverse the notions of 'minority', 'marginal', 'suffering' positions defined by social constructions.

The third lesson-workshop made evident that the students would benefit from having these weekly encounters throughout the first year, as it reflected the need to articulate their position as individuals

who are socially seen as not being part of the majority. More time is required to develop dialogue around what their interests are, which topics they are introduced to and ask to know more about. In order to develop the practical side of my research, bringing to the classroom the combined theory build as a queer pedagogy, it is required more time to reach a level of trust within the classroom that will truly enable students (and teachers) to share personal views.

4 – Music Icons

Considering that part of the students found analogies through music to mirror their artistic interests, like one student who asked if David Bowie could be considered a queer individual, it would be enriching to explore music work that students could relate to.

Taking the student's ethnical backgrounds, political interests and music preferences, the Pussy Riot came to mind as a potential example to debate in class.

I want to show two videos of the band, one clip and the video that led to their arrest. I will give a brief history/ introduction to the band, and explain the reasons why I wanted to share them as a topic of discussion. These are based on the following: Punk-rock, Russia (political context), feminist and Riot Girl (ideology). I want to ask why were they arrested? Why do you think they stayed in jail for that long (nearly two years)?

Having this option of lesson-workshop after objectification is introduced allows to explore how the case was perceived by the western world, making a contrast between the support the band had from the mass media and activist groups all around the world.

The political context I want to mention is related to freedom of expression, or the lack of it, and the way the Pussy Riot chose to express their opinion regarding it.

5 – What should have been there? Students' presentations

In order to make another step in 'getting to know' each other, it is important if student's could share what kind of artists they think it is important to talk about.

I will ask, beforehand, what artist's/ artworks do you think we should have talked about? I will ask them to give a short – 5 minute – presentation about why the work they chose is important. This will not be mandatory, and depending on how many students want to present, this 'assignment' can be done individually or in group.

Each meeting, lesson-workshop, helps choosing the topics of discussion of the next. The facilitator should be aware of what king of suggestions, opinions, and urgencies emerge during the discussions in order to keep up with the unpredictability of the group dynamics. It is important to understand in which direction the students are moving, so that the lesson part can adapt to the current needs. The longer these weekly meeting happen, the broader, or not, the discussions grow. The increase of dialogue boosts the transformational path of self-development, which is one of the points this educational project can help with.

6 – Introduction: what changed?

The sixth meeting will serve as an 'evaluation' moment for what we have built in the previous weeks. We will do an introduction exercise again, but this time bearing in mind that we already know each other a bit more. It is an introduction 2.0, where the information is more elaborated, perhaps deeper, perhaps more superficial. At the end of the exercise I will ask what has changed between the first and that day's introduction.

A second introduction strengthens the importance of having each student's voice, it is what allows the class to keep supporting each other as a group. This would be a moment when each person shares their opinion regarding what has happened so far, and evaluates its relevance.

'We' can do the 'balancing' of the past weeks with a verbal mirroring exercise.

V. <u>Conclusion</u>

I used the educational project to explore the practical side of my research, and to provide a set of possible lessons that follow principles and guidelines of how a pedagogically queer approach can be implemented in the first year of a fine art curriculum.
It allowed me to build a relationship of trust with several students, which is one of the biggest goals, as it boosts their confidence in expressing their current personal and artistic stand.

QP aims at social inclusion without imposition. In order to reach that, or perhaps I should say 'to work towards that', one must generate safe spaces of discussion where students are motivated to share their critical thoughts in a respectful manner. This entails continuous dialogue so that each student knows that their voice counts and learn how to negotiate in-between group dynamics.

Although I propose a set of lesson-workshop(s), these must be flexible and adapt each year to the students' needs. The emphasis QP brings is about the way knowledge is taught, its implications when shaping people, and the search for alternatives that dismantle social-political binaries and impositions. Most importantly, it reflects a belief that individuals can relate to one another with respect and compassion, and it does that by generating discussions through art.

The first year student's feedback reflect an emotional engagement with the content of what we discussed during the lesson-workshop(s), they asked for a continuity of our meetings.
The third/ fourth year students' and alumni's feedback stressed the importance of developing a feeling of belonging, of not being 'left out'. In the research conducted at the WdKA this happened when a student thanked me for showing an artist that s/he could relate to due to their ethnical background.

Students shouldn't be surprised for feeling that they can belong regardless of their gender, ethnicity or religion, this should be self-evident.

In retrospect, if the feedbacks are combined, "it would have made a difference in the way I think" and "thank you for showing it", they highlight that what I am proposing does have an impact on the students' personal and artistic development.

Queer pedagogy as a method encompasses the ethical values, the activist energy, and the desire for social changes regarding the way individuals treat each other. It is a method that can empower the students' agency, and it can generate new forms of transmitting knowledge based on mutual individualities. Yet, it also leaves room for further research to explore long-term effects that work towards creating a more respectful environment within educational art institutions, which in its turn can be a catalyst for changes at a social level.

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Tracey Moffatt, *Fourth Place*

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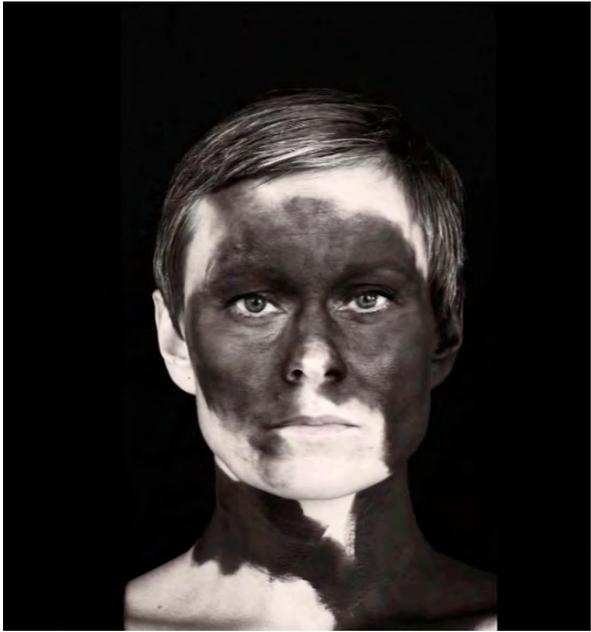
Tania Bruguera, *Tatlin's Whisper*

Tania Bruguera, *Tatlin's Whisper*

Omer Fast, *CNN Concatenated*

Omer Fast, *CNN Concatenated*

Patricia Kaersenhout and Jeannette Ehlers, *The Image of Me*

Patricia Kaersenhout and Jeannette Ehlers, *The Image of Me*

Aernout Mik, *Cardboard Walls*

Aernout Mik, *Cardboard Walls*

Cassils, *Becoming an Image*

Zackary Drucker, *This Is What It Looks Like (To Go From One Thing to Everything)*