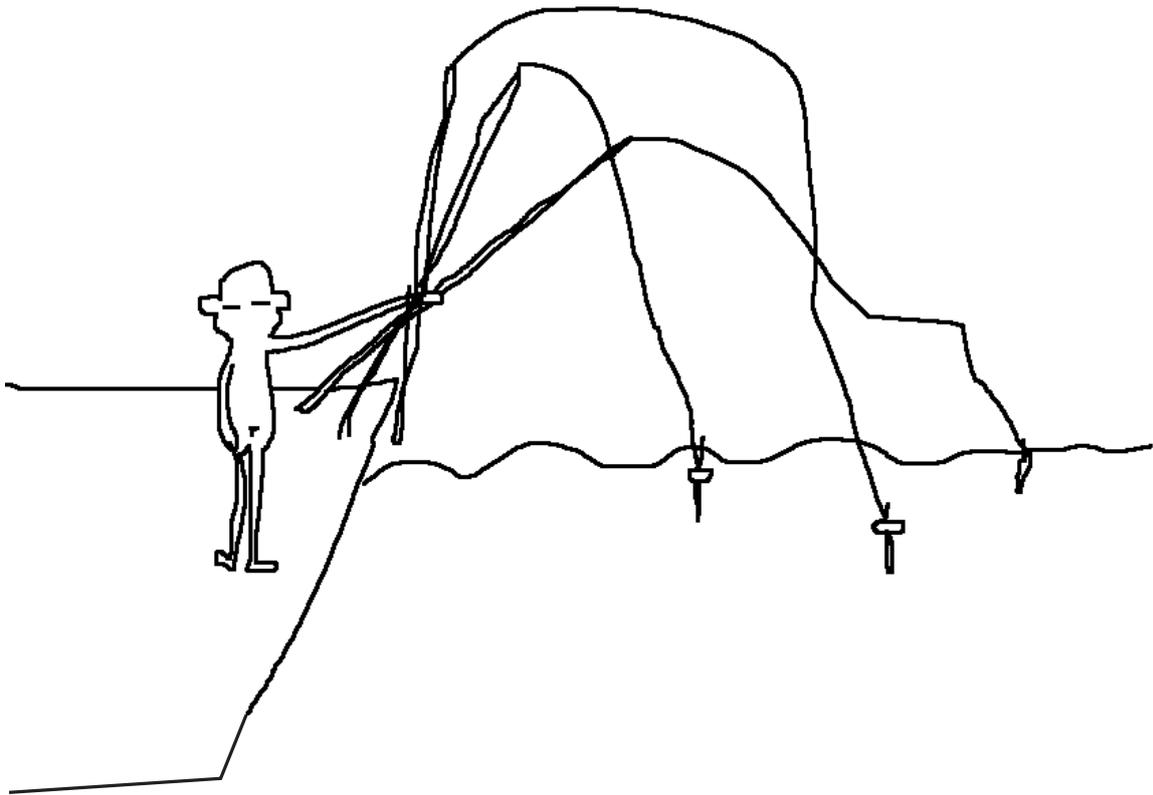


# ***how to teach like a pony\****

***about a pedagogy in the middle  
and ongoing “adventures of making with”***



TEACHING  
LAND

PONY WATERS

\*

Pink pony express works at the interface of research, design and society. Pink pony express always enters into dialogue with their projects. In this, other perspectives are just as important as their own fascinations, opinions or questions. Somewhere in the middle something arises that they expose. Usually in public space. Meeting or involving the other(s) is just as important as the quality of the final image / product. Their images, products, installations or performances magnify underexposed themes, thus bringing new perspectives to the table.

(...) research converts every closure into an opening,  
every apparent end-point into a new beginning.  
(Ingold, 2017, p.72)

**about a pedagogy in the middle  
and ongoing “*adventures of making with*”  
(Atkinson, 2018, p.226)**

Graduation Project 02021 \*  
Master Education in Arts  
Piet Zwart Institute,  
Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences

Annemarie van den Berg



\*  
As Roman Krznaric showed in an episode of *Tegenlicht* (called *Time Rebels*), one can expand the years by tens of thousands of years by just putting a zero in front of the year. This tiny little change can help us rethink time itself. (“Time Rebels”, 2021)

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# 0 short cut

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**question(s)**

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What are the basic principles of Pink Pony Express and how can these be translated into an educational program?

—> How does my design practice (foremost with collective Pink Pony Express) build and inform my pedagogical practice?

—> Which elements of my practice play a crucial role in education.

—> **How can I teach like a Pony?**

—> Can I reveal my teaching approach in the same way that I approach a subject on location? (investigations)

---

**theoretical voices**

---

(that resonate with my practice) are interwoven through my story

\_\_ Dennis Atkinson

\_\_ Tim Ingold

\_\_ ... and others...

---

**Pink Pony Express / Practice**

---

\_\_ What can I tell about Pink Pony Express

\_\_ How did PPE come into existence

\_\_ What elements are important?

---

**Teaching / education / intrinsic pedagogical motivations**

---

--> looking at my teaching practice, what elements pop up, and how? Which don't?

What can I tell about teaching, although teaching is not the right word?

Booklet as an example of site-specific-research and site-specific-making



---

**A pedagogy in the middle**

---

Atkinson and Ingold (amongst others) bring theory to the story. Can I formulate something that bridges their knowlegde and my practice? Something that is not opposing existing systems, but more inviting?

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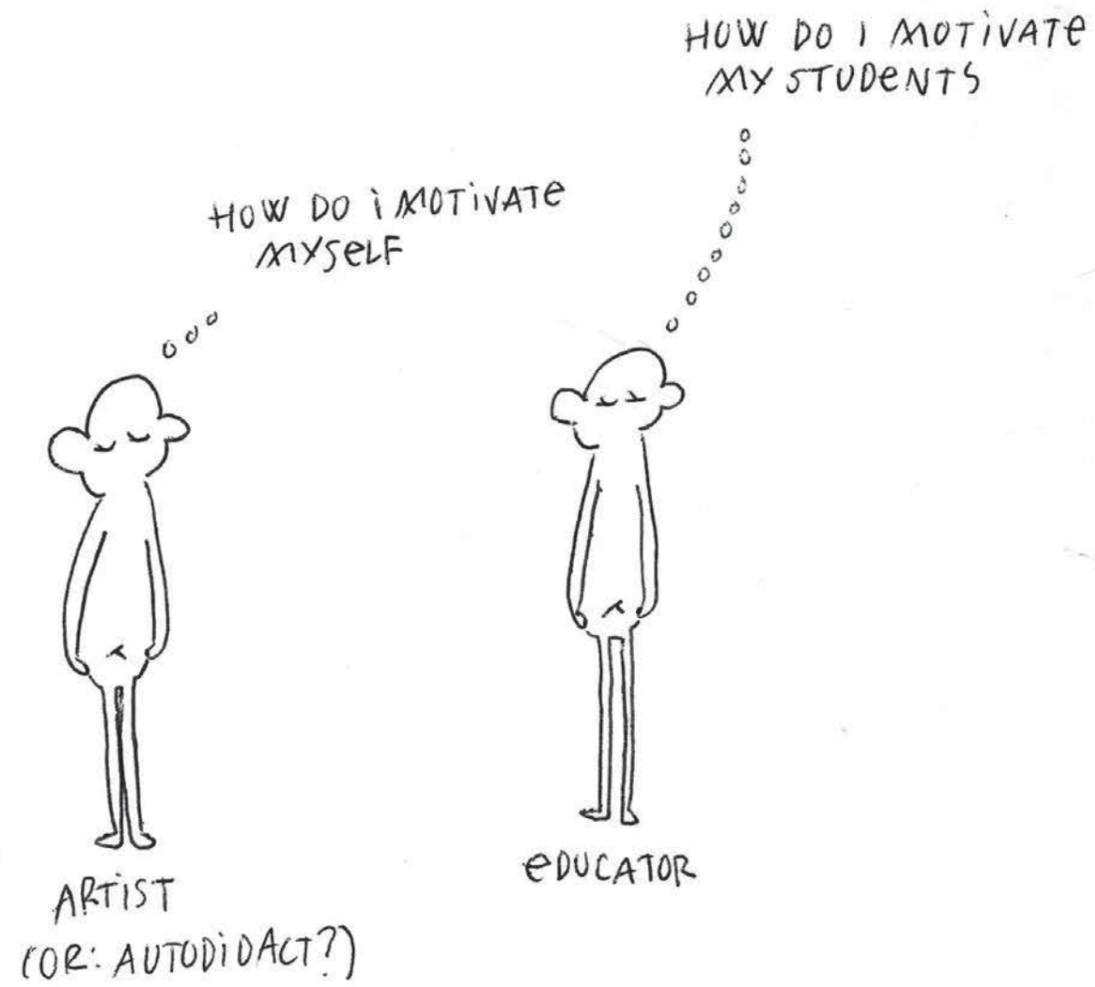
**Bibliography**

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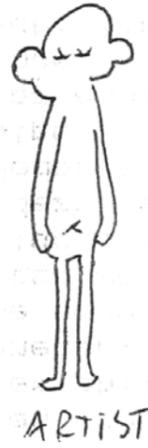
THIS IS A STORY  
ABOUT ME -----  
ABOUT TEACHING<sup>1</sup>  
ABOUT MY PRACTICE<sup>2</sup>  
AND ABOUT (ME) STUDYING<sup>3</sup>



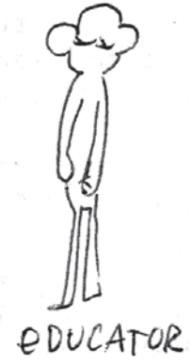
- 1 I currently teach at St.Joost School of Art&Design in Breda. I supervise students graduating from Bachelor New Design and Attitudes (heretofore 'Design in Context').  
From the website: "In the New Design & Attitudes course you will discuss issues that are relevant and urgent for you and society. Such as: climate, loneliness, social inequality, poverty and urban development. You learn to design products, experiences, interactions, systems and processes that respond to these issues."
- 2 I have co-Founded a designers collective Pink Pony Express and worked with them very intensively from 2009–2016. Since I found out that I never learned as much as whilst working with this collective – I wanted to find out why that is, and how?
- 3 This thesis is written also from the perspective of being a student myself, studying at Piet Zwart Institute, Master Education in Arts.



something inside yourself  
that you feel you  
should manifest



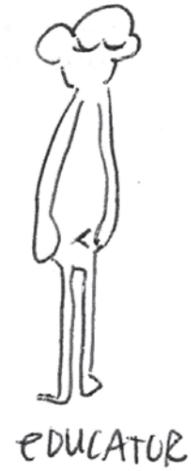
something inside the students  
that they feel they should  
manifest



engage?



engaging students



artist & educator



**/ confession /**

I am used to working in dialogue, since it is within an encounter that new ideas evolve. Studying, but foremost graduating, feels often like a monologue, a solo, something which I would like to break through. Whilst writing this I am not sure yet how to do that but I will find out (soon). I guess I will have to search for dialogue?

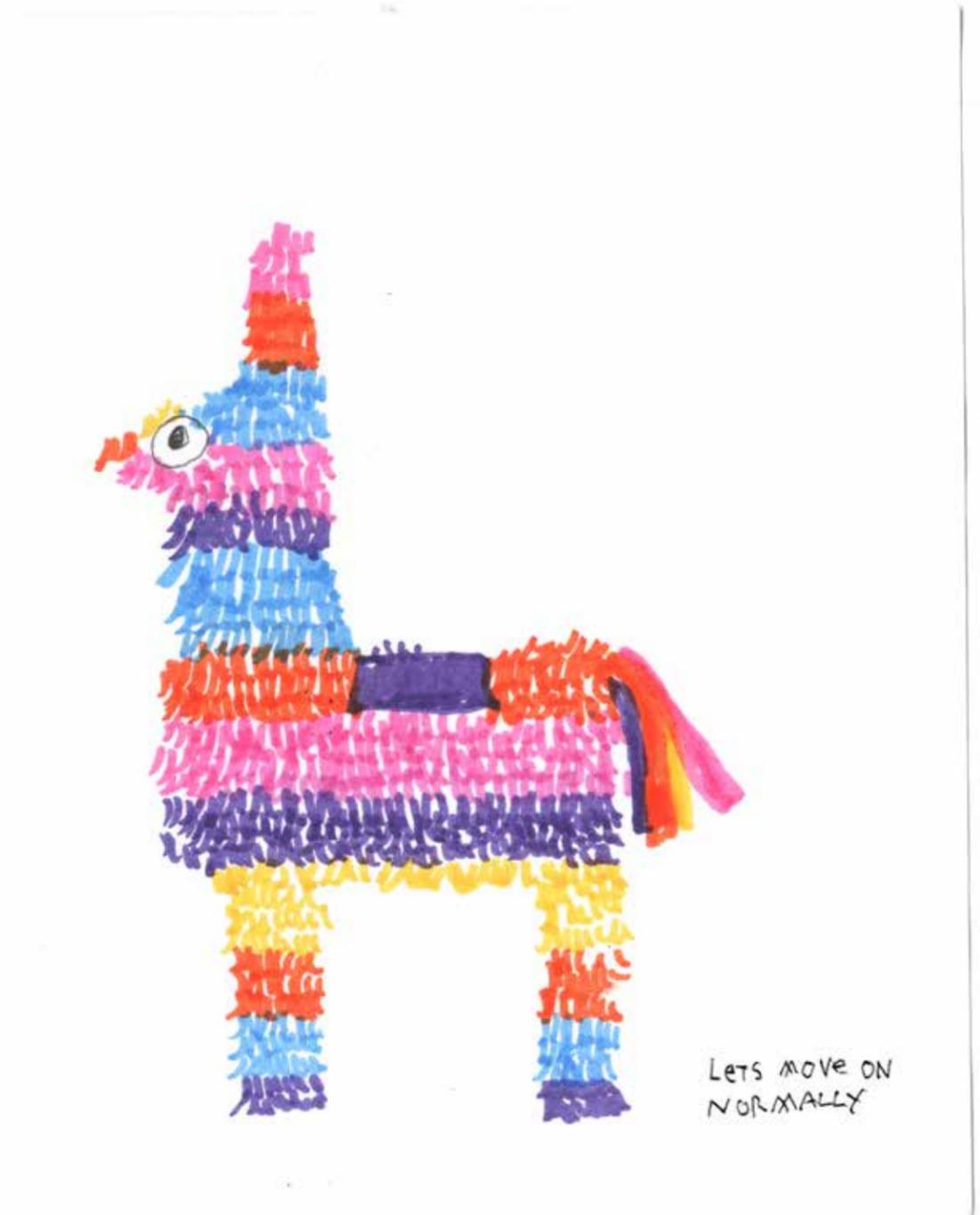
Teaching also confronts me with monologue-ish feelings. Like I have to prepare "my show". I hardly prepare, but since I notice fellow teachers preparing slide shows and giving the students small tasks, I suddenly doubt if I not should do the same. Prepare slide shows? Set out small assignments? When I do try, I feel so far away from how I am used to working. And far away from the students. Preparing things from my desk, behind my computer.

Of course it's not true that I hardly prepare. I guess I prepare differently. As I am writing this, I would love to find out what that "preparing differently" consists of.

I feel soft, poor, weak, and slow. Am I writing my diary? Am I corresponding with something inside myself?

Something inside yourself that you felt that if you could manifest it in some way you would understand more about yourself and how you co-exist with the rest of society. (Bowie, 2016)

This story is taking place in a middle, where things are personal, and where nothing is obsolete. Different perspectives exist next to each other. Making and researching create new openings for other new things to make and research. There is no end station. There are always new beginnings.



**Dear reader,  
thanks for passing by.**

I am trying to find out if there is an overlap between my design practice and my teaching practice. Can I teach the same way as how I design? Whilst designing is perhaps not the right word, just like teaching is not the right word.

**First of all** I will take you along the road looking-back at the work I did with designers collective Pink Pony Express (which I co-founded in 2010). Pink Pony Express is the name of the collective, which consists of four riders. Soon we were called 'the Ponies'. Therefore sometimes we refer to ourselves as 'Pony'.

Pink Pony Express works at the interface of research, design and society. Pink Pony Express always enters into dialogue with their projects. In this, other perspectives are just as important as their own fascinations, opinions or questions. Somewhere in the middle something arises that they expose. Usually in public space. Meeting or involving the other(s) is just as important as the quality of the final image / product. Their images, products, installations or performances magnify underexposed themes, thus bringing new perspectives to the table.

The basic strategy of the Ponies is *research through making*, with every exploration taking material form. These forms occupy or are brought back to the places under study, so that the practice of the Ponies includes a kind of "giving back" to the communities they live and work in. What the Ponies return, however, may not be immediately recognizable to the members of those communities; their work *gives back what was never possessed in the first place*, with research thus becoming an occasion for generous and eccentric exchange. (Herscher, 2012. p.112)

Looking back I must say I never learned as much as whilst working (and living) with the Ponies.

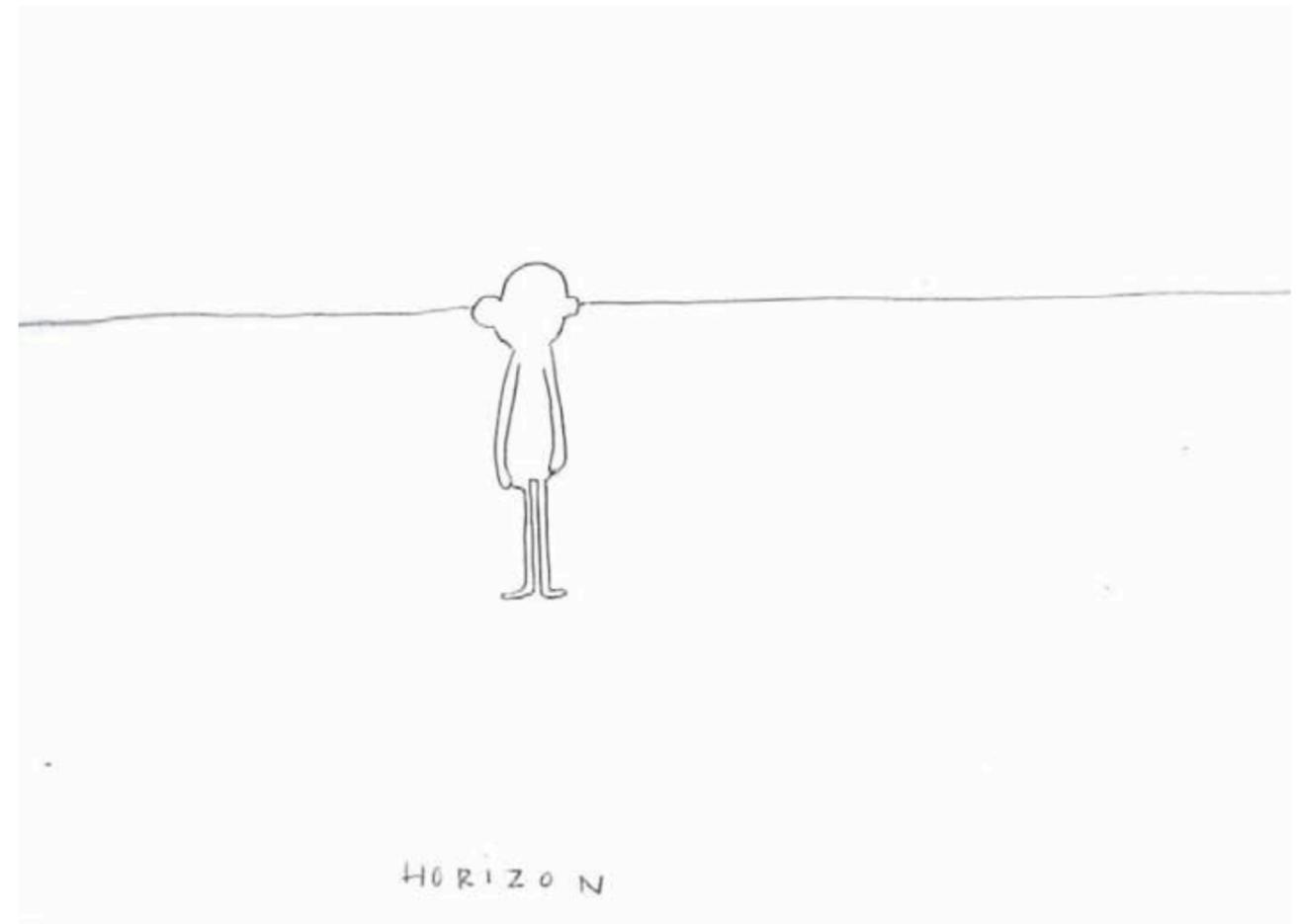
Why had I not learned as much in the 6 years of primary school, 6 years of highschool? And what about the one year of studying abroad (Social Science), the 5 years at a Technical University (Industrial Design Engineering) and again 3,5 years at an art academy (Graphic Design)? Or the many years of running my own graphic design studio?

I want to unravel why I learned so much with the Ponies. I wonder why this is, and what causes this? Can I pinpoint some crucial elements, ingredients or methods? I'm not sure how to name these crucial things? Perhaps attitudes is the best word (for now).

**Then** I want to look at my teaching practice. What are my (past) experiences?

I am currently tutoring graduating students at St.Joost School of Art & Design since 2020. They study in the department New Design and Attitudes (formerly known as "Design in Context, graphic and spatial design"). Previously I have given modules at Design Academy Eindhoven, Willem de Kooning Academie Rotterdam, and workshops/lectures at various other art institutions.

When looking at my teaching, can I retrieve Pony ingredients? And how can I transfer my Pony knowledge? Although transferring is not the right word.



My main question to start with is: **What are the basic principles of Pink Pony Express and how can these be translated into an educational program?** Subquestions would be:

- > How does my design practice (foremost with collective Pink Pony Express) build and inform my pedagogical practice?
- > Which elements of my practice play a crucial role in education?
- > How to teach like a Pony?
- > Can I reveal my teaching approach the same way I approach a subject on location?

Somewhere in the meantime I read *Art, Disobedience and Ethics – The Adventure of Pedagogy* by Dennis Atkinson, in which he writes about a *pedagogy of disobedience*. Most of the things he writes about sound very familiar to me. Familiar to my practice – namely my work experience with designers collective Pink Pony Express.

I had never thought of myself as a disobedient designer, nor a disobedient educator. Since I (try to) live my life my way, it feels natural to me. But perhaps when looking at ‘my way’ of doing, from the perspective of an art academy and its curriculum, one might call this way different? Or disobedient? It is Dennis Atkinson that makes me look in the mirror.

Dennis Atkinson’s writings are not the only ones resonating with my design and my educational practice. Tim Ingold – amongst others – also plays an important role.

Whilst Atkinson writes about disobedience, Ingold (2017) writes about a poor pedagogy and weak education. Notions like disobedience, poor and weak trigger my thought, but I do wonder if I can find a less negative term? One that is more inviting instead of opposing to something?

### / research /

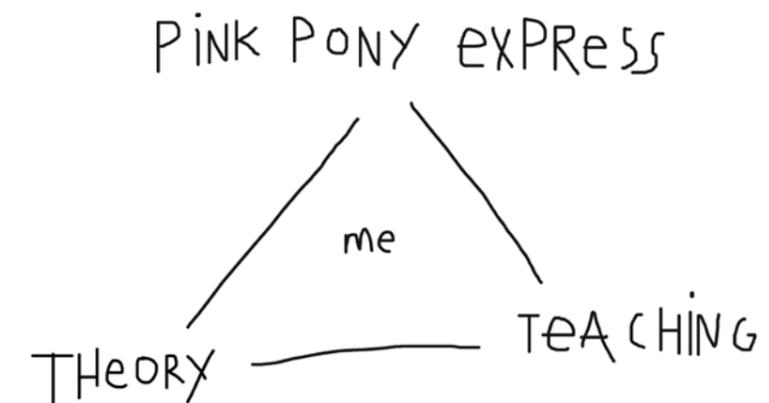
How will I do the research to find answers to my questions?

Whilst research lies at the core of all Pink Pony Express projects, and whilst we do research by making, I propose to stay close to my practice and to research through making. But what does ‘research through making’ mean? Or does ‘research through making’ sometimes means ‘research through doing’? Making and doing are both an active mode of being.

Perhaps making and doing are one side of the same coin, and on the other side one finds thinking, and reading and writing?

We cannot make the future, however, without also thinking it. What then is the relation between thinking and making? To this, the theorist and the craftsman would give different answers. It is not that the former only thinks and the latter only makes, but that the one makes through thinking and the other thinks through making. The theorist does his thinking in his head, and only then applies the forms of thought to the substance of the material world. The way of the craftsman, by contrast, is to allow knowledge to grow from the crucible of our practical and observational engagements with the beings and things around us. This is to practise what I would like to call an art of inquiry. (Ingold, 2013, p.6)

I am a maker. Which doesn’t mean that I don’t think. I do think I can only speak about something through making. Thoughts are always there, but are



– to me – very intangible, under the surface, and invisible. Whilst making (or doing), things become visible. Visible to me, but also to others. It is exactly this ‘making visible’ which makes it easier for me to relate to matter.

It was only until I made a booklet for my students (which you can read about in a later chapter) that I started understanding what I am looking for in my research. This booklet made me relate to matter in a strong way. To me it makes things visible more than words can explain. (Which I nevertheless will try to do.)

Not to leave unmentioned, I also make drawings. In which my thoughts take stage. To which side of the coin do these drawings belong? They might live in between making and thinking. The character that is often appearing in my drawings always has its eyes closed. It is wondering, thinking, questioning, contemplating, out loud.

Questions are creative tools for exploration that a learner may find relevant to her practice. Relevant questions try to actualise the power of a learner’s practice, its particular concern or mattering for the learner. (Atkinson, 2018, p.225)

### **/ researched /**

Looking back, how did I do the research to find answers to my questions? Honestly I was walking circles trying to look back at my Pony practice. Where to begin, where to end? My research started without direction, and stayed without direction for quite a whilst. There are so many different Pony projects, so many pictures of our work in the archive, so many ways to talk about it. How did I find a way to talk about my practice? I looked up book after book after book, searched through many articles, but nothing that I found resonated.

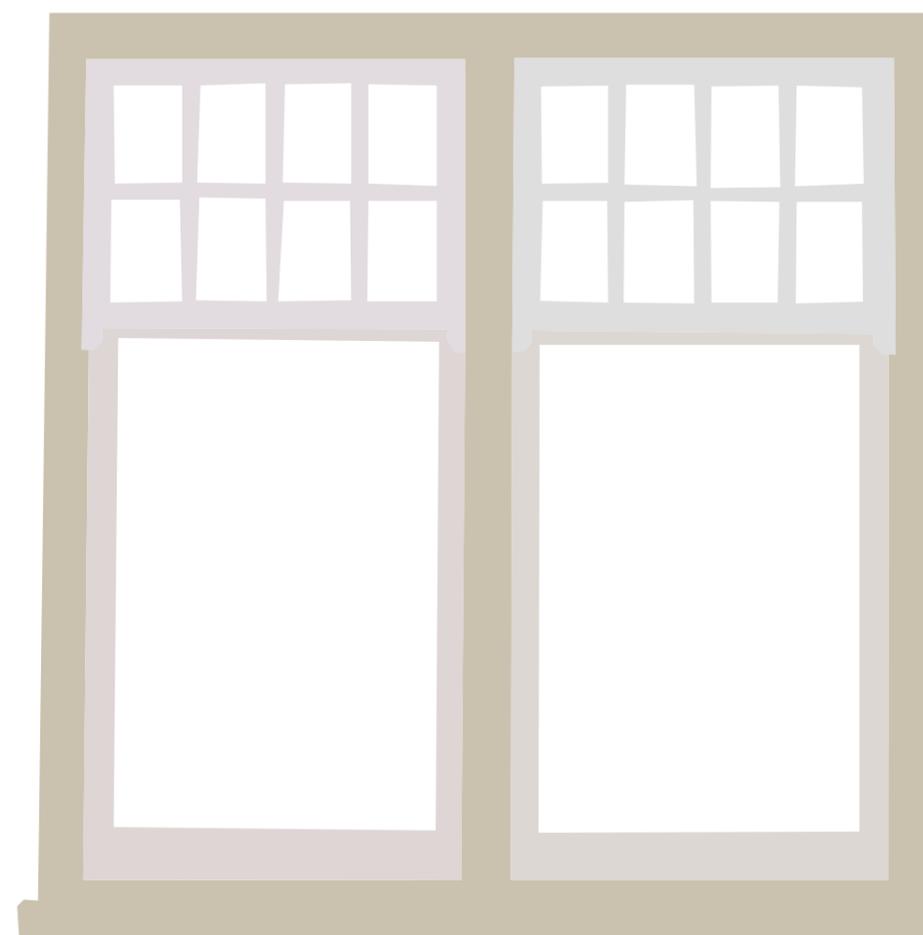
Until I stumbled upon an article by Dennis Atkinson in the book *On Not Knowing: How Artists Think*. His writing gave me a hint for something that mattered. Later, reading his latest book *Art, Disobedience and Ethics – The Adventure of Pedagogy* was a feast of recognition. Atkinson puts in words what Pink Pony Express puts in practice, words that I had never found myself. It felt like a match between thinker and maker. Atkinson’s writing/thinking opens up a more philosophical way of talking about my Pony practice. Pony practice as a philosophy : ) It feels as if my Pony practice can suddenly take root. Stand strong(er).

Whilst reading Atkinson my journey started – or better said: I took off. After reading came drawing. The reason that the illustrations are positioned on the right side of the spread is because they were the first thing that came into existence. The things that I am writing about evolved only after drawing (or making). The quote on page 12, by Ingold, about thinking and making rings a bell. I took off whilst reading Atkinson, whilst drawing I started grounding.

### **/ making /**

It is perhaps here that I should introduce another part of this thesis, which lives online. Since all the things that I have written in here actually started with a drawing or with something ‘made’. I wish to give these ‘things’ a (separate) stage  
—> [re-search.hotglue.me/](https://re-search.hotglue.me/)

NOTHING IS  
HAPPENING



Most of the things on the website – which presents a collection of things made during my studies – are somehow also integrated in this document. But I do believe they live different lives in this document and on the website. Perhaps one can look at this thesis as an exhibition catalogue. Of which the website is the exhibition? On show are drawings, animations, or movies, basically anything visual/made.

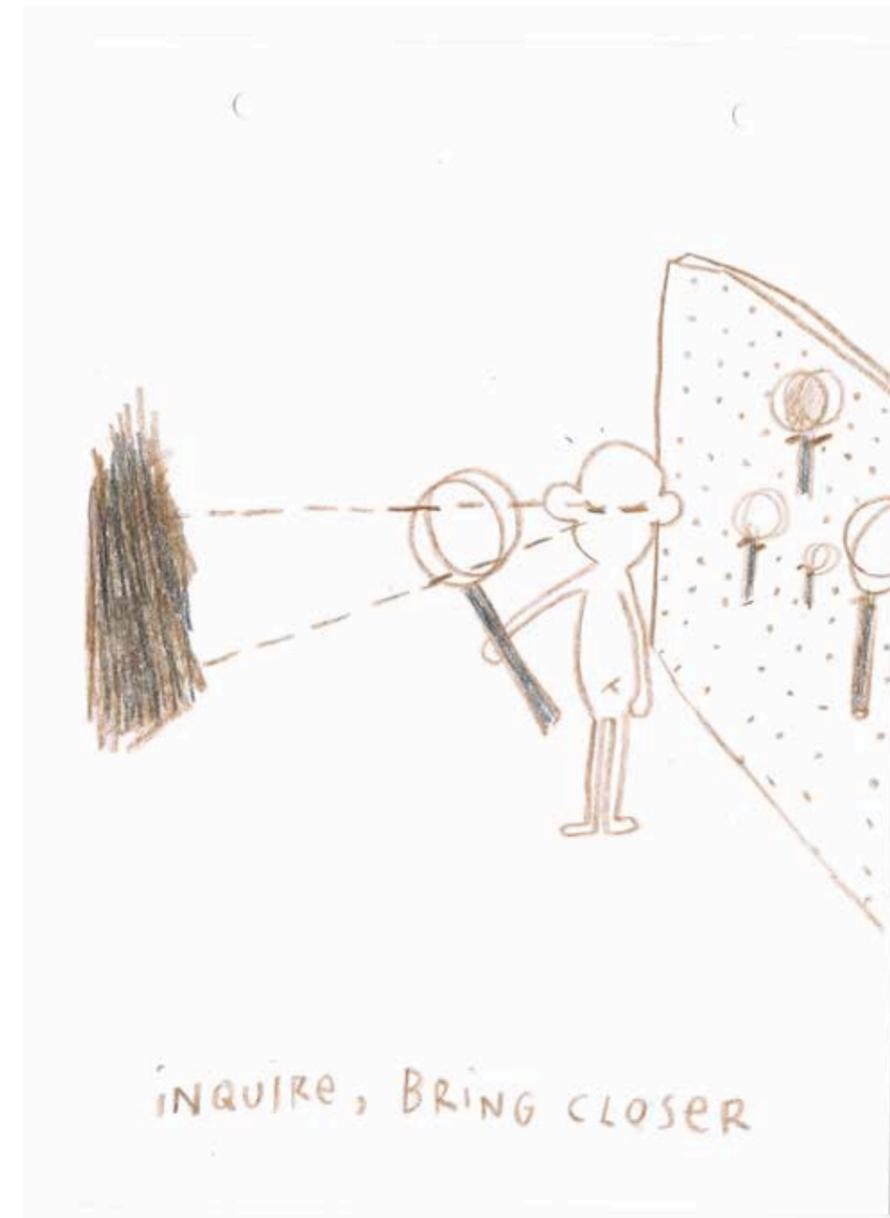
Adding to this, I have always kept in mind that my thesis should be readable both for people interested in art educational matters and likewise for (my) students on art academy. The website helps me talk to the student. In the meantime they are quite familiar with some of the drawings, which I use in my classes to talk about certain topics.

Lastly, the website shows me whilst studying, making, reflecting, thinking, but foremost: **MAKING** ❤️.

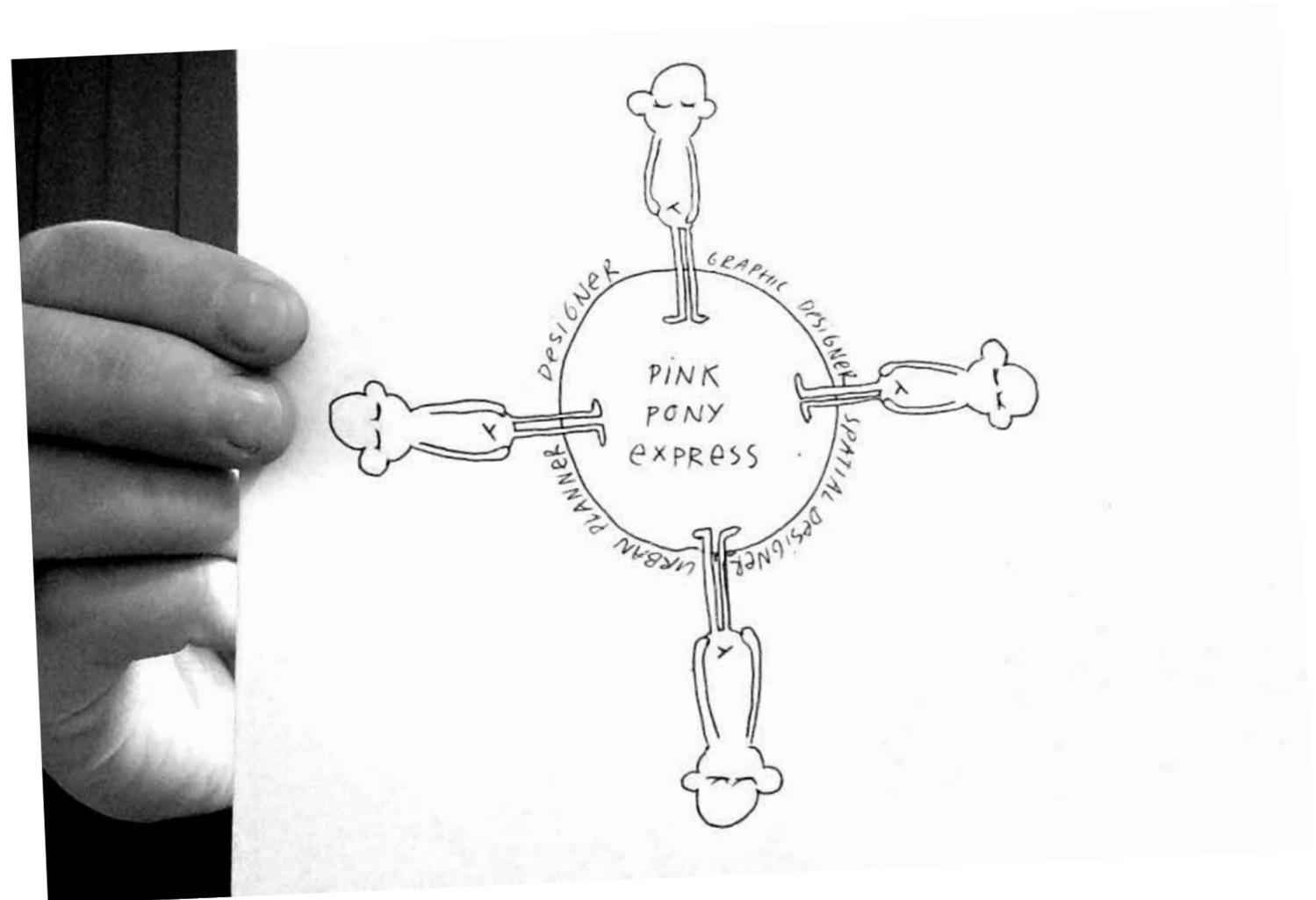
### / perspectives /

Another important element of my research is to find other voices. Other and different perspectives play an important role. Who am I to tell the story, to do the research, and to conclude? My story will be woven with voices of students but also with notions discussed from my reading.

Lastly, I can imagine that this document feels somehow a bit like a diary. I do try to keep things small, and personal, close to my personal perspective. When possible I include other perspectives. A reason for this is that I want to counteract generalisation, for which zooming-in is a great tool. Another reason is because I am interested in “ecologies of practice” (as apposed to “economies of performance” (Atkinson, 2018, p.17). In these times that we now call the Anthropocene, in which it is a fact that mankind has a negative footprint and is disturbing Mother Earth’s natural way, it is needed to look more inclusive at things. All is complex, but subjects, humans and non-humans are related to certain specific contexts and certain specific systems. In that way everything is situated. Looking at different perspectives helps oversee specific situations. Generalisation, and looking at things from a distance, forgets to take the specificity of things into account.



# *my design / pony* **practice** *(attitudes and intentions)*



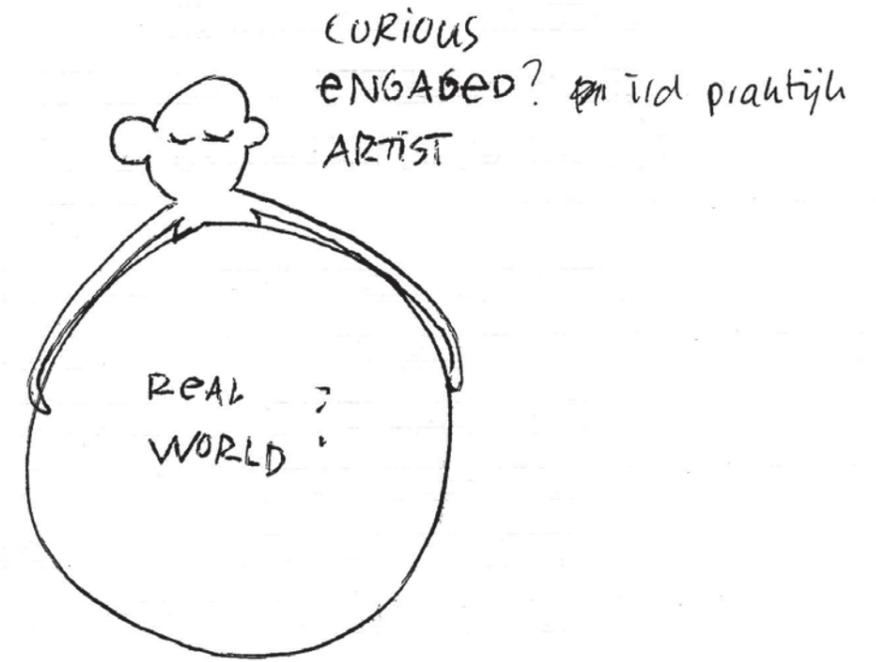
\*

The Ponies is a research and design collective. Their basic strategy is research through making, with every exploration taking material form. These forms occupy or are brought back to the places under study. What is returned may not be immediately recognizable to the members of those communities – their work thus gives back what was never possessed in the first place, with research becoming an occasion for generous and eccentric exchange. (Herscher, 2012, p.112)

Authentic  
 RELEVANT connection  
ENGAGEMENT Embedded engrained ingesloten  
 EARTHY  
 ENGAGED ART URGENT  
 connecting to a situation  
 situated realness



Dialogue  
 TALK  
 CONVERSATION  
THE OTHER THE UNKNOWN





(For Whitehead,) a subject does not exist prior to encounters in a world but rather emerges as a consequence of such encounters. (Atkinson, 2018, p.71)

(...) education which is neither child-centered nor subject-centered but thoroughly world-centered, that is, centred on our worldly existence, that is, our existence in, with and for the world. The task, in other words, is to engage with the world as a subject of action and responsibility and not as an object merely subjected to the world. (Biesta, 2012, p.94)

(...) art can – and in my view ought to be understood – as a thoroughly worldly phenomenon, a phenomenon in which precisely the difficult encounter of self and world can occur as an encounter in which the world appears as something different and other, as something that exists in itself rather than that it is just an object for us to master. Art, in this sense, can only be understood as confrontation (see Mäkikoskela, 2012). (Biesta, 2012, p.96)



These negotiations-in-practice continue along complex trajectories of becoming with: making-with, questioning-with, feeling-with, talking-with, seeing-with, guessing-with, risking-with and learning-with. It is a process of co-existing. (...) adventures of making-with. (Atkinson, 2018, p.225)

**WE FOUND OURSELVES RE-WRITING OUR BIO TEXT SO OFTEN, THAT WE WONDERED WHAT OTHERS WOULD WRITE ABOUT US, SO WE ASKED AROUND:**

*Pink Pony Express is a Dutch collective doing international projects in the field of **critical design**. They focus on **engaging and activating local communities**, by identifying and visualizing local problems and conflicts, and underlying (social, political, architectural, cultural, historical) causes and **relationships**. Their methods are: **embedded infiltration, research by design, collaborative intervention, performative communication**. Their style is deadpan (if not **absurdist**), pragmatic and **optimistic**. [Joris Landman, 2015]*

*'The basic strategy of the Ponies is 'research throughmaking', with **every exploration taking material form. These forms occupy, or are brought back to the places under study**. What is returned may not be immediately recognizable to the members of those communities; their work thus gives back what was never possessed in the first place.' [Herscher, 2012]*

*If there's something strange  
in your neighbourhood  
Who ya gonna call?  
PINK PONIES  
[Bas Jacobs, 2015]*

*[google translate]*

*Pink Pony Express works at the **interface between government and society**. Their work is **humorous**, light-hearted and unexpected, but does not shy away from statement. The Pink Ponies work **grass-roots**, grounded and inductive. PPE's work is not only a result, but above all **a method and process. Soft data** is molded into tangible, expressive images that often force you to **tilt the perspective**. [Arne van Huis, 2015]*

*Before we ponies know what we want to address we dig like anthropologists, hunt and gather like hunters and gatherers, chat like a local, ask questions like a child, do things like the situationists, and search like detectives. [Annemarie van den Berg]*

*Not knowing who or what exactly Pink Pony Express was or did, I agreed to host them in my Detroit home in 2010...it was their first international collaborative assignment and it took only a short time to realize they were completely **dedicated** to their purpose. They took to the streets, talking with residents and finding out how they feel about the city they live in now, compared to the past, and what has and is happening to it presently, and how it will affect their future. Since their time in Detroit, I have had the pleasure to accompany them in other assignments elsewhere and their **honest integrity** held true to the purpose of creating projects that reflect the honest sentiment of the people, the actual people, who inhabit the city they are investigating. The 'Ponies' are far from pretentious, instead, **they dig into the core of a city**, without hesitation, to find creative ways to bring the politics, demographics, historic, and economic issues of the city to a forefront and **make it accessible** in a way that **promotes understanding** and acceptance rather than prejudice and hate. The 'Ponies' inspire positive change and I believe they do what they do to **re-discover and re-inhabit self-worth** and the goodness we all possess to **re-claim** the place we call 'home' [Bridget Michael, 2015]*

*Pink Pony Express is an (artist)collective focusing on design, research and society. They schedule/profile/depict social issues. Through visualizing social issues in **public space/context**, the **perspective** on how these issues - or should we say problems - are perceived **is shifted/shifts**. 'The basic strategy of the Ponies is **'research through making'**. The powerful combination of artistic vision and scientific analysis are the tools that help shape strategies for the future of our society. They work in **close collaboration with experts** to shape our images. From biochemists, to imams, to meteorologists and politicians. Their images **redefine the world** as we knew it. They should be seen/used/ as blueprint for a **new relationship** between government and citizens. [Cecilia Hendrikx, 2015]*

/ undetermined /

How to unpack collective Pink Pony Express, its methods and its outcomes? Why do we place art/design in public space? What is our mission? What are the results? How do we fulfil our mission(s), are these singular, or multiple-fold? Is there a steady method or is all based on some improvisation? I remember the saying that ‘the fish will be the last to discover the water’. How then, will I discover our water?

Firstly, I will try to look back at my pony practice. How did it start? What were the main motivations? Where did I come from, and what were my intentions, or wishes?

The starting point of my investigation is the observation that I have never learned as much as whilst working with Pink Pony Express. I wonder why this is, and what causes this? Can I pinpoint some crucial elements, ingredients or methods? I’m not sure how to name these crucial things. Perhaps attitudes is the best word (for now).

Trying to pinpoint Pony practice into some kind of defined field I stumbled upon writings of the art historians Miwon Kwon and Claire Bishop. Whilst I can link some of the things they write about (e.g. social practice, working site-specific) to my experience with Pony practice, it is immediately clear that descriptions never fit 100%.

It soon becomes clear that projects that deal with ♥ site specific research and site specific making all have their own specificities.

♥  
site specific  
research  
&  
site specific  
making

(...) despite the effort of many artists, curators, critics, and historians to unify recent trends in public art as a coherent movement, there are numerous inconsistencies and contradictions in the field. (Kwon, 2002, p.7)  
(...), this task of imagining altogether new coordinates of art and site is an open-ended predicament. (Kwon, 2002, p.9)

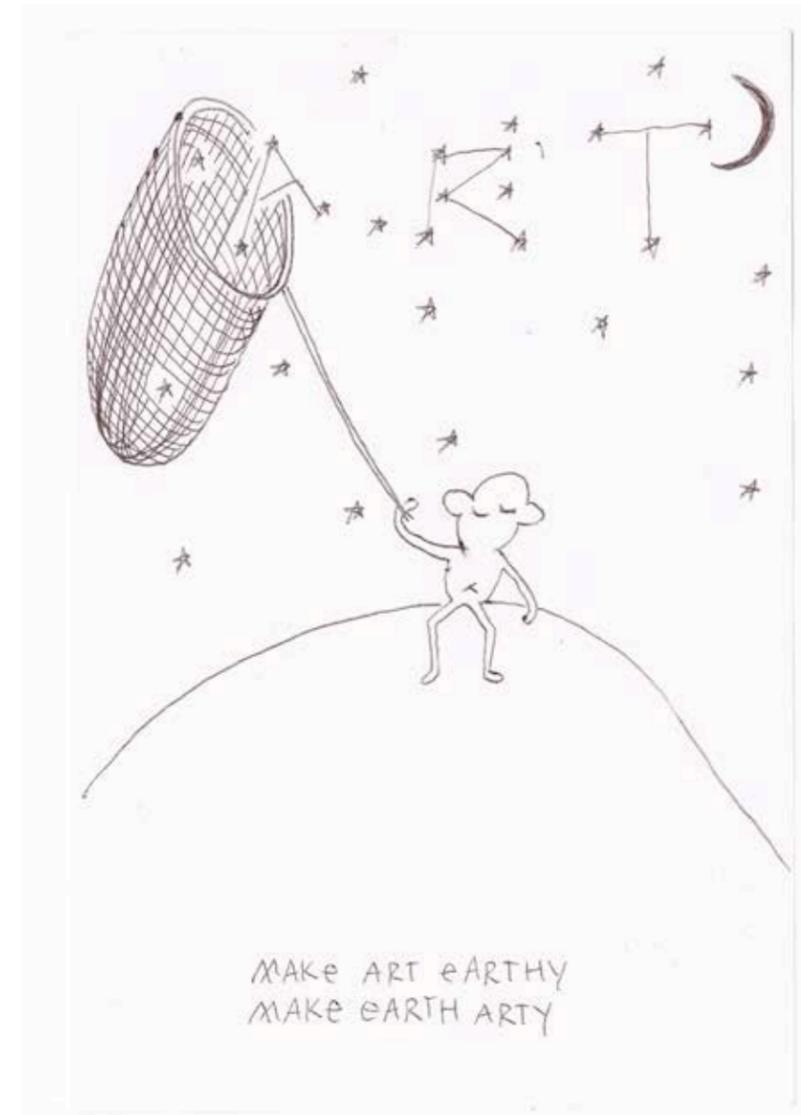
This expanded field of relational practices currently goes by a variety of names: “socially engaged art, community-based art, experimental communities, dialogic art, littoral art, participatory, interventionist, research-based, or collaborative art. (Bishop 2006, p.179)  
(...) context-specific, debate-specific, audience-specific, community-specific, project- based (Kwon, 2002, p.2)

Additionally of value is the writing of Pablo Helguera. Instead of social design he uses the terminology ‘socially engaged art(ist)’. When talking of pedagogy, he introduces the term ‘Transpedagogy’:

I define the word as the migration of the discipline and methods of education into art-making, resulting in a distinct medium where **the artwork is constituted simultaneously of a learning experience or process and a conceptual gesture** open to interpretation. (Helguera, 2013, p.3)

♥  
other  
perspectives

Pink Pony Express works at the interface of research, design and society. Site specific research and site specific making are at the core of their projects, which means that meeting or involving other(s) – in one way or another – is very elementary. Including ♥ other voices in the process brings meaningful perspectives, and on top of that making things visual/visible gives them a stage.



All Artists are alike. They dream of doing something that’s more social, more collaborative, and more real than art. (Graham, n.d. as cited by Bishop, 2006)

♥  
**making  
visible**

Giving things a stage by ♥ making them visible seems like a steady end station of a project. It is designed, made visual, and placed in a certain relevant context. But to be honest, it never stops there. By making things visible perspectives are shifted, and the matter being exposed starts to live its own life. In a way, this is where it all starts. End results are in a way new beginnings. Of which you never know what beginnings these will be, and where they will lead. These new beginnings are beyond our control.

Ourselves, we have wondered: Are we social designers? Or activists? Or artists? (socially engaged ones?) Or situationists? Or futurists? Or journalists? Anthropologists?

I have a nagging sense that the people really doing anthropology, these days, are artists. (Not all artists, to be sure). (...) Art that is anthropological, in my terms, is characterised – as is anthropology – by generosity, open-endedness, comparison and criticality. It is inquisitive rather than interrogative, offering a line of questioning rather than demanding answers. (Ingold, 2017, p.65)

♥  
**research  
by  
making/doing**

Do we have multiple personalities? Before we ponies know what we want to address we dig like anthropologists, hunt and gather like hunters and gatherers, chit chat like a local, ask questions like a child, do things like the situationists, and search like detectives. The work of Pink Pony Express is not only outcome, but especially method and process. ♥ We research by making/doing.

We relate a lot to journalism, but instead of words we make images. With those images we put things in the spotlight. When asked about our methodology, or methods, again we wonder. Is there really nothing to be said about our way of working? I think our way of working might have more to do with attitudes and intentions than with a formal methodology. These come to light when I look back at my practice and try to tell the story of how Pink Pony came into existence. Nobody asked us to work together or to form a collective, we wished for this ourselves. Thinking out loud (whilst writing) about where our wishes came from, and about how these came to develop, certain attitudes and intentions drift to the surface.

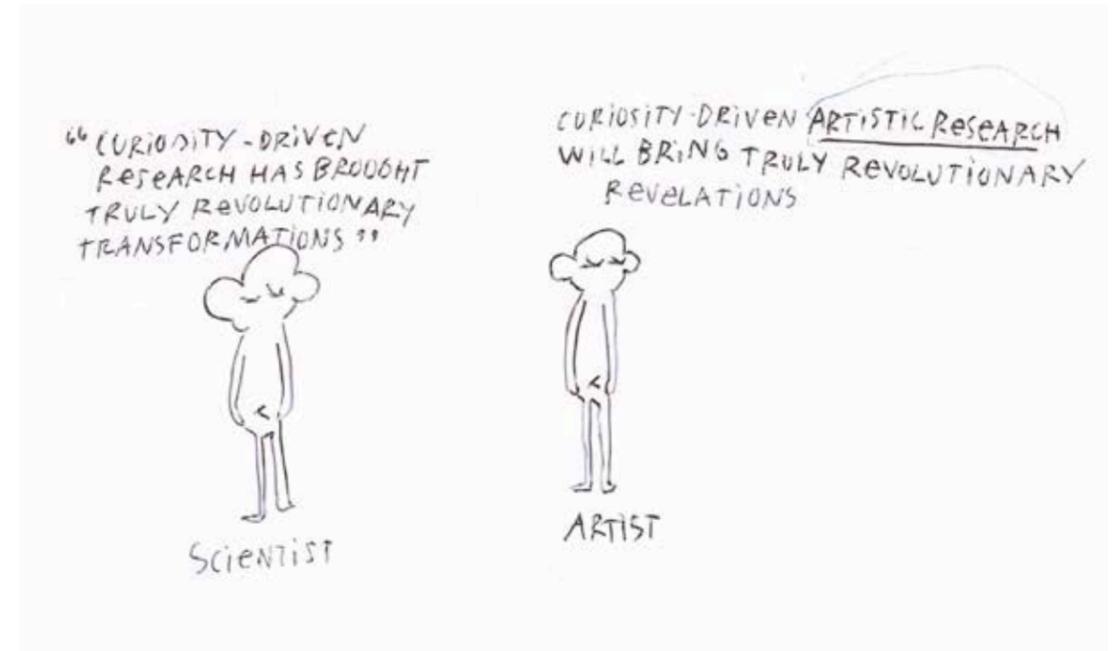
In the following discussion I will distil a collection of ingredients which will all give way to certain underlying notions. Spoiler: the following ingredients will be present: ♥ *site specific research and site specific making*; ♥ *visualise/make visible/give stage*; ♥ *research by making and doing*; ♥ *other perspectives*.

**/ disclaimer /**

I would like to note that I am writing things from my own perspective on matters of the Pony collective. Things will resonate with fellow Ponies, but I want to keep open to possibilities that they might have a different focus or a different hierarchy of things that matter to them. I want to state that both perspectives exist, and that my 'explanation' of Pony practice is not written collectively.

**/ looking back /**

It all started in 2009, whilst sharing a curiosity for the city of Detroit (USA). Friends went there and their stories made me and the other future Pony members want to go there too. We were still a loose gathering. I knew Cecilia, and Cecilia shared her studio space with Tara. Jessica again was a fellow



acquaintance of Cecilia. We were still unnamed back then, but were somehow pulled together by our shared fascination for Detroit.

Detroit, as I soon learned, is the biggest shrinking city on earth. In only 50 years it's population halved. Since the 1950's Detroit's population has fallen from a peak of roughly 1.8 million to an all time low of 900.000 (half that number) of inhabitants at this present day. After the "Big Three" of General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler moved out of town – 'to escape the auto-union wage requirements' ("Decline of Detroit", 2021), people were left with no jobs and no future. Houses became abandoned and slowly degraded to the famous ruins. The news tells a lot of negative stories about the city, like high crime rate, poverty, drug gangs, wild dogs walking around, and disappearing public transport.

Cecilia Hendrikx (NL, spatial designer), Jessica Hammarlund Bergmann (SE, urban planner), Tara Karpinski (USA, designer) and I were curious about how a city whose population shrank so fast would look and feel like, but foremost we were curious what positive things would evolve in a city exposed with only negative news. Could one find positive developments? What if one would look at the city from up close and in a positive way. Replace the pessimist with the optimist? Could we find some positive stories to add to all the negative ones?

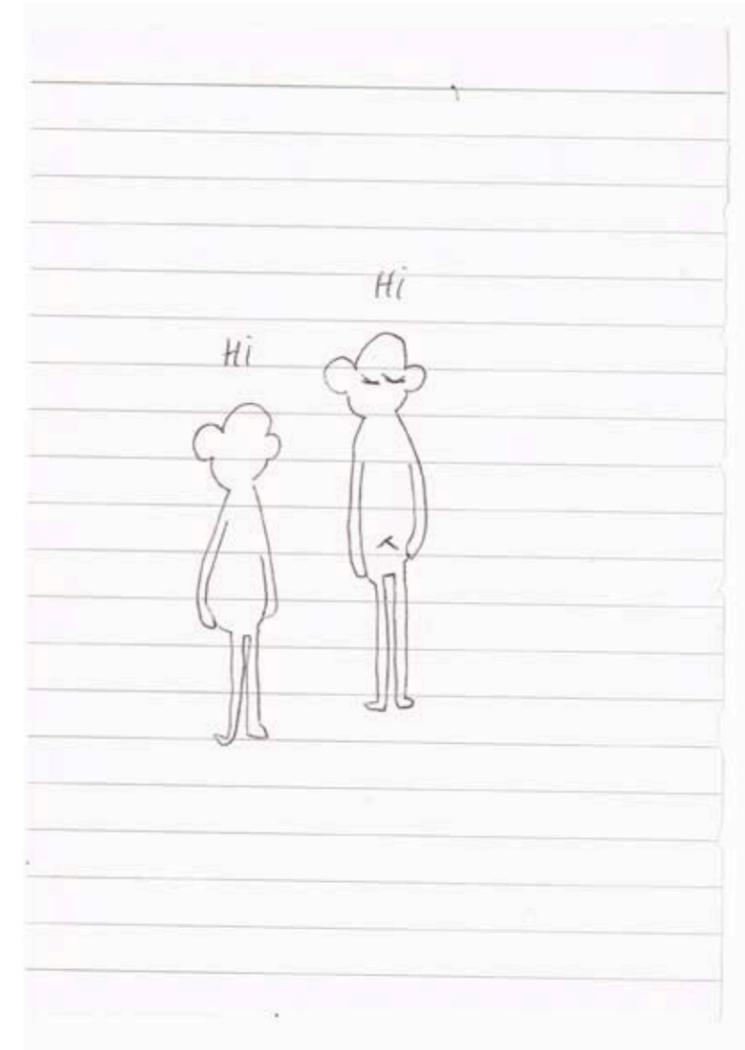
Until Pink Pony Express came into being, I was an independent graphic designer mainly designing books for the creative industry. The content would be design or art, the reader would be a designer or artist, as well as the authors. And there I was, also a designer, just shaping things. I was always designing somebody else's content.

Too often, the role of the designer is to clothe a set of messages they've had no participation in. Here is a book. You didn't write it. You don't change it except insofar as you present the information somebody else has generated. (Cooper cited Rawsthorn 2020, p.17)

Below the surface, for some time, I felt dissatisfied by operating in such a closed circle. What was my contribution to a bigger whole? Could I contribute to something outside of my bubble? Perhaps my years of study within the Industrial Design Engineering department (Technical University Delft), before I switched to studying graphic design at an art academy, contributed to wanting to step outside my bubble, and connect with other 'parties'. Within Industrial Design Engineering one would always design something for someone else, and therefore one had to at least do user research, interact with material experts as well as future possible end users. In that way assignments were always relational.

A learner builds a life, a life in relation with 'others'; it is a relational struggle. (Atkinson, 2018, p.59)

So, there we were, four Dutch designers, making a plan to go to Detroit. If we were not to make a book of our experience/research over there, what would we then do? **Our first (1) principle was born. We would make projects at the location of research, close to it's origin.** One can compare our projects a little with archaeological excavations where one can choose to leave what is discovered onsite, or one can transplant the findings to another place (like a museum). We explicitly choose to make projects onsite and not export things to someplace else. Projects would be installed onsite. Something visual, three dimensional, or performative. **Also (2) we would not work from a distance, but embed ourselves on location**



CONVERSATION  
DIALOGUE  
TALK  
THE OTHER THE UNKNOWN

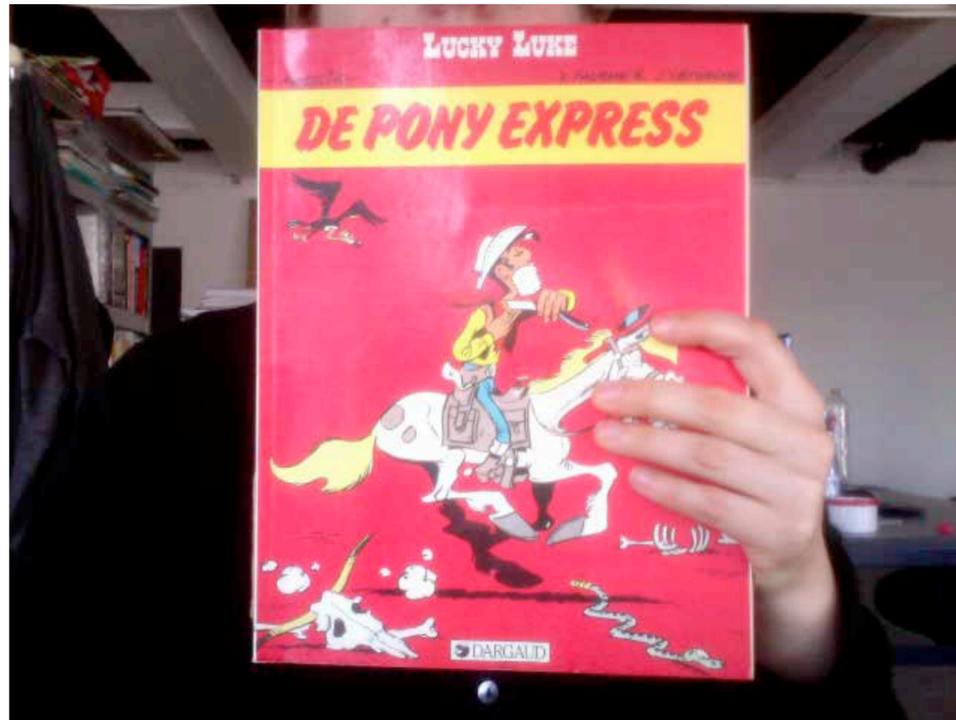
**for a longer period of time.** For example: in 2010 we lived and worked in Detroit for two months. A year later, in 2011, we lived and worked in Heerlen for about six weeks.

Our initial plan for Detroit was to work/walk along with the local post(wo)men. They would know all the local stories and know the neighbourhood. We wanted to analyse the disintegration of Detroit by examining the state of the Post.

### **/ postman as a guide /**

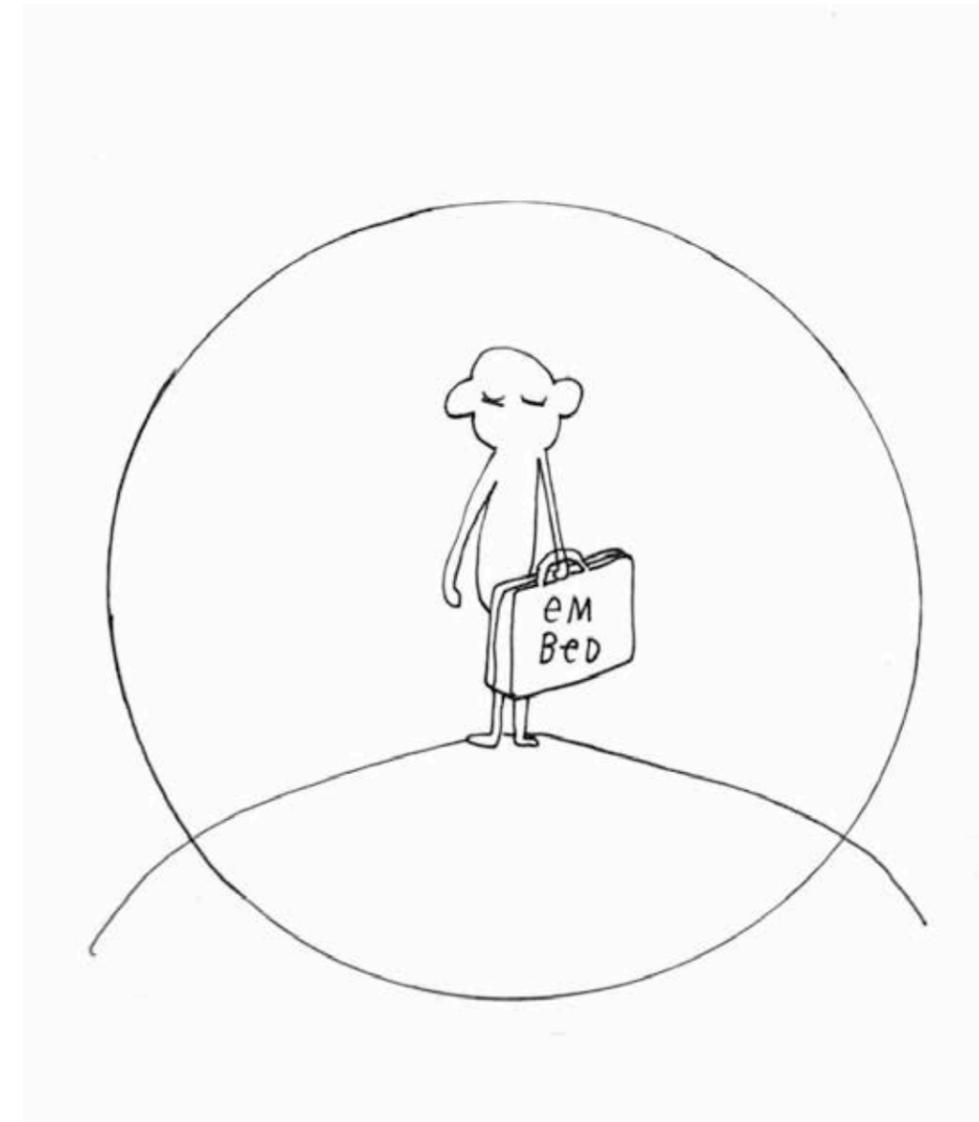
We choose the postal network as a basis and a starting point for our research. The postal network cuts through all of Detroit's neighbourhoods, regardless of social status, ethnicity, or location. It is the oldest communication network in the city and reaches all residents. The post(wo)men have information that we as newcomers do not have; (s)he is the local guide and just like the mail (s)he goes everywhere. We planned to join the post(wo)men, walking their routes, looking for stories and places where small-scale initiatives flourish.

### **/ Pink Pony Express /**



The Pony Express was the first postal service to connect the East and West of the USA. Our name Pink Pony Express is inspired by the idea that with little means (just a horse and a rider) one can achieve great things.

The Pony Express was a mail service delivering messages, newspapers, and mail using relays of horse-mounted riders that operated from April 3, 1860, to October 26, 1861, between Missouri and California in the United States of America. During its 18 months of operation, it reduced the time for messages to travel between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts to about 10 days. Many people used the Pony Express as a communication link. It also encouraged catalogs to be created, allowing people to buy goods and have them brought by horse to the customers.[1] It became the West's most direct means of east-west communication before the transcontinental telegraph was established and was vital for tying the new U.S. state of California with the rest of the United States. ("Pony Express", 2021)



### / soft data /

Our focus is on soft data. To explain the difference between hard and soft data: Hard Data are traditional measurements displayed in statistics/graphs. Such graphs are often made to reveal (urban) developments. Numerous statistics have been made about Detroit in recent years; about unemployment, crime, vacancy and much more. Whilst these are of value to the analysis of the city, we believe that with using hard data – such as graphs – important aspects and nuances are left out of consideration. For soft data it is important to zoom-in, to talk to people, to hear and see from close what is happening. And most importantly one has to have time to ‘find’ soft data. Soft data also counteract generalisation and help stay close to a specific context. (One can also name these soft and hard data qualitative and quantitative data.)

### / relate /

Our initial wish to work together with the postal service failed. They certainly had no time for us. They got paid by the amount of addresses they deliver post to. Since houses fell off the grid, their routes became longer and longer. They had to speed up their pace, and involving us would slow them down. Our plan to work/walk together with the post(wo)men failed. They had no time.

The impact of being in a deserted city, with so many contrasts was quite confronting. Would we be able to create change? Help the city? What the hell were we doing here? Four white Dutch designers visiting a poor, corrupt, mostly black city, supported with money from Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture (Fonds BKVB). Not to left unmentioned: there were four other Dutch designers assemblies in Detroit at the same time, on Dutch subsidy money.

During the summer of 2010, it felt like the first time Detroit was really changing, rapidly. For me, that was the linchpin summer. All kinds of people from all over the world were visiting, which was somewhat of a double edged sword. On one hand, when we couldn't go visit the world, the world came to us. I was able to meet people and make friends from all over the world because people were coming to Detroit. This was absolutely and unequivocally invaluable. At the same time it was a bit uncomfortable, because at the time, most of the folks I knew in Detroit didn't have the means of traveling elsewhere, so there was an inherent power imbalance. (Philp, 2021).

We had our very first crisis. What the hell on earth could we do here? What the hell was our plan? Our intentions to keep things small, and focus on soft data soon disappeared to the background. Things in Detroit felt tough. The city looked ruined and abandoned. I felt strange being there, perhaps I even felt guilty. I felt pressure to do something that would justify our visit.

The solution was to zoom in, instead of zoom out. What would happen if we would try to take things very personal. To follow our own fascinations. Instead of zooming out, we decided all we would do was zoom in. Make things smaller, as little and as tangible as possible. Perhaps I can also say, make things softer. As we intended to look for soft data, we ourselves also had to soften to encounter these soft data. Instead of wanting to create change we asked ourselves what we were fascinated by. Which questions did we have? What local phenomena caught our attention? What did we want to investigate?



♥ the black eyed peas - where is the love

(...)

**What's wrong with the world, Mama?  
People livin' like they ain't got no mamas  
I think the whole world's addicted to the drama  
Only attracted to things that'll bring you trauma**

(...)

**I feel the weight of the world on my shoulder  
As I'm gettin' older, y'all people gets colder  
Most of us only care about money-makin'  
Selfishness got us followin' the wrong direction**

**Wrong information always shown by the media  
Negative images is the main criteria  
Infecting the young minds faster than bacteria  
Kids wanna act like what they see in the cinema**

**Yo, whatever happened to the values of humanity? (Yeah)  
Whatever happened to the fairness and equality?(Yeah)  
Instead of spreading love, we spreading animosity (Yeah)  
Lack of understanding leading us away from unity**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WpYeekQkAdc>

For example [1]: How come there are so many churches in a city so abandoned? Almost every street had some sort of version of a church. Or another example [2]: how come that the street where we ended up staying was so social cohesive? In contrast to other streets – with many empty lots or abandoned houses. To answer these questions (respectively) we would [1] organise a barbecue to meet our neighbours, and ask them about the social cohesiveness. And [2] we would join church services on Sundays. Each Sunday another church, in our neighbourhood.

We would connect to local situations without knowing where this would lead us, or what exactly our intention was. But we would be interested in hearing the(ir) stories, and be honestly curious.

We are curious because we care. We care about the earth and all its inhabitants, human and non-human. We care about the past, because it helps us to better know ourselves and where we have come from. We care about the future because when we are gone we want to leave behind a world that is habitable for the generations that come after us. In short, curiosity and care are two sides of the same coin. That coin is truth. Research then, is the pursuit of truth through the practices of curiosity and care. (Ingold, 2017, p.71–72)

Not to leave unmentioned, our personal fascinations or questions were often cranked by something visual, something we would stumble upon whilst staying and moving around in Detroit.

**/ site-specific-research and site-specific-making /**

When in dialogue with others it is hard to stay away from wanting to solve problems, or wanting to solve a situation. Wanting to improve things can easily be lurking. To try to stay away from this attitude, it helped to ask ourselves, what fascinates us? What exactly do we find interesting? And how can we uncover this? Whilst looking back at our projects, the things that often fascinated us were things under the radar, invisible and not on the surface, and things that dealt with some sort of friction. This can be friction between citizen and government, between politics and nature. Or it can be a contrast, like the social cohesive street in the midst of an abandoned neighbourhood.

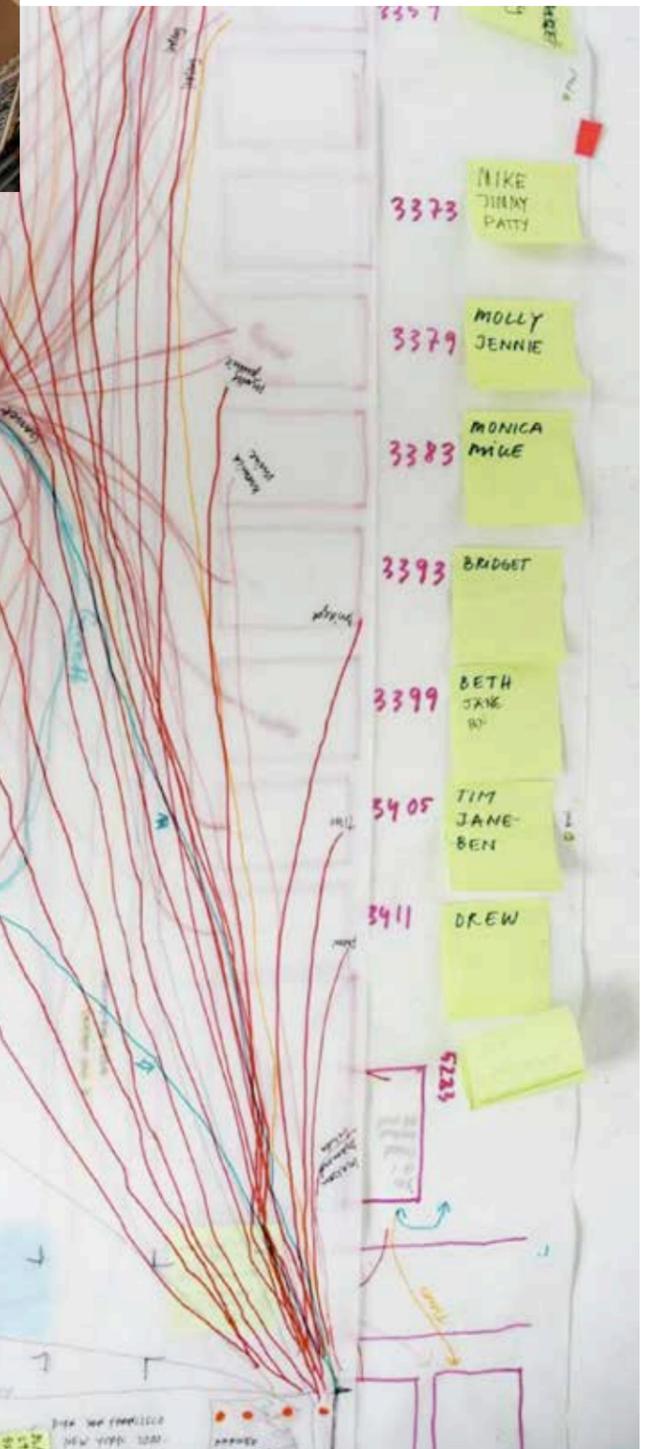
Maps that inhabitants (of the street where we stayed) drew at the barbecue resulted in more information about the social cohesion. Who came to live in this street first? Who came second? Who owns land? Who invited whom to also buy a house in this street? Each question was answered with a certain colour code.

It would be normal to take these diagrams home, and build a fancy model or info-graphic of it, and then publish these in a book or exhibit them in some art institute. Instead we decided to draw this diagram on the street where it originated. We bought kilometres of yarn, and made a 1:1 installation in the street. Revealing something in the context of where it relates. This became one of our main products. When talking about making things public, or visible, this in a way points to a final stage of a project.

But revealing/showing something in public space, often leads to a dialogue, which opens up new perspectives, and creates new encounters. Something unintended always happens. When you work in public space, and when you make something onsite, the final product is never the end of a story. It often leads to new beginnings.



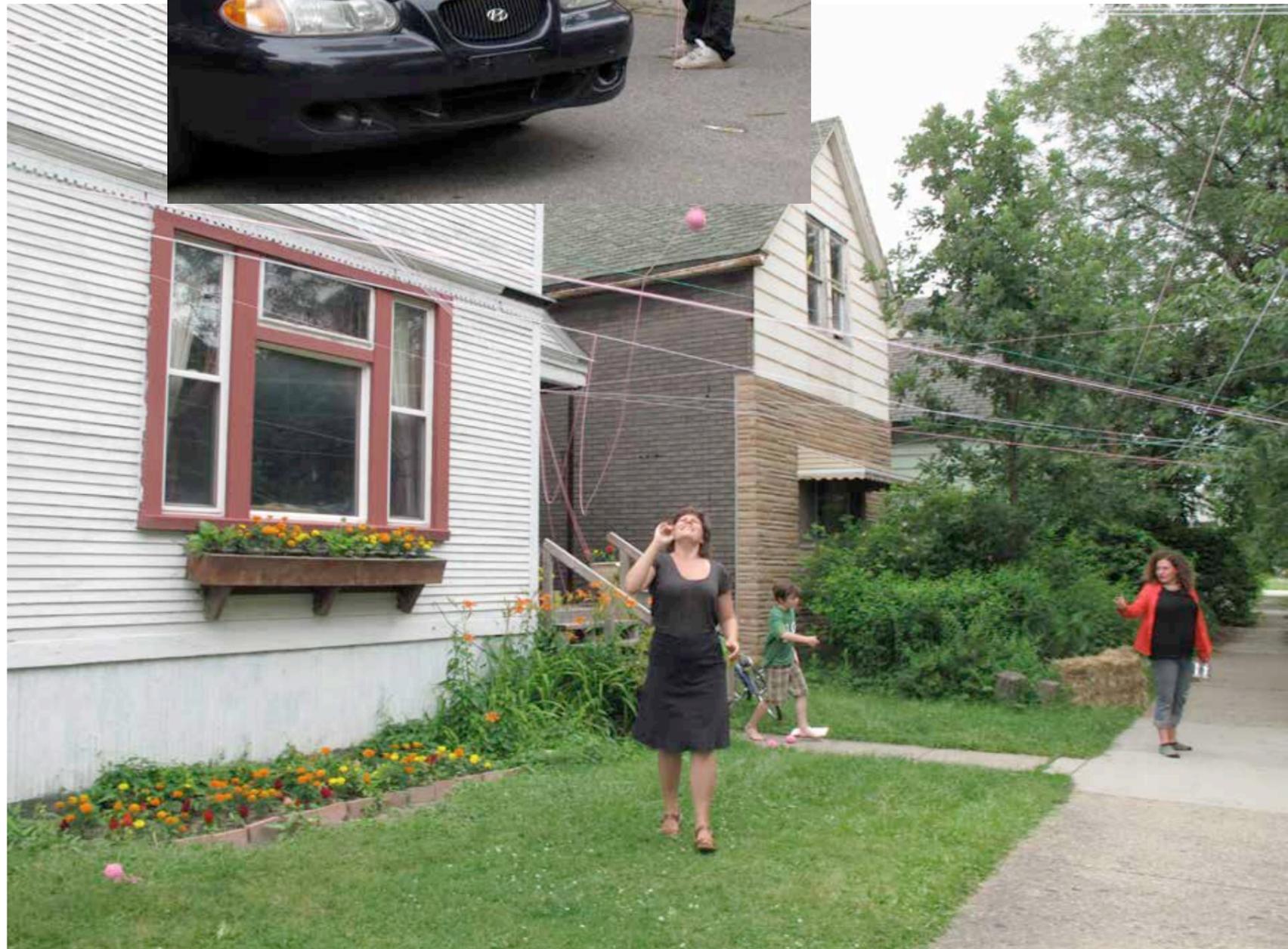
**detroit 2010**  
barbeque and  
mapping



**detroit 2010**  
maps overlay



**detroit 2010**  
mapping (drawing)  
in public space instead  
of on paper



## / to know the land you have to walk the land /

The Moriori, an ancient Polynesian tribe have a saying To know the land, you have to walk the land. In Detroit, we ran every other morning. Running had no other intentions than just running, to keep the body (and mind) fit. Logically we would get to know the neighbourhood a little better. But unintentionally we made quite an appearance – four white ladies jogging in a black neighbourhood.

Most houses in Detroit have a porch on which people like to hang out. People would be smoking a cigarette or standing on their porch in pyjama's waking up and sniffing some fresh air. They saluted us, and said things at us like:

“Don't stop running now”  
“Church let out early this morning”  
“I am running with you naked”  
“Are you lost?”  
“Hey ladies you better be careful”

We learned that our appearance in public space gave reason for people to react. Positioning ourselves in public space (here appearance and performance lay very close) made it easier for the other to open up, and for unexpected things to happen.

Whilst residing on Curaçao – a constituent country within the Netherlands, we decided to ‘walk around’ with cardboard models of Caribbean houses on our head. Inspired by Architects that were dressed like their favourite buildings at the Beaux Arts Ball 1931 (that took place in New York). We were researching the representation of The Kingdom of the Netherlands in Madurodam, a Dutch miniature park representing the Netherlands in small detail. Although this park shows The Netherlands in miniature, the Caribbean parts of our kingdom are left out.

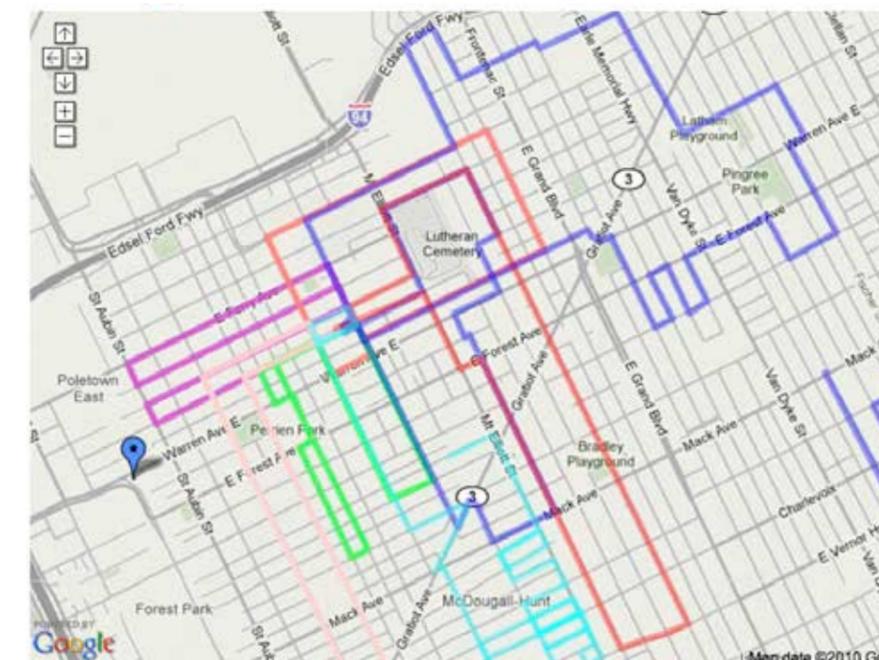
Of course we wore these models on our head intentionally. To make our project (and us) visible. We combined walking the land with a situationistic attitude. People on the streets of Curaçao approached us by saying they recognized the types of houses and that they reminded them of typical Caribbean architecture. In getting to know a neighbourhood and its people living there, we try to not force a conversation, or attack strangers with our questions. We try to find a way in which conversations start more indirectly or organically. You never know is going to happen, and therefore these appearances are like a little adventure. Whenever we went somewhere we tried to wear the cardboard models on our head. Perhaps those heads, or our way of wearing them can be looked at as a conversation piece. A starter. Soon people on the island would get to know us, since they had seen us walking around with these hats.

(...) works of art, develop situations for the expression of multiple subject positions, and it is through these kinds of exchanges that the possibility for change is enacted, with careful attention paid to the aesthetic potential of the communicative act. Above all, these projects come to function as critical sites of debate and contestation, a form of productive interaction that invariably metabolizes the different viewpoints of those involved in order to produce other viewpoints to be mulled over and debated. Such processes are ultimately dialectical in nature, productive in their sustained oppositionality and interconnectedness. (Bridges, 2009, p.10–11)



**Heerlen 2011**  
sporting in  
public space

**Detroit 2010**  
running each other day



**/ outcomes /**

Outcomes of pony projects always differ. The carrier of the message differs from an installation in public space to a smart-phone app, a machine that turns bread into energy, a piece of jewellery worn by politicians in charge, a radio-documentary, or an event where children in the Dutch Caribbean propose buildings which represent their island the most.

Since what we find and what matters on location always differs, the outcomes of projects differ too. We move along to what we find. And we wonder how a subject is shown the best. A project is often presented in close relation to its context. Once transported to a different context, a project loses its message. It is also important to note that things do not always go as planned. And when working in public space, we Ponies never know what will happen upon realising a project. A whilst ago I tried to pinpoint the goals of Pony projects. What would we aim for, what would projects result in? If we are designers, what would be our end product? I made a list of means/methods and a list of (end) goals. And I realised that all (end) goals can also be seen as a mean.

(Deleuze and Guattari) A line of becoming has neither beginning or end, origin or destination, a line of becoming has only a middle. A becoming is always in the middle. (Atkinson, 2018, p.119)

*means / methods*

- ASK QUESTIONS
- COLLABORATION/INTER-DISCIPLINARY
- DIALOGUE CONTEXT
- ENCOUNTER WITH THE REAL
- ENGAGEMENT
- FUN
- LEARN
- MAKE RESEARCH
- OTHERS
- PERSPECTIVES

*goals / end product*

- CRITIQUE
- POETIC PROTEST
- POSE ALTERNATIVE
- PROTEST
- PROVOKE / CONFRONT
- PROVOKE DISCUSSION
- QUESTION
- REVEAL
- SHOW A PROCESS

I am, by profession, an anthropologist. And for me, anthropology is a generous, open-ended, comparative, and yet critical inquiry into the conditions and potentials of human life in the one world we all inhabit. Anthropology is *open-ended* because its aim is not to arrive at final solutions that would bring social life to a close but rather reveal the paths along which it can keep on going. (Ingold, 2017, p.58)  
 But the point of anthropology, as Dewey said of education, is not that it should end in final outcomes but that it should open up to experiences that themselves open to further experience, making possible a never-ending and always beginning process of growth and discovery. (Ibid., p.65)

For example: to reveal (or show) something can be seen as an end station of a project. Something is made visual. One can easily take a picture of it and use



**Curaçao 2015**  
wearing models on our heads



this picture later to show the project on a website or in a lecture. But, since our work is always site-specific and made/realised/shown on location (instead of in an office or studio or museum), it starts to lead its own life and always leads to something unexpected. Revealing something then also becomes a means.

the force of art challenging us to think. The force of art, or art's event, can be conceived therefore as a process with a potential for the individuation of new worlds or to see that other worlds might be possible. (Atkinson, 2017, p.141)

### / perspectives / the voice of the other /

Writing this chapter I realize more and more that this story is mainly told from my perspective only. With most things that I write down, I wonder what 'the other' would say about a Pony project. Since our work is mostly realized in public space, or in another relevant 'space' relating closely to the subject matter, it can be interesting to give stage to the voice of others. For example, what will the children from Statia say, or their teachers? Or how will Madurodam, or the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, who supported this project reflect on our work? Or what do residents of the street in Detroit – where we installed strings to their houses – say? Or Ricky and Ron, the bar owners in Heerlen, where we went regularly to socialise, spend after work hours and at the same time mingle with the locals. It would suit our vision to talk about Pony projects more inclusively, and therefore not only from our own perspective(s). This will be something worth exploring in the future.

### / ethical attitude /

Whilst working on location, we are always a visitor, and always come from outside. Who says that people living on location are happy to have us there? We did notice that it is in our advantage to work independently, and not be working for a local municipality, with its own agenda, for instance. We always explain why we are visiting, what our intentions are, and what we are looking for. We mostly look at positive, undervalued or invisible things. It is important to have an optimistic attitude and not to comment on things with a negative connotation. Reciprocity is an element to always take into account. By making (temporary) work (installations) in public space our work opens up dialogues by revealing something otherwise left unseen. We often add something to public space that was already there.

The basic strategy of the Ponies is 'research through making', with every exploration taking material form. These forms occupy, or are brought back to the places under study. What is returned may not be immediately recognizable to the members of those communities; their work thus gives back what was never possessed in the first place.' (Herscher, 2012, p.112)

### / independent / honest /

Pony projects are always self-initiated. We soon found out the importance of working independently, and for example not to be working for a municipality or another company with its own interests. It is important to act openly and without a hidden agenda. To relate openly to others is easier when you can be honest and open yourself. For example, in Detroit we explained that we were curious about the positive things that were to be found in a city in which the media exposes mainly negative stories.



♥ the beloved - in sweet harmony

Is it right or wrong  
 Try to find a place  
 We can all belong?  
 Be as one  
 Try to get on by  
 If we unify  
 We should really try  
 All this time  
 Spinning round and round  
 Made the same mistakes  
 That we've always found  
 Surely now  
 We could move along  
 Make a better world  
 No it can't be wrong

Let's come together  
 Right now  
 Oh yeah  
 In sweet harmony  
 Let's come together  
 Right now  
 Oh yeah  
 In sweet harmony  
 Let's come together  
 Right now

Oh yeah  
 In sweet harmony  
 Let's come together  
 Right now  
 Oh yeah

Time is running out  
 Let there be no doubt  
 We should sort things out  
 If we care  
 Like we say we do  
 Not just empty words  
 For a week or two  
 Make the world  
 Your priority  
**TRY TO LIVE YOUR LIFE  
 ECOLOGICALLY  
 PLAY A PART  
 IN A GREATER SCHEME  
 TRY TO LIVE THE DREAM  
 ON A WIDER SCENE**

Let's come together  
 Right now  
 Oh yeah  
 In sweet harmony

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AD9ZFcNX1-g>

## / talking about pony practice /

I have given many lectures about my Pony practice, and I always choose our earlier work to talk about. In the beginning, we were investigating ways to do site-specific-research and to site-specific-make, actively, experimentally, and open. We always stayed on location for several weeks full-time – working day and night. I would show what our intentions were, our fascinations, together with the outcomes, and furthermore, the happenings after the project on location had finished. I talked about trying things out, not knowing where things will go, and that a project does not have to be thought through in detail before you can decide to do it.

Real learning in the sense of experimentation has no prescriptive force, it is restless, disobedient and awaits subjects-yet-to-arrive, (Atkinson, 2018, p.60)

Also I discussed the difficulties, doubts, and tensions during the process. I like to make things small, when I talk about Pony projects. About trying things out.

(...) an alternative approach to knowledge, learning and teaching in art education, an approach that is more uncertain, less prescribed, grounded in the notions of the not-known and subjects-yet-to-come. (Atkinson, 2018, p.19)

Perhaps most of our work is about the process, the intentions, the difficulties, and the surprises. We tend to make a lot of photo's on location, which makes it easier to tell the story and to show all the steps of the process.

## / learning /

I was intrigued by a note that Frans-Willem Korsten made during one of his classes (1st year MEiA), namely that until the 18th century art and literature had predominantly pedagogical motivations. Suddenly I wondered, “do Pony projects have pedagogical motivations?”

I do think so. They somehow tell a story, reveal something that is often under the radar, or overlooked. And since they do this in a related context, projects can open up perspectives, or start a conversation.

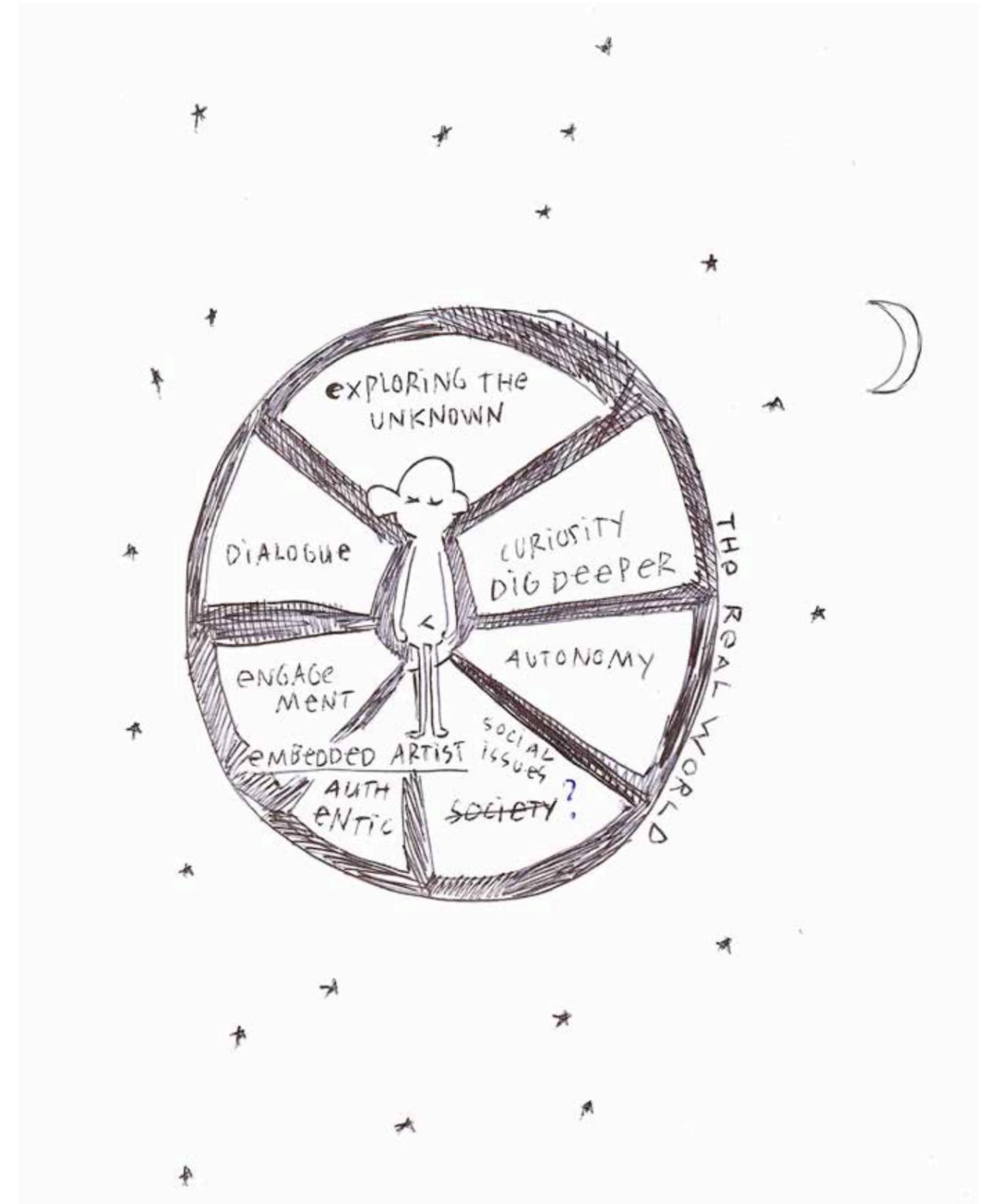
The force of art, as Paul Klee stated, does not reproduce the visible but makes visible, and this making visible is the pedagogical force of art; the composing of new possibilities, new ways of seeing, making, feeling and thinking. (Atkinson, 2018, p.61)

Also I think our projects have internal pedagogical motivations. During the process of researching and making I learn a lot myself, but since our work often happens in public space ‘the other’ also learns (or has the possibility to learn). Pony projects, collaboratively working on site-specific-research and site-specific-making are a strong foundation for learning myself.

Learning is an experimental process; it's priority is a kind of apprenticeship in learning how to learn rather than the acquisition of knowledge or skill. (Atkinson, 2018, p.130)

## looking at it / distillation

Unpacking my Pony practice helps me to look at our intentions. Working in specific contexts and outside of our designers bubble is certainly present. The



ingredients on the next page, which all have their own underlying notions, are all equally important. Pony projects are supported by specific attitudes and intentions, which are in themselves not the goal, but together they help relate one to a specific subject. Not-knowing and learning are crucial for this setting of relating.

*Site specific research and site specific making (these go hand in hand) (or: embed yourself)*

For site specificity the following notions are important:

- > mutuality
- > relevance / to matter
- > connection / contribution to a bigger whole
- > reciprocity (act with integrity, respectful and open)
- > to relate

*Other perspectives (play an important role)*

- > encounter(s)
- > soft data are crucial (such as personal stories, nuances, background information) and to be able to find these one has to be attentive, make things personal and zoom-in (instead of zoom out), look from real close
- > synthesis
- > dialogue /seeing/hearing
- > the other /inter-esse
- > we are curious because we care

*Visualise/make visible/give stage*

By making things visible they are given a stage. It is not about solving problems and creating solutions, but about showing things that are otherwise left unseen.

- > revealing (make something invisible visible)
- > a positive/optimistic attitude
- > new beginnings (open up possibilities instead of dead ends)

*(We don't know beforehand but we) Research by making/doing*

Important notions are:

- > adventure
- > not knowing (in which engage(ment), intrinsic motivation, inter-esse, an open attitude and honesty, play an important role)
- > sharing/not being in control of the process, not knowing the outcome
- > curiosity
- > investigating whilst explorations take material form
- > looking at it

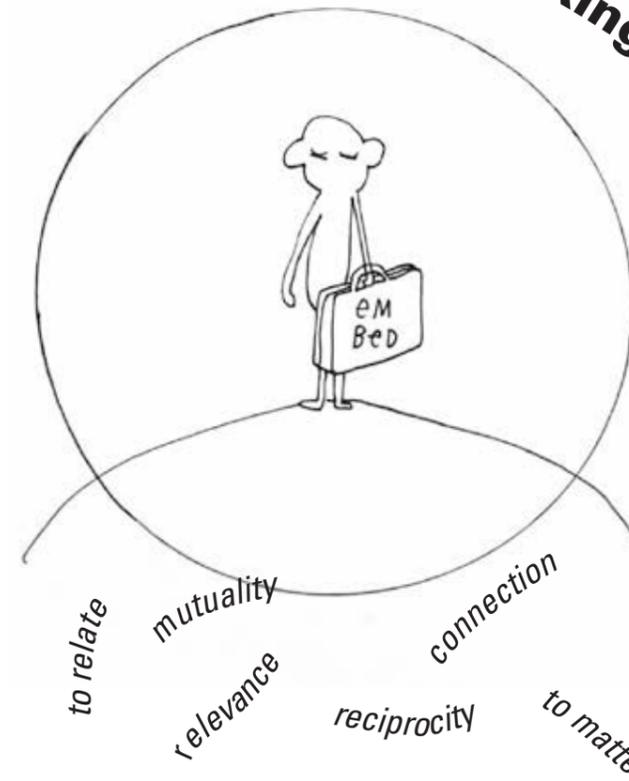
You try things out and see what happens. We need (...) not to accumulate more and more information about the world, but to better correspond with it. (Ingold, 2013, p.7)

- > take time

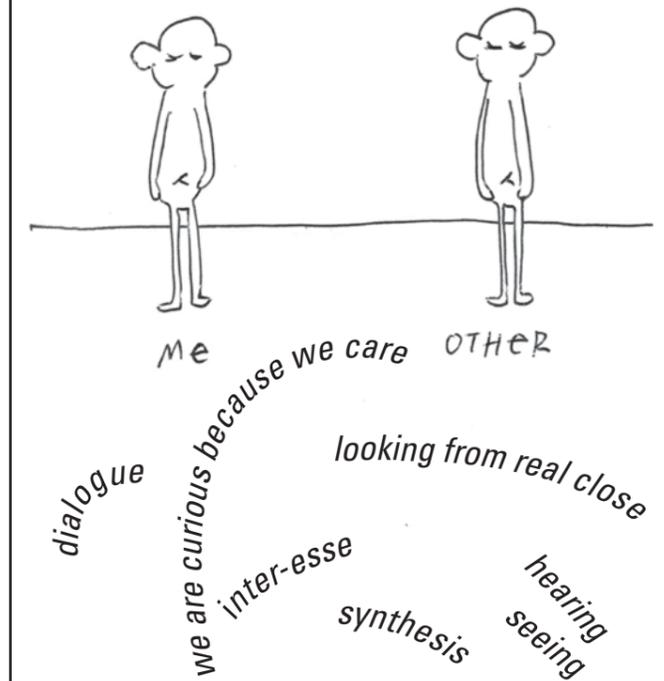
### / what's next /

This list of attitudes and intentions is long and almost everything connects to everything else. In the following chapters I want to look at my educational practice and further define these elements as being part of a pedagogy in the middle.

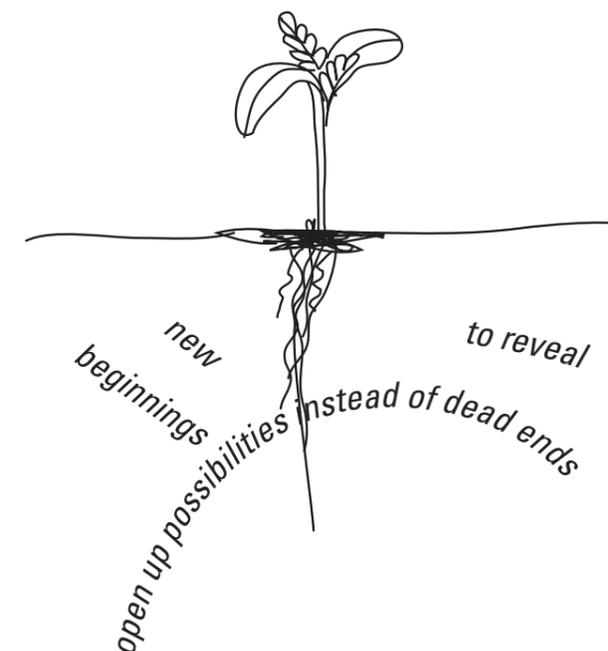
## site-specific-research & site-specific-making



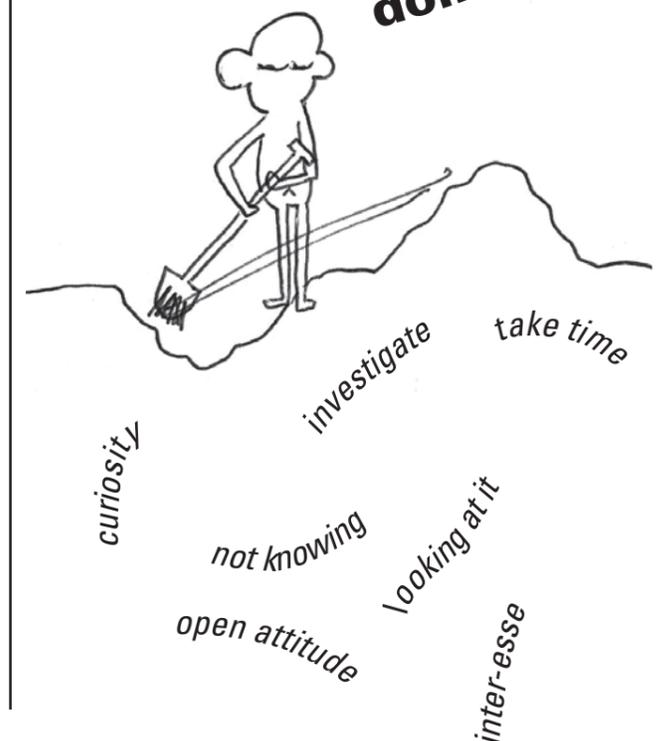
## other perspectives



## making visible giving stage

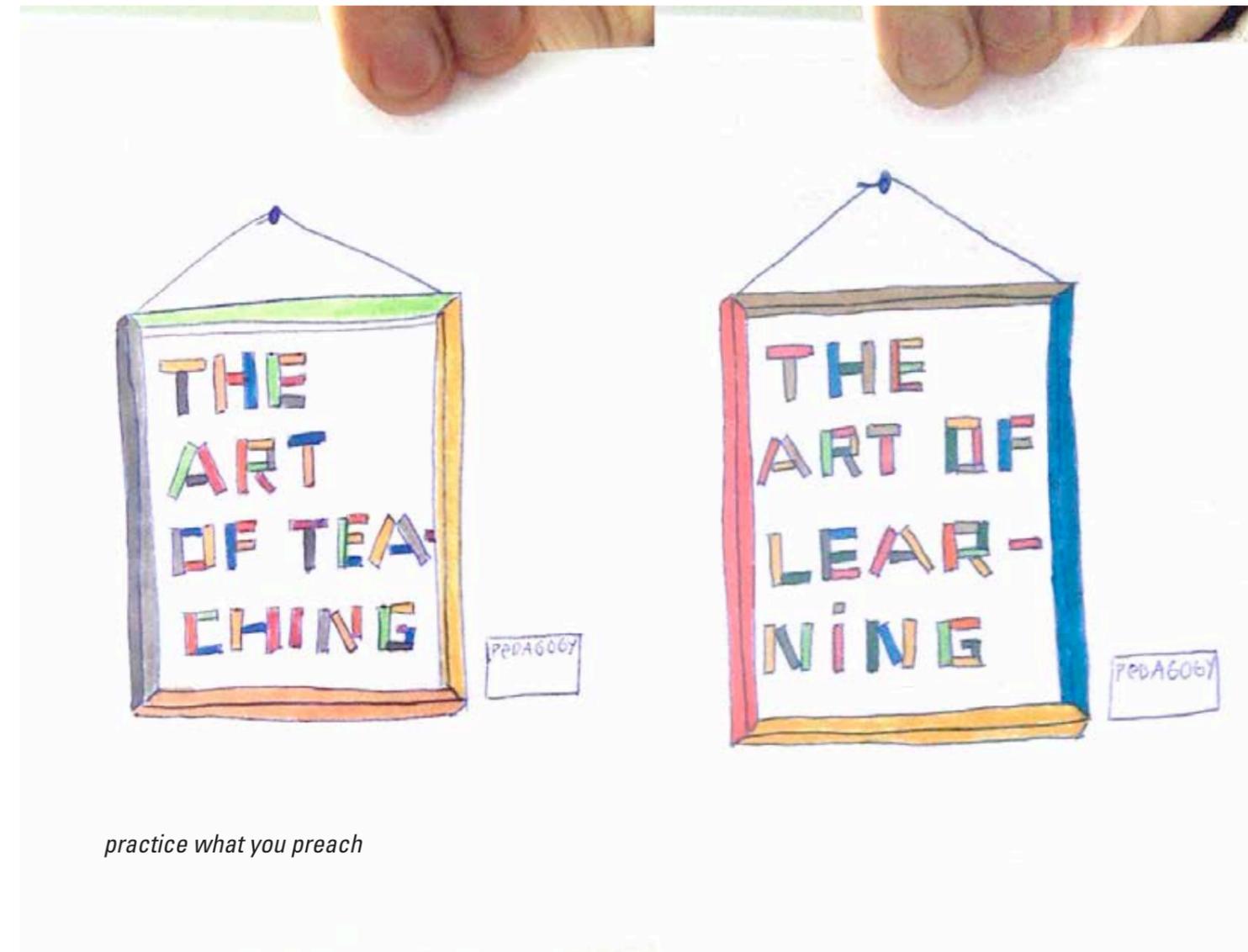


## research by doing





# *investigation on how to **teach** like a pony*



*practice what you preach*

*preach what you practice*

Pedagogic work involves a **joining with** learners in an on-going exploring and experimenting with what the possibilities and potentials of learning might be. (...) It seems important to ask, for whom is the practice of learning relevant, is it the learner, the teacher, the government.... these imply different agenda's. (Atkinson, 2018, p.61)

floor

19 november 2020

*I experienced your class as very different from any other class at the academy [Design Academy Eindhoven, ed.]. I think I can even say that for the first time I caught a glimpse of the way of working that really suited me:*

Safety:

*For the first time in the academy, I found a sense of security in your way of guiding and teaching. I had the feeling that the steps I took mattered and were watched and analyzed with loving attention.*

*This gave me the courage to experiment at my own pace. This is why I dared to make choices in my process that I did not dare to make before.*

Softer values:

*In your classes I felt that softer values were appreciated. For example, my project was about the connection between two women in a neighborhood, about their first meeting. In other classes the focus would become much more analytical: Anthropological or social / cultural. In your class, for the first time, I felt an encouragement to explore more intimate topics, which actually interested me more. This was, for example, because you showed the project: "Take care of yourself", a book in which an artist had her ex's farewell email read to 101 women.*

What it means to be a female artist / designer:

*I can't explain very well, but in your classes, for the first time, I had a sense that my femininity didn't have to be polished away, but rather encouraged.*

Autonomy:

*Looking back, I learned to work more autonomously during your lessons. Because of the trust that I experienced and because I felt I had the space to investigate what I really found important, I noticed that I could also develop a project in which I only investigated themes that I myself found important. I was less concerned with what the teacher or classmates or the outside world would think of my project.*

Life:

*I felt that in your classes there was more life to be found. Suddenly my own daily life was less distant from my life at the academy. As a result, I began to develop my own interests and my thoughts and could more freely explore themes that I found suitable myself. It broadened my scope of possibilities. I dared to be more vulnerable in my work and this took my work to the next level.*

*It was one of the first assignments where the unpredictability of the context was not seen as a disturbance, but as a gift / opportunity. By unpredictability of context I mean that the people with whom we entered into a dialogue responded to us and our work and that as students we had less control over the process and end result. Now that I am writing this down, I would find it interesting to do assignments that further reinforce this interdependence of the environment.*

## **/ personal note / introduction**

Looking back at my practice with Pink Pony Express I realise I have never learned as much as whilst I was working with this collective. And since learning is such an active ingredient of my practice, I am curious how/if this can be translated to others. Since 2011 I have been giving lectures and workshops and I have tutored within multiple art academies, always related to my pony experience.

At moments it is or was my dream to start a Pony School, or a Pony Academy. In short: A place where one learns to work within contexts, learns to connect to this context, and learns to realise projects in that same context. In reality: it is far more complicated than that.

I must admit I am a very curious type of person. Willing to learn. Willing to try all sorts of things, to find out all sorts of things. Being curious has to do with wanting to know more. Digging deeper. It is not about knowing, but it is about not-knowing, or even better: wanting to know more. Perhaps I found the ground for this curiosity to grow during my Pony Practice. Or a frame in which it was okay to ask yourself what you are looking for.

In conversation with Freire, American educator Myles Horton once remarked: “my expertise is in knowing NOT to be an expert.” He meant that his role in his work consisted not in telling his students what they didn’t know, but instead in helping them discover their own expertise and then decide for themselves what they needed to know. (Helguera, 2011, p.52)

I guess working together with the other pony members also has an aspect of learning within. I have always liked working in collaboration. I even think I work better in a collaboration. If I am stuck, or if I don’t know what to do, or doubt things, I can always lean on the other and discuss my thoughts. Or unexpected things happen, since you are not alone, and someone else also thinks and talks. Having the option to always have a dialogue is productive for me. I must admit, writing this thesis, is not my favorite setting. Working alone, behind my computer, searching for words and structure and a storyline in my head – it feels like a monologue.

## **/ educational project(s) /**

My educational project is multiplefold. It all started with a workshop I held (in 2019) at Artez in Arnhem, iMAE, a three days workshop with master students international Master Artist Educator (iMAE). My subjects were site-specific-research and site-specific-making, ingredients which are at the core of PPE projects. Later I got the opportunity to tutor graduate students at St. Joost School of Art & Design.

## **/ workshop /**

In May 2019 I held a threeday workshop with master students iMAE (international Master Artist Educator), to make them familiar with site-specific-research and site-specific-making. iMAE is a one year full-time Master based in Arnhem.

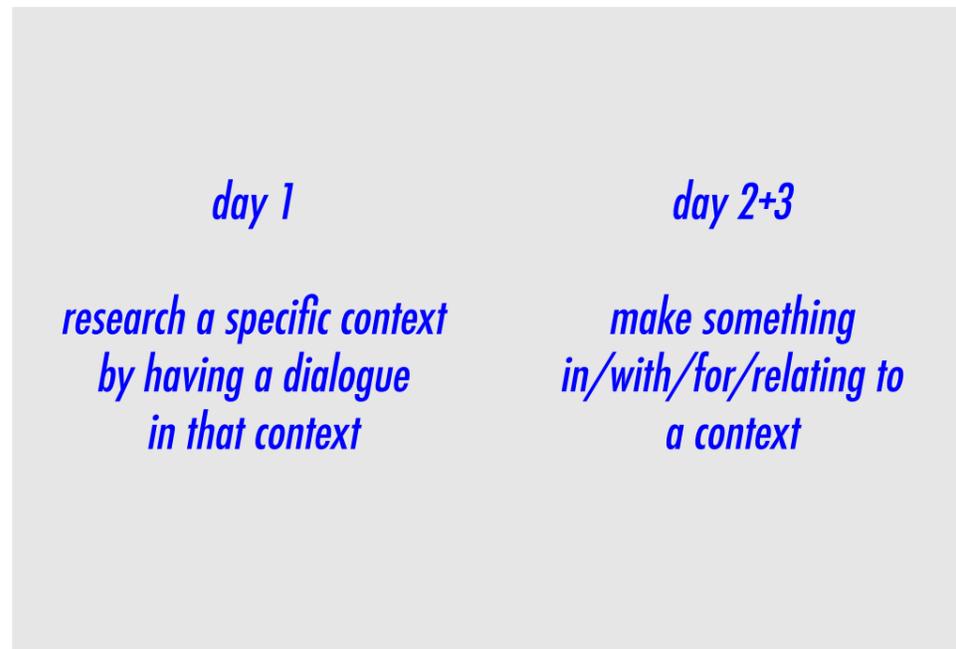
At iMAE we promote the concept of the artist educator as one identity. This simply means we see art as education and education as art. Therefore an iMAE graduate is not an art teacher or teacher of art, but an artist educator who uses their practice as a vehicle to enable agency and social change. [<https://www.artez.nl/en/course/artist-educator>]



Underlying themes of the workshop were having a dialogue with someone, encounter with the real, relateness and integrity.

(...) think of learning in terms of encounters, lines of becoming, and the task of building a life. (Atkinson, 2018, p.24)

The plan was to give this workshop in the beginning of the study year (November 2018), but it was rescheduled to later (May 2019). By then the students that attended the workshop would graduate from their master in July 2019.



The class of students existed out of 11 students, some coming from abroad alongside Dutch peers. On the first day I showed them some Pony projects in a short presentation, and they could introduce themselves and tell something about their graduation subject. Then the students were encouraged to do some experiments/research on location – in the neighborhood of the academy. I asked them to go out and have a dialogue with someone on some topic they were interested in themselves. Some did this alone, others in duo, or with the three of them. This was the starting point of the workshop, opening up a subject, and integrating having a conversation with someone, to find out more. But overall, to find out what that does to your perception of the subject. What input does the dialogue give you? Does it lead you to something you did not think of before? Or does it create a dead end. Or something in between. Foremost, I wanted them to realise that as soon as you start a conversation with reality, things take turns, and that those turns are relevant for your project, your ideas, and your process. Furthermore that working this way creates a first connection to a context ‘in the real world’.

Perhaps the idea of a fundamental encounter proposed by Deleuze as the trigger for thought can be considered through the intense experience of standing inside a waterfall in contrast to standing outside and observing it. (Atkinson, 2018, p.122)

We discussed all our findings in the afternoon. What surprised them? What did they find difficult? What direction did it give them? We discussed what the next step would be – for the next day.



*on the shelf at iMAE*

But something was lurking at the background. To me it felt like every student was already far ahead in their own project, and therefore not that motivated to try out new things – which was the setting of my workshop. Positive energy, and active curiosity and to be open are important for exploring new territories. If something is holding back nothing new will happen.

In *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Foucault reads the term education as educ-ere (not educare) meaning an outstretched hand, leading us toward an out-side, a hand supporting an encounter with uncertainty. But what constitutes this ‘outside’ in practices that form what we call art education and how, in pedagogic work, might we confront and come to know it? It seems here that both the learner, in being challenged by the unknown or the struggles of a learning encounter and the teacher, in facing the immediate outcomes of a learner’s practice (and not pre-judging these according to established forms of practice), are faced to some extent with uncertainty and the not-known. (Atkinson, 2020, p.109)

On the second day I noticed that students were occupied with other things, demotivated, the energy of the group was somehow draining. I addressed this at the end of the day and asked each of the students what they wished for. I also explained to them that I am not a type of teacher that wants to roll out my programme no matter what. I was interested in their opinion, but I must say I was also frustrated and insecure because things were not working smoothly.

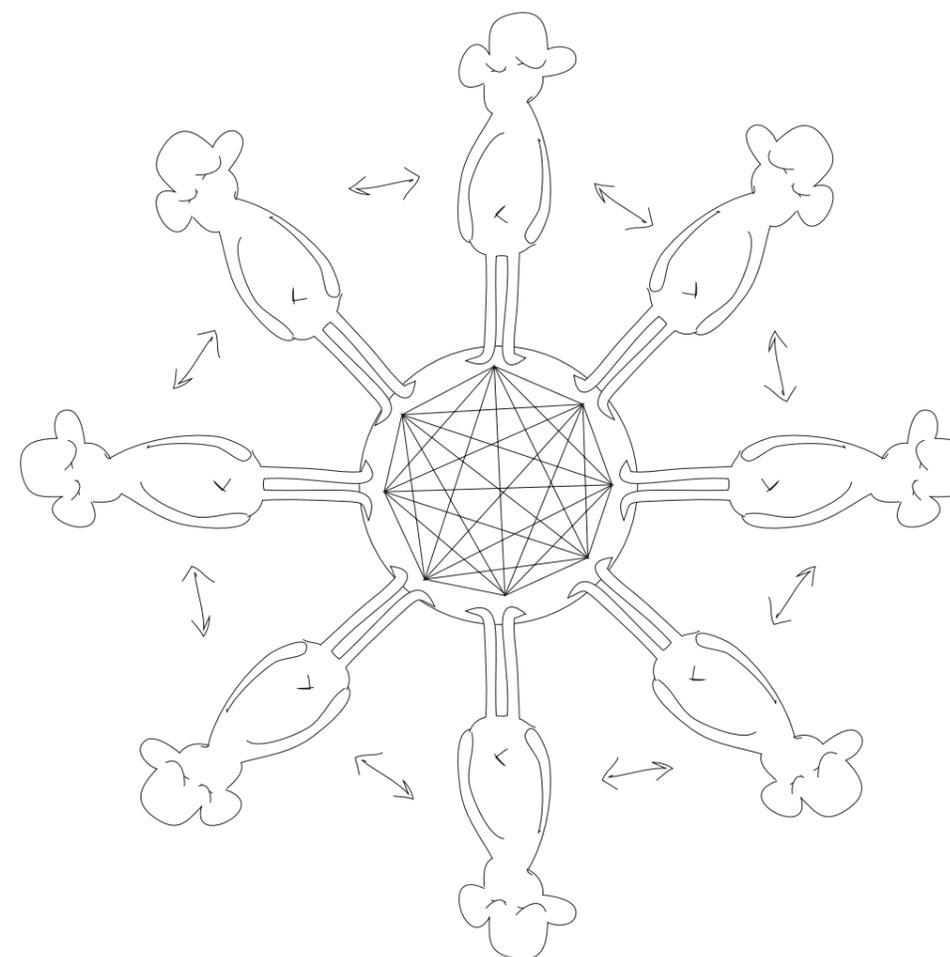
My workshop was about connecting yourself to a tangible context through dialogue and making in this context, which can be anything, anywhere. I gave the students the option to connect their graduation topic through my workshop, but since my workshop is also about openly exploring, looking at what will happen, making little steps and to follow the steps as traces to somewhere unknown I do think some students had difficulties with this “openness”. Which I can understand – two months ahead of finishing the course.

There were mainly two wishes: two students wanted to continue my assignment, most of them wanted to zoom in on their final projects.

Whilst looking at this workshop I find a relation to my Pony practice. We always make a plan what to do when we go to live and work on a new location. But when we arrive, we always have to change plans. Since things seem different from a distance than from within. In that way one has to be open to what the context brings when you look real close. And to be open to not wanting to stick to your plan from beginning to end. In a way – when I meet students – they are my context, instead of a physical location. And I should be open to change my plan when necessary.

I asked each of them to tell me how they were, and what they needed. After a round the table discussion one student even told me she would rather work at home on her own project in silence and use her time efficiently – which felt very awkward to me. To be honest I was surprised that this student would even tell me these very honest feelings. Perhaps, it helped that I opened up my feelings, and that I was very honest about what I felt, so they could also reflect this honesty.

The common denominator was that they missed insight in each others processes. They were interested in feedback from the class, and to think together. I guess they felt alone in their projects. And valued and missed the questions and critiques and ideas from their classmates.



This decentres the designer from their position over and above materiality and instead positions them at a crucial vantage point, in the midst of a multitude of connections’ (Boelen, 2020, p.15)

I went home quite exhausted after this second day. I promised them I would think of something else and more fitting (hopefully) for the last day. I would have almost no time, since I would get home late, and had to get up early to travel back to Arnhem.

I decided that my set up for this third and last day should be simple: I divided the class into two or three groups of 3 to 4 students. Each of them would present their project and ask their fellow classmates a question they could then react upon.

To me this setting felt very unsatisfying. My workshop was all about exploring a context, and about making in this same context. It was everything but sitting behind ones desk thinking and talking. I was therefore very afraid that this last day would not satisfy either, and decided to start the day with a very small improvised exercise, called drawing together. I had an internal panic moment, and improvised as hell. I felt uncomfortable, but continuing my program would be as equally uncomfortable.

So, students would sit opposite each other, on a long table, and in duo's they drew on one piece of paper. A few rules: no talking. One starts with a line, after which the other also draws a line (or shape). This taking turns is repeated until both think the drawing is finished. Basically it is a dialogue with pens. This exercise is in a way a metaphor for a lot of elements that relate to my practice and to my proposed workshop. It deals with having a dialogue, following traces, the unexpected, the other, not-knowing where to go, giving up control of the process, etc. Afterwards we reflected on what they felt and thought and I talked about this exercise as being a metaphor.

To be able to draw together one has to look at what the other does, not take full control but share control of the process. You don't know what the intention of the drawing is, you will have to find out together. Also decide together when it will be finished, or if it needs more. Having a dialogue, not-knowing and collaboration are present ingredients. In a way you have to be open to the unknown. Which takes guts, courage, and openness.

I tried this exercise at different places in art education, and I am always surprised that students don't find this exercise difficult or uncomfortable at all. They enjoy it, don't feel any friction or insecurity. We talked about drawing together and what they experienced. Also I talked about the metaphors that are in this exercise, that relate to site-specific-research and site-specific-making. Since I am always surprised how easily students do the exercise and enjoy it, I do wonder if they get any of the metaphors out of it. Actually, it would be a good idea in the future to spend some more time reflecting on this exercise.

After this short exercise and discussion we hung the drawings on the walls of the room and the group was divided in groups of 3 or 4. They began discussing their projects. I would let them be, and switch tables to join them in their conversations. At the end of the day I planned a reflection together with the group. We discussed what this last day of the workshop 'delivered' them. They were very happy to think together on each other projects, and found out they did not know much about what the others were doing. Two students figured out that their theme had an overlap, which they were previously unaware of. One openly expressed his fears of his next step, and we encouraged him with practical tips. The energy was positive, and it felt that the class was excited.



I explained to them that these three days felt like a roller coaster for me. Having a plan, and having to change it. It was nice to hear that they appreciated that I changed my setup. They said my workshop better suited the beginning of the year, and found it badly planned by the programme coordinator (which it was, I guess). Also they told me that most tutors 'preach' to tutor according to what the student needs, but that they never met a teacher that put this into practice like I did. One student told me this is called rhizomatic learning, which I myself never heard of. Another surprising comment of another student, was that the drawing exercise in the morning set the tone of the day. Namely: to be open with the other, and to have a dialogue. Which I never intended it to be. It was very nice to hear that it somehow made sense though.

Looking back at this workshop I remember preparing for it, behind my desk. Making a presentation about pony projects and a presentation about other exemplary situated projects. Also I made a rough timeline for the three days. But I kept sitting behind my desk preparing and preparing. I had the feeling I was never finished. I found it hard to lean on my experience of working with people, and working with different situations, and to trust my improvisational skills.

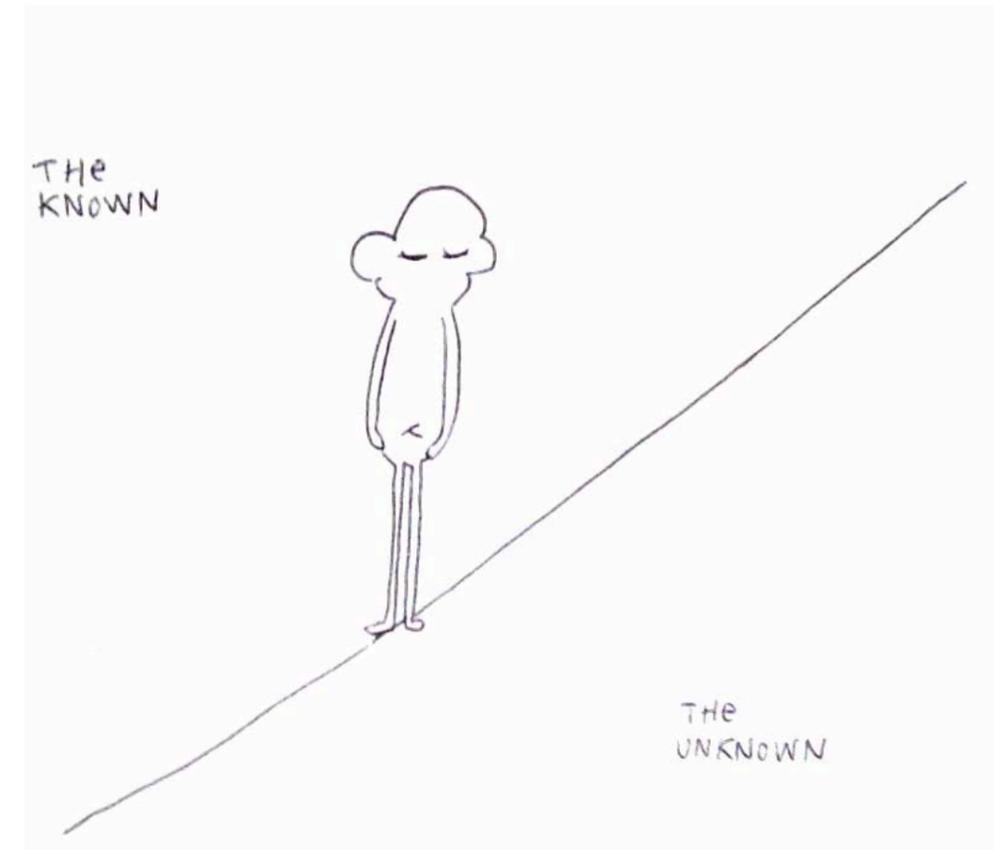
I now realise that I was looking for some sort of control beforehand. How does one prepare for improvisation? I guess this is the internal friction that I always have with teaching. How to prepare for the unprepared. A lot of time (or energy) actually goes to reacting to situations in the moment.

For me it was a moment to realise that the plans you might have as a teacher might not always fit the students needs.

The  
workshop  
that  
I  
held  
turned  
my  
perspectives  
up  
side  
down

Secretly, it was a first attempt to work towards my dream of a future Pony School, in which I wanted to translate our way of working, and our philosophy to the future generation artists and designers. A Pony Academy, a place where one learns to work within contexts, learns to connect to this context, and learns to realise projects in that same context. Researching onsite and making onsite are important elements. Not solving problems, but giving a subject a (public) stage would be the goal.

I soon found out that not everybody is waiting to become a Pony. And that it is not about creating copies. But I found out things were much smaller. I took a better look at what the students situation were, and to what they would need. Instead of my wishes and demands. Looking back I soon realised that whilst teaching I am not transmitting my knowledge, but whilst teaching I hold the



same principles as when working with the Ponies. Just like all Pony projects relate to their sites, as a teacher I try to relate to the student – as if it were a site. Teaching then becomes a relational matter.

(...) Conneller warns, we should avoid the temptation to turn understandings drawn from one particular context of material-technical interaction into a meta-theory for everything else. Our task should rather be to describe and analyse every case in its ethnographic specificity. (Ingold, 2013, p.29)

When starting a pony project on location, we always have (to have) a plan beforehand. We learned though, that as soon as we would arrive on location, our plan needed to change, adapting to the new/unpredicted circumstances that we would meet. Plans made beforehand often don't fit when you set foot on location. To me, tutoring is also like this. I do have a plan, and intentions, beforehand, but often I find that students need something else, and I have to change my plan.

Schon's (1991) (...) authentic art education (...) accentuates the role of art educators as reflective practitioners, rather than as the executors of routine tasks. Reflective practitioners allow risk, surprise and confusion in their profession and carry out experimentations to generate new understandings of their practice). (...) art education needs educational art experts who are able to balance embracing and controlling risk. (in Heijnen, 2015, p.13)

We Ponies learned to be open to the unexpected, and to be able to throw the plans off the table, and to start over. And how do you start then? By looking from real close what the site looks like, who lives there, and what issues are present, both visible as invisible. I found out my student is my context, or the 'site' that I am working at.

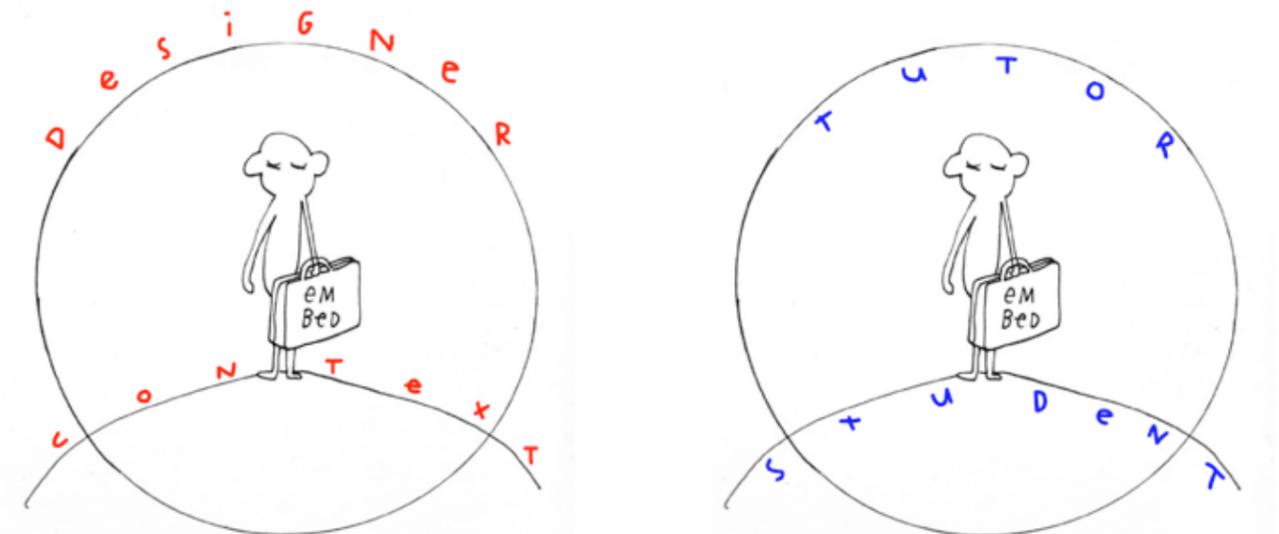
In respect of pedagogic work and the task of building a life with others, such work does not exist in a vacuum but in relation to its context, and the values and sensibilities of learners, hence the need to appreciate the situated nature of such work in each of its situations and the obligation that arise for a teacher. (Atkinson, 2018, p.222)

Looking back I learned how important I find it that students want to learn. More and more I try to sense when something is holding them back. Perhaps this is when some disobedience steps in? From my side as a teacher to not tell them what they have to do. But also from their side, I try to encourage them in being disobedient themselves. To not look too much at assessment criteria, and to not take these too seriously. But to be looking inwards, to their own wishes and demands. What is it that they want?

(...) a pedagogical imperative is to try to understand learning from the perspective of the learner's capacities to learn and not to judge such capacities from external criteria. This form of pedagogical ethics demands that pedagogical work engaged with the intrinsic capacities of learners, it requires that we try to understand how something matters for a learner in a particular learning encounter. (Atkinson, 2018, p.128)

Sometimes I hear fellow tutors mentioning that it is necessary (at art academy) to loosen students from the educational system they got used to at primary and secondary school. It happens that students want to know what they have to do to pass the module and only look at external criteria.

(...), we play practically no attention to the idea that engagement in school can and should provide intrinsic satisfactions, (...) (Atkinson, 2018, p.16)



(...) comparing that what educationalists call 'school' with what anthropologists call 'the field'. (Ingold, 2017, p.59)

Students are not used to playing, to wondering around, to search and be lost but only work towards the examination (criteria)/getting the job done.

As Atkinson says: “The journey is always ‘in the middle’, developing new ways of thinking, feeling and acting in relation to events and encounters as they occur. Conceiving pedagogical work as an on-going journey in the middle seems important.” (2018, p.121–122)

The task is therefore to encourage the other (learner) to express intensities and ideas as experienced in a learning encounter and try to understand how these are significant, how they matter for the learner. (Atkinson, 2018, p.133)

### / tutoring /

Since my masterstudy led to analysing my Pony practice, I wondered where would be a good place to connect my practical knowledge. I was looking for a department close to my Pony practice and stumbled upon ‘Design in Context’ at St. Joost School of Art & Design, a department that promotes designing in relation to a certain context.

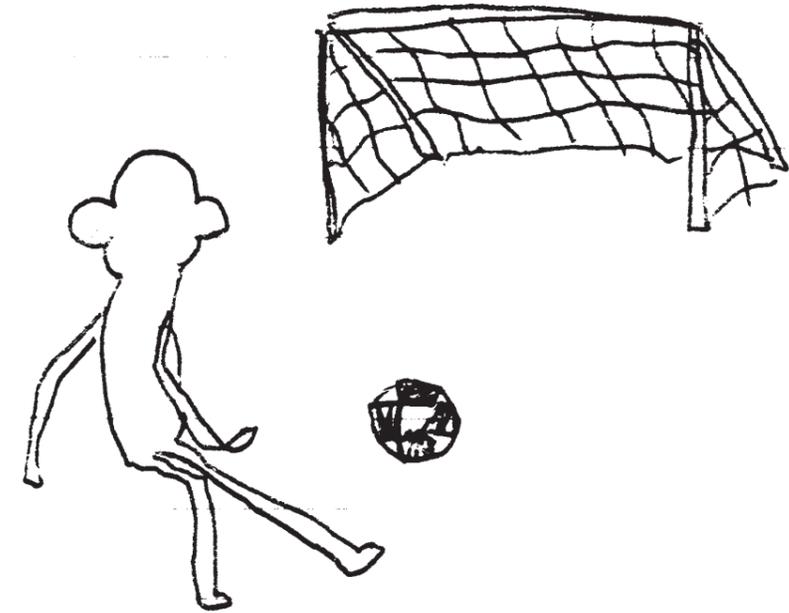
Since 2020 I tutor graduating (Bachelor) students at St. Joost School of Art & Design, department New Design & Attitudes (NDA). This name was introduced in 2021, before it was called “Design in Context, graphic and spatial design”. The website of St. Joost explains these terms as follows (translated from the original Dutch texts):

**Design in Context, Shape the world** / You are curious about the world around you. From your own fascination and imagination you provide answers to topics that require a **response** in society. During the Graphic | Spatial Design study, you learn to tackle a design issue and strengthen your design skills through analysis and research. In this way you develop into a professional designer that can react in a critical and creative way to what is going on in society. And who can shape the world in this way. [<https://www.akvstjoost.nl/opleidingen/grafisch-ruimtelijk-ontwerp>, 1-March-2020]

**New Design & Attitudes** / Who are you as a designer and who would you like to be? As a designer, can you change things in the world? Can you contribute to a better world, now and for the future? How far are you allowed and willing to go with that? During the study of New Design & Attitudes, you will address issues for you, your environment and society. You will learn to design objects, experiences, environments and systems that respond to these issues. You design for and with people, from expectations and needs, or for non-people. Sometimes your design solves a problem, sometimes it makes things more poetic, more challenging, more sustainable, more beautiful, clearer or more convenient. Your designs can play a role in the exchange of ideas, making environments more pleasant, providing insight into information, offering new experiences, provoking discussion or provocation. You research and develop your design attitude.

Whilst writing this the students of 2020 and of 2021 have all graduated. Which means I tutored two groups of students (2020 & 2021), each group having around 11 students. Tutoring means seeing the class half a day per week. Which means I can have 15 minutes per student per week.

When Covid set foot in The Netherlands last year (2020), we had to adjust our teaching to online teaching. I did wonder if it was a good idea to ‘just’ follow the planned schedule. In these times, should we really expect students to graduate? Who says they should? Should we not give them extra time to adjust



to this chaotic situation? I almost felt guilty tutoring them each week, as if I expected them to behave like normal, and as if graduating still was priority number one. I was told that giving students more time to graduate (like an extra year) would not make it easier for them. In the end they were given two weeks extra. My first year of tutoring students I had perhaps seen physically three times. And that was it. They did graduate. Online : (

I will make a bit of a jump, to the class of 2021: February 2021. The new graduate students were just done with a one week program called 'graduating in one week' and another week that they spend in the workshops. Now the students were divided into groups to continue their final project with their appointed tutor. The team of tutors consists of five tutors, all tutoring around 10-12 students, together with two theory tutors, two coaches and once in a whilst experts and alumni are invited.

### **/ February 25th 2021 /**

I found it very special to be able to meet my group of students physically at the academy. Covid had not left the building but restrictions were a bit more relaxed. I wondered what my first lesson should look like. The Covid situation was not new, students had already spent one year of coping with online teaching, lockdowns at home, etc. But for these students graduating would be new. Last year I focused a lot on having fun during their final projects. I supported the students to do things they wanted to do, just because they felt like it. To make something and to enjoy it was – in my opinion – important. Having fun as a strategy to cope with the unstable Covid situation. Personally, I also felt that it was important to do things I enjoy, in order to remain positive. And not to do too many things that would drain me. I started calling it our survival mode, to have fun. (I even asked myself, if one would compare Covid-19 with a war situation, what would resistance look like? Does having fun come close?)

I thought it would be nice to make a personal letter from the old class towards the new class. Since the class of 2020 was the first generation to graduate in pandemic times. Could they be of support to the class of 2021? I asked the class of 2020 to think about how they could help the new class graduating in a Covid setting. Did they have ideas or recommendations? I told them I wanted to send a message from them to the new class. About five students (out of 11) replied with recommendations. My first idea was to make something like a letter. A letter from the former class to the new class. Whilst working on it, it evolved into a booklet. I thought it would be useful to give each student something tangible at the first graduation tutorial. Since it was a physical class, it would be encouraging to bring something physical.

Naturally there is always my side of the story. My perspective is that of 'a teacher', of 'an independent maker', of a 'mother', of 'a pony'. What would the students perspective(s) be? What would they say? What would they recommend the coming students? What was their opinion? I had to ask. And by asking them I would also learn and get to know the students a bit better.

It would be nice to show the students some typography, some certain way of folding, and show that paper choice matters. This booklet would be a way to (also) show them that design matters. I realised I had fun preparing my first lesson. It felt good making something to give to them. Normally I tend to not

*up to the attic*



*The bedroom turned out to be a place with not enough concentration. Close to the childrens bedrooms. I moved one floor up, and bought a 20 meter cat6 cable. March 2021*

*down to the modem*

feel prepared enough whilst preparing my lessons. But now I felt prepared as hell. Perhaps I did not feel alone? But perhaps I felt I didn't have to preach these things that I think are important. The booklet would show, not tell.

(...) the promise of anthropology is to bring others to life, to draw them into the field of our attention so that we, in turn, can correspond with them. A work of art can be anthropological, insofar as it delivers on this promise: if it serves to bring things forth into the fullness of presence, to put them 'on the table', to free them from the determinations of aims and objectives. Art that is anthropological allows things to be themselves. (Ingold, 2013, p.67–68)

Also I hoped they would feel not alone. Not alone in graduating during Covid-19 times. Not alone in this chaos. Not alone struggling. But feel connected and supported, not only by me, but by other students.

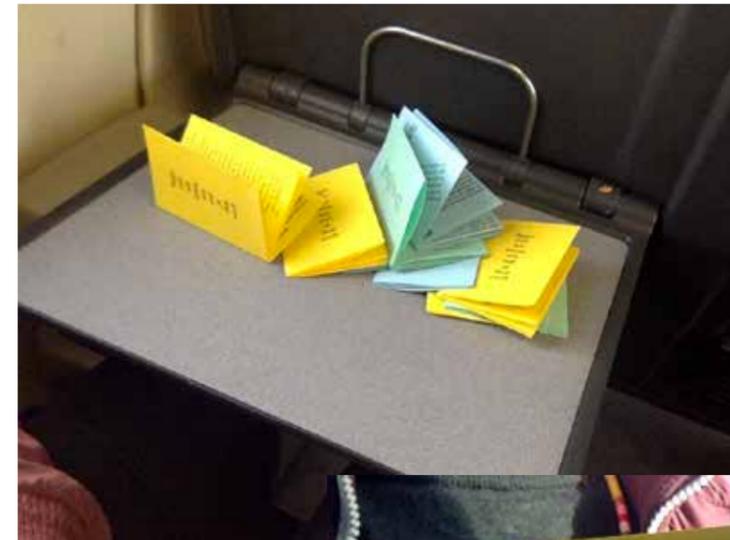
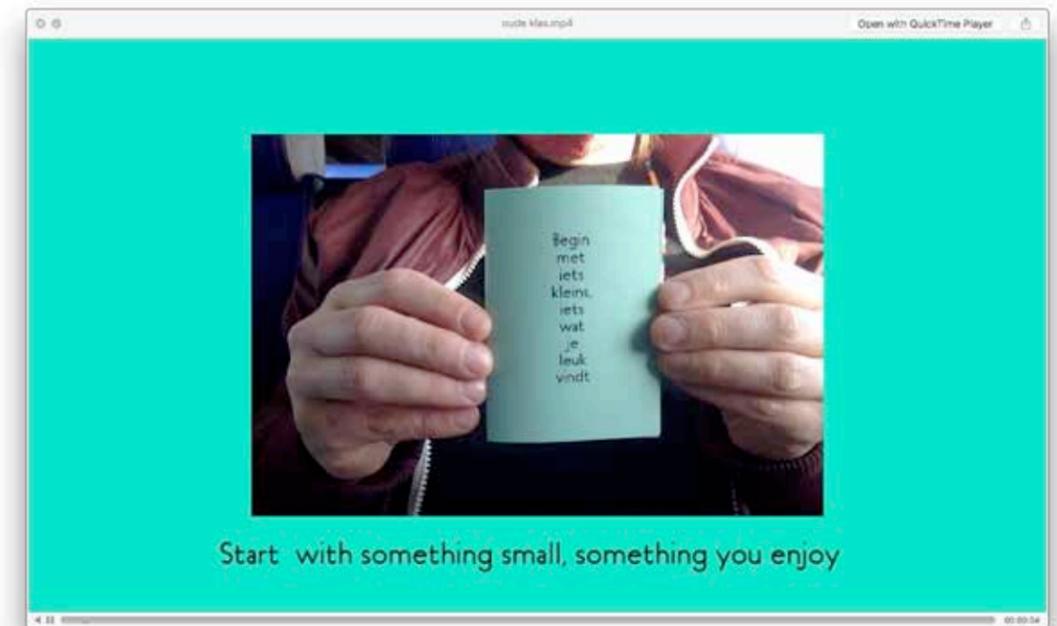
When I think about my teaching/pedagogical practice (or I can also say Pony way of teaching), I always find it hard to unpack things. What are my motives whilst teaching? How can I make these visible, in class, but also to others? Perhaps the booklet that I made can help me unfold things. Since it makes my practice tangible. Just like a Pony project it reveals something in a relevant context. And might therefore be a carrier of my Pony way of working. It somehow embodies our intentions. It becomes (in) the middle. To be able to make it I have to research other perspectives (or as we say as ponies, we embed ourselves on location). It opens up new ways of seeing. It reveals something without solving a problem. And even more importantly, it reveals something in a relevant context. It is a good example of site-specific-research and site-specific-making.

With site-specific I mean the students studying, working on their final projects. The 4th year students are the site. And the situation they were in was chaotic, they had to adjust their lives due to Covid-19 to ever changing rules. The academy and its workshops closed, their rooms became their school and/or workshop. There was no physical difference between their personal lives and their student lives. These two worlds merged. Just like mine. I have been teaching from the bedroom. With the laundry in the background. Whilst teaching I could hear my family downstairs, and also whilst teaching all the unfinished household was present (and lurking). I share my studio with three other designers, and since there were a lot of restrictions for meeting people outside of your bubble, and all three of us a teaching part-time, we decided to not teach from the studio.

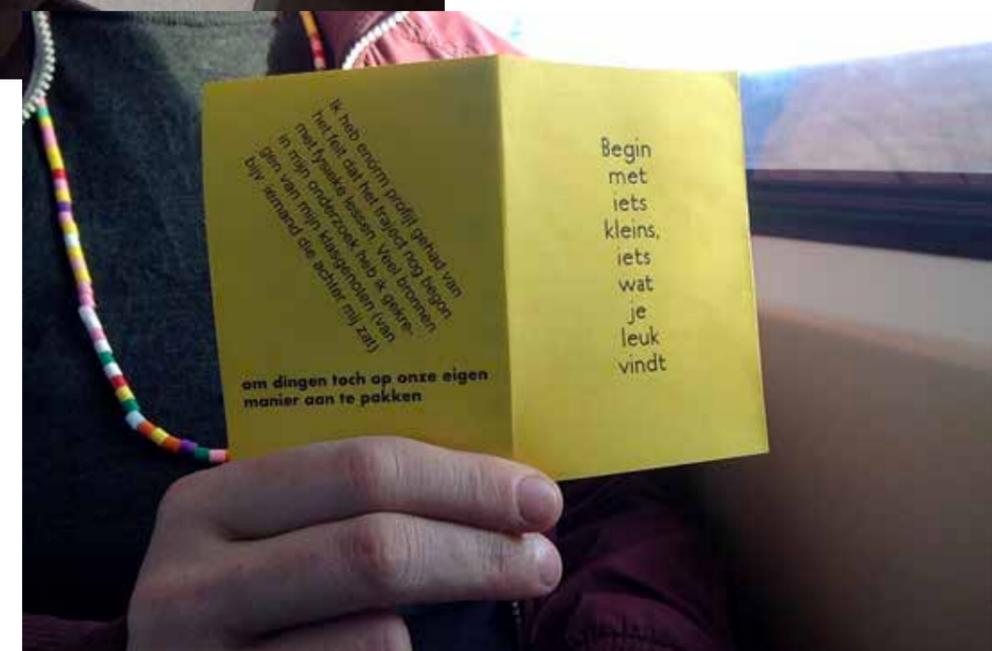
Subjects that this booklet show me are

- embedded research
- other voices/perspectives
- site-specific-research and site-specific-making
- revealing (something in a relevant context)
- an exploration taking material form
- complex trajectories of becoming with: making-with, questioning-with, feeling-with, talking-with, seeing-with, guessing-with, risking-with and learning-with. It is a process of co-existing (Atkinson, 2018, p.225)
- reciprocity

The booklet is a carrier of these pony elements. It embodies our intentions. It becomes in the middle. It reveals something without solving a problem. It opens up new ways of seeing.



**please watch (and read):**  
<https://vimeo.com/599428164>



Unexpectedly, one of the students of this year, whilst looking through this booklet, asked me if I also put something in there myself. (Which I didn't.) Which I could have, it just didn't cross my mind. In a way some recommendations were things that I often told the students myself (like 'start with something small', or 'do something you really like to do').

Another thing I hoped is that this booklet would show that a teacher doesn't always know everything. To show that the voice of the student matters. And to show that I am curious to hear what they have to say. To create a more inclusive view on teaching. As Henk Oosterling says, let's stop talking about bottom-up as opposed to top down. They both maintain the same hierarchy. Instead of talking about bottom-up, one can talk about circulating. Not vertical (top-down), but circular. Where everybody takes part, shares, communicates, and participates. (Oosterling, 2020)

I really liked this book. It was inspiring and I certainly benefited from what was written inside. I really liked the fact that the previous graduates literally preceded us and 'encouraged' us with these tips! In the last few weeks before graduation, I honestly looked through it more often to get some motivational support. Being in the same boat is a good name for it. (Kuijpers, 2021)

It was also a kind of getting to know you as a teacher, because we had never had a lesson. This, together with the presentation on the basis of a powerpoint, gave an impression of who we had in front of us. Someone who tries to look from the perspective of the student and someone that learns together with the student. And it gave me the feeling that things might perhaps work out after all, a little bit of hope. (Van Oosterhout, 2021)

It was a very good start! Graduation feels like something very big so to start with some supporting stories from the last years graduates was more than welcome. The front cover of the booklet (which I still have by the way) was also a nice reminder: start with something small. You quickly forget in such a large project what actually matters and that you can also have fun. So this book definitely had a positive impact for me! (Van den Berg, 2021)

The idea that there had been people before us who were in the same boat made it a less lonely graduation. (Van der Graaf, 2021)

The booklet was a very nice opening, really a kind of "welcome!" it introduced you and it showed that you were curious for who we were too. It felt warm. (Van der Linden, 2021)

I haven't looked into it much myself. But I thought it was a nice gesture. It is always nice to read others experiences. (Smeets, 2021)

For me it was a present and I immediately realised that you really cared about us. (Anonymous, 2021)

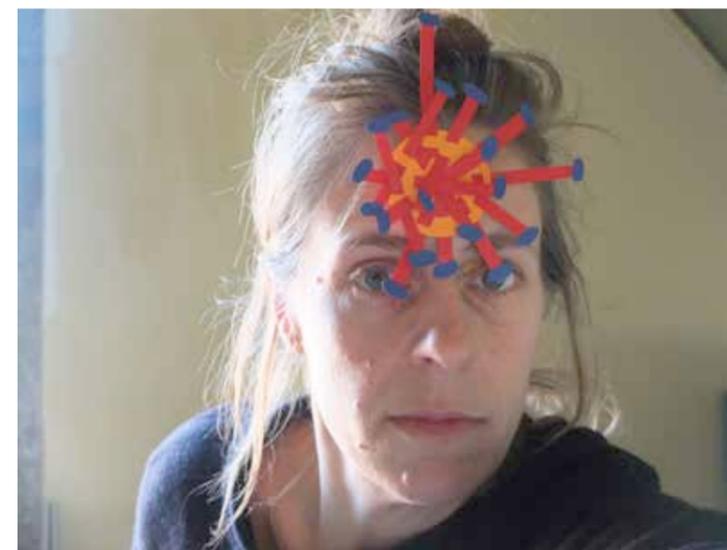
### **/ looking at it /**

Somehow it helps to look at this booklet, but also to look at the drawing exercise, as artefacts of my educational practice. And to reflect on what they tell me. They talk to me. They make me look in the mirror. Somehow they reveal my teaching approach in the same way that pony projects reveal a subject on location. It's about a way of working, seeing and being, which all relate to being in the middle. Or as Atkinson names it, becoming in the middle.

The force of art does not emanate from a prior subject, but through this force a subject, or more accurately, a subjectivation and a world emerge. (Atkinson, 2018, p.59)



*Covid just entered the universe. I decided to do a lecture about my Pony Practice. Practical insights about designing in specific contexts. For students St. Joost School Art & Design. The lecture was given in Microsoft Teams. From my bedroom. With the laundry at the background. April 2020*



*Tutoring from the attic. I took a PCR test since I wanted to feel free to cough or sneeze in the classroom. Without feeling guilty or wondering if I would bring some infection into classroom. It was a proactive test. Since I had no symptoms. But it turned out I was positive. April 2021*

**/ personal anecdote, February 2021 /**

Since Covid was still around, I was asked to think of how to teach the coming months. Which classes would be physical and which one would I plan online?

I had no idea how to plan this. Would students prefer to come to the academy, and would some of them prefer to stay home – for one reason or another? Turning my head upside down, and looking at how other teachers divided physical/online teaching, I could not get my head around it.

Thinking about my pony practice, it would make sense to do some embedded research and look at this matter from real close. I decided to meet the students at the academy for the first class. I could then see how they felt about these matters, and also test out hybrid teaching. Since some of the students had to (or decided to) stay home.

**February 25th, 2021 / 09:35 – 13:50 / 1st tutorial**

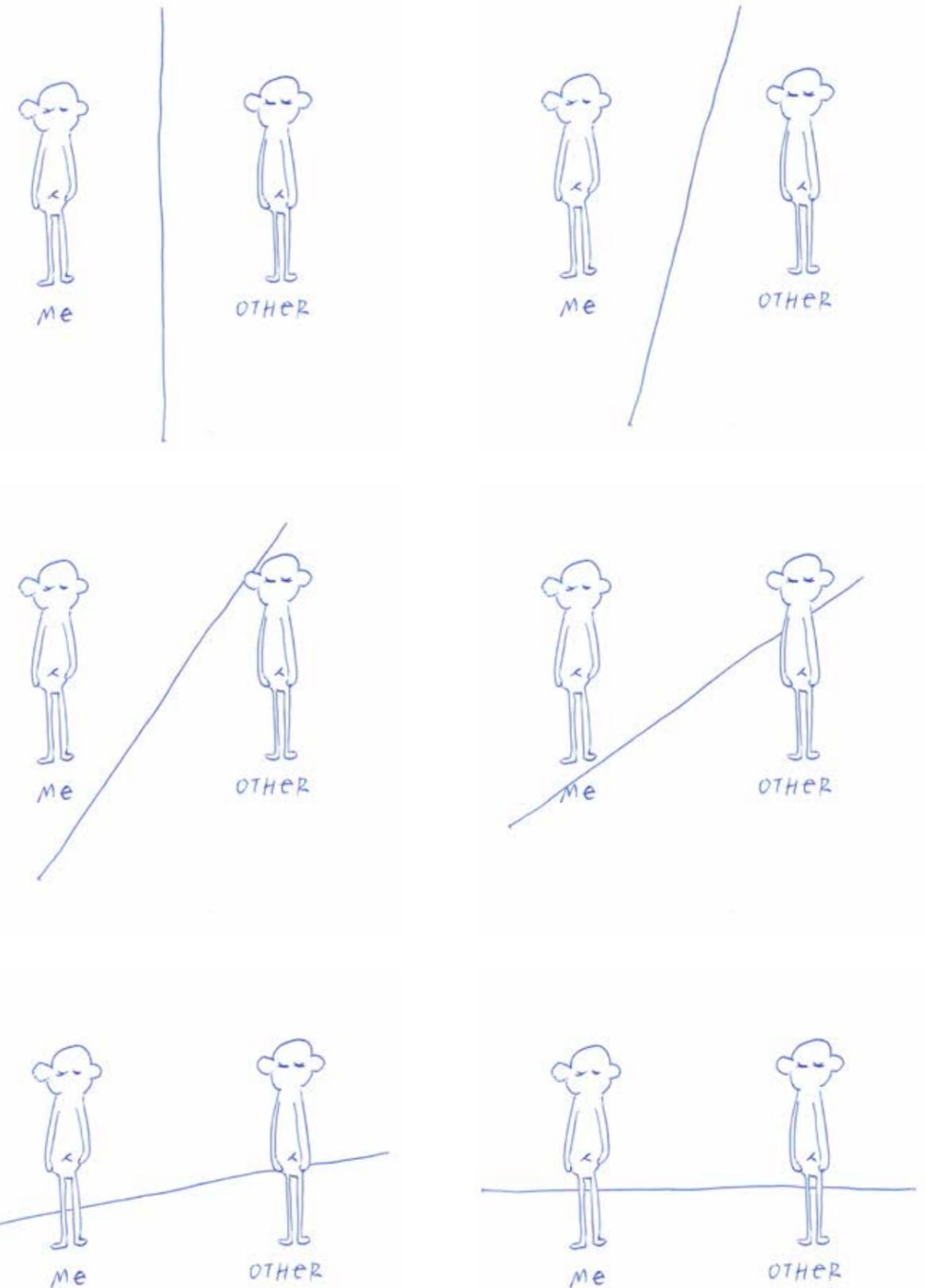
I met my class of students. Nine of them came to the class, two of them joined the class online. Since in these times I did find it a special moment to meet my students in real, I made a booklet to give to them – of which I have just elaborated. I planned some time to introduce myself and my practice to them – since they might not know me nor my practice. We talked about graduating in Corona times, and about physical and online lessons. The group of students was very enthusiast about meeting in real – and not that excited about having a lot of online classes. Whereas I figured some might find it easy to stay home not having to commute to school, this was not the case at all. Not all students live in Breda, some of them lived in Rotterdam, some in Den Bosch, so they would have to travel by train.

It wasn't possible to plan all lessons to be physical, since there were restrictions for the use of classrooms, the space available, and allopermitted numbers of students in the academy at the same time. The decision was made. The lessons would alternate between physical and digital. The one week physical, the other week digital, a 50/50 division.

This is just a small anecdote. But it shows I had to reserve space for the unknown, and take time to meet the others involved. On the other side, the academy was waiting for my preferred setup, to be able to book classrooms for example.

Although this is an example where I take time for things that I don't yet know, I do feel pressure. I feel I should know. And I feel people are waiting for my planning. I guess this is why Atkinson talks about disobedient pedagogies. It is opposite of the expected. Or opposite structures, in which things need to be planned, students must meet criteria, programs must be elaborated. Things that students also feel – even me as a student writing this thesis.

The pedagogical imperative therefore is to initiate learning encounters, (...) that encourage learners to ask questions and formulate their ways of learning and the materialisation of their world in this world—to become disobedient learners—in the sense of being encouraged to go beyond what might be expected. (Atkinson, 2018, p.33)



animation -----> <https://vimeo.com/508799231>

## / unprepared /

I could say that it is wrong for me to feel unprepared. But I could also try to say to myself that it is okay to feel unprepared. Or try to understand this feeling and where it comes from. Reserving space for the unexpected creates space for things to just happen as they happen. Or to improvise or change direction.

Remain open to the not known, may be a better disposition rather than the closure of knowledge. (Atkinson, 2018, p.206) (...) knowing (not knowledge) (Ibid., p.20)

I guess a lot of things are 'expected' in school – or even in life. Everyone has expectations. But what if things don't go as planned? In Dutch we have a saying, 'kont tegen de krib'. Which literally means to turn your ass to the crib. But actually it means: "When you push a kid really hard to go one way, the other way starts to look more entertaining." ("Kont tegen de", 2021). Having two children, of which one is 2,5 years old, I know this behavior very well : )

I do believe, when there are external expectations, ones own quest might get dilluted.

We need to engage with what resists, rather than destroy it or withdraw ourselves from it. (Biesta, 2012, p.94-95)

And I think whilst working with Pink Pony Express we had no external expectations. We always had to define our own fascinations, and think about why those things fascinated us. We also defined ourselves what we were aiming for. Most of the times we worked independently – which meant projects would only go through when we were granted subsidy. Perhaps it is important to learn art students "to not fulfill others peoples expectations" (Bowie, 2016)

"Never play to the gallery. But you never learn that. Until much later on I think. If you feel safe in the area that you are working in, you are not working in the right area. Go a little bit further in the borders that you are feeling that you are capable of. Go a little bit out of your depth. And when you don't feel that your feet are quite touching the bottom you are just about in the right place to do something exciting. I think it is terribly dangerous for an artist to fulfill other peoples expectations. They generally produce their worst work when they do this. Always remember that the reason you initially started working was that there was something inside yourself that you felt that if you could manifest it in a way you would understand more about yourself and how you co-exist with the rest of society." (Bowie, 2016)

The more we are acted upon by external bodies, pressures, regulations or controls in whatever form, the more passive we become. (Atkinson, 2018, p.42)



-->

## please watch (or listen) / <https://vimeo.com/620671308>

### 1\_Helguera

In conversation with Freire, American educator Myles Horton once remarked: "my expertise is in knowing NOT to be an expert." He meant that his role in his work consisted not in telling his students what they didn't know, but instead in helping them discover their own expertise and then decide for themselves what they needed to know.

### 2\_Bowie

Never play to the gallery. But you never learn that. Until much later on I think.

### 3\_Atkinson

We pay practically no attention to the idea that engagement in school can and should provide intrinsic satisfactions.

### 4\_Abramovic

Just to give an example, one of my exercises for my students when I was teaching I told them an exercise for three months. Buy 100 sheets of paper and one rubbish can. Put this on the table. Everyday in the same time sit on the chair and write your good ideas. Put the ones that you like on the left side of the table. Put the ones you don't like in the rubbish. After three months they want to present their good ideas, I am totally not interested in good ideas. So I took rubbish can, and every single idea in it was incredible. The ones that you reject are the ones that you don't know how to deal with them.

### 5\_Bowie

If you feel safe in the area that you are working in, you are not working in the right area. Go a little bit further in the border that you are feeling that you are capable of. Go a little bit out of your depth. And when you don't feel that your feet are quite touching the bottom you are just about in the right place to do something exciting.

### 6\_Atkinson

The more we are acted upon by external bodies, pressures, regulations or controls in whatever form, the more passive we become.

### 7\_Bowie

I think it is terribly dangerous for an artist to fulfill other peoples expectations. They generally produce their worst work when they do that.

### 8\_Atkinson

How can we respond to the unexpected, the appearance of something new?

### 9\_Bowie

Always remember that the reason you initially started working was that there was something inside yourself that you felt that if you could manifest it in some way you would understand more about yourself and how you co-exist with the rest of society.

### 10\_Atkinson

The notion of not-known is immanent to such adventures. We might think of events of learning as being on the edge of time, as consisting of a tension between that which exists and that which-is-yet-to-arrive. How can we respond to the unexpected, the appearance of something new?

(Abramovic, 2013; Atkinson, 2018; Bowie, 2016; Helguera, 2011)

**/ exercises /  
in reciprocity  
(and/or learning together)  
/ mutuality**

It was the end of the final year, (my) students graduated, and there was an event planned to hand out the diplomas. A moment of celebration where tutors give short speeches to their students. Last year I told the students what I had learned from them. Since studying is about learning, but also teaching/tutoring is about learning, I thought it would be nice to let them know I learned too. All speeches were printed together on one piece of paper, which was then folded differently to put another name on the cover. Unfolded one could read the speeches of their fellow classmates.

I never tutor the students one on one and prefer to talk in groups of three or four students so that they can collectively contribute to the feedback with questions and comments or just listen to what is being said. For this same reason they got all the speeches together on one piece of paper. Nobody studies alone, I see the class as a community.

<p>DEAREST CLASS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">COMGRADATIONS</p> <p style="text-align: center;">.... WHAT NOW?</p>	<p><b>A</b></p> <p><i>I soon learned that it was not without reason that you and Joost were working at the same table in school. Free birds, with a philosophical interest, always producing new work and sketches.</i></p> <p><i>With a steady pace, autarkic as hell. You research by making.</i></p> <p><i>An interesting questions is to ask yourself how important it is that such a process has an end point. But, you certainly managed to create an end point. I'm curious about your next stop.</i></p>	<p><b>B</b></p> <p><i>I learned that the delay that Pfeiffer had on your life (and still does, right?) also brings a drive and focus. You have no time to lose, and no energy to waste. And you probably, or or hopefully take some rest when needed.</i></p> <p><i>The lessons that Corona is trying to teach society may be comparable to the lessons that Pfeiffer has brought you. Looking at your results, the future may be brighter than we think now. Thank you.</i></p>
<p><b>J</b></p> <p><i>I soon learned that you learn a lot. You research like a very hungry caterpillar (never enough!). Obviously you want to make real things for the real world - while considering the climate change and other dilemma's in the world. Wanting to improve the world can weigh heavily, so I think it's great to see that you have been able to make this weight small. You fished it out of the water, and you looked deeper. Please, keep looking deeper.</i></p>	<p><b>J</b></p> <p><i>I learned that Joep makes, so Joep lives. You remind me of what Tim Ingold writes in his book "Making". Ingold is an anthropologist who writes about the connection between art, architecture, anthropology and archeology. Your way of working is like that of a "craftsman". You sketch almost one to one. You think through making. Keep thinking and thus making. Or keep making and thus thinking. If you know what I mean.</i></p>	<p><b>J</b></p> <p><i>Chapeau how clearly you were able to present your whirlwind of creations at your resit.</i></p> <p><i>I learned in one of the first lessons that you work autarkic, and don't accept, or need, much guidance. I think you teach yourself the most. In that way you remind me of myself.</i></p> <p><i>Too bad you now have a diploma, otherwise you could call yourself autodidact.</i></p>

A year later, still teaching online, I still never talk to them one on one. When the class is online I give students that are not in the scheduled tutorial group the opportunity to join tutorials as if sitting in the background. They can turn off their camera and sound, and just join with their ears. They can even go shopping, do the dishes, or lay on the couch, whilst still having the chance of following the tutorials of the others. I was surprised how many students stayed in the meeting. They were silent, camera's were off, and once in a whilst they would jump in with a comment or a question or something else relevant. They could learn from each other.



**/ 13th July 2021 / exercise in relating /  
(teacher as a plant / plant as a teacher)**

For this year's diploma I wanted to think of a new theme. I often think of my class of students as a garden, each student being a different plant, with different needs, different ways of growing and different ways of dealing with nutrients. Also I was thinking of a group portrait, in which they would all be together in the collective soil, growing, and somehow (invisibly) depending and co-existing. (see drawing).

I already started writing some of them, but soon I felt uncomfortable. You can't talk about plants without talking about seeds. And the dutch word for seed (zaad) took me to places that felt inappropriate. I killed my darling.

One student resembled a dandelion. Each class I wondered how I could be of use for this student. No matter what – there was always progress made, thousands of thoughts were considered, sketches were present in various ways, ideas were evolving. A dandelion has a taproot, which is a root going downward deep, and therefore has a very high chance of surviving. With a deep root it is easier to find nutrients needed to endure droughts for example. Also it is not depending on the quality of the soil that much, since the deeper you go, the more rich soil becomes (and water can be found). Another student resembled mycelium. This one always thought along other students process, commented, gave worthy tips, or asked crucial questions. Although its own process was very turbulent and this student was often very demotivated by all the demands that were acted upon a graduation project, its presence was always very rich for the group. Mycelium is a type of fungus in (or on) soil that is of use to all the other organic species. It can be a binder, it can bring in nutrients, and many plants co-evolve with this fungus.

Nevertheless I choose not to use plants as a metaphor. Later, whilst in contact with the class, for feedback about my classes, I had to again think of the garden as a metaphor. I asked them, if they were to compare me to a plant (or tree or flower), what would I be?

- A **Pilea peperomioides** (in Dutch: pancake plant): Pancake plants get a lot of cuttings. I do see myself as a cutting from you as a plant hahahaha. You teach us a lot and everything you water: grows. Even if you take cuttings from a pancake plant, it will continue to grow and the cuttings will also grow into an adult plant. (Kuijpers, 2021)
- A **plant that makes the soil better** and allows other plants to grow and the plant itself as well. Perhaps when harvesting, another plant is temporarily put in place because the soil is brackish and then potatoes can grow again afterwards because the plant gives new nutrition to the soil. (Van Oosterhout, 2021)
- A **sweet potato twig** because it wriggles and turns in all directions, looking for a spot of light or a nice warm spot, and hardly ever stops growing! (Van der Linden, 2021)
- **ivy**: You keep going and going. And more and more knowledge is added. (Smeets, 2021)
- **Buddleja davidii**: Like the butterfly bush, it generously distributes its honey to bees and other insects so they can survive. You want to inspire as many people as possible and bring out the best in them (Van den Berg, 2021)
- A **clematis** because you search(listen) very attentively to your surroundings. And only then grab onto something. And you can grow in several directions at the same time. With an occasional beautiful flower! (Booklet) (Van der Graaf, 2021)



### *III teaching like a pony?*



## **a pedagogy** *in the middle*



The process of a learning event is not linear and predictable, but is a constantly differentiating process beginning again and again in the middle. (Atkinson, 2018, p.124)

(Deleuze and Guattari) A line of becoming has neither beginning or end, origin or destination, a line of becoming has only a middle. A becoming is always in the middle. (Atkinson, 2018, p.119)

Study in the field is rather communal than solitary, it follows real problems but not to find solutions, it is speculative but not predictive, critical but not wedded to critique. (Ingold, 2017, p.63)

The journey is always 'in the middle', developing new ways of thinking, feeling and acting in relation to events and encounters as they occur. Conceiving pedagogical work as an on-going journey in the middle seems important. (Atkinson, 2018, p.121-122)

And as an architect of *scholè*, the educator or teacher, according to Masschelein, 'is one who un-finishes, who undoes the appropriation and destination of time'. (2011:530). He or she is not so much a custodian of ends as a catalyst of beginnings, (...) (Ingold, 2017, p.46)

(...) research converts every closure into an opening, every apparent end-point into a new beginning. (Ingold, 2017, p.72)

But the point of anthropology, as Dewey said of education, is not that it should end in final outcomes but that it should open up to experiences that themselves open to further experience, making possible a never-ending and always beginning process of growth and discovery. (Ingold, 2017, p.65)



soft, poor, weak, slow, speculative

# a pedagogy.

## a conclusion somewhere in the middle

I am trying to find a way to avoid staying-in-the middle too much with my thesis. I feel obliged to make conclusions. Which I find terribly hard. I talk about my intentions, my investigations, and my attitude. Which are all terribly soft.

Atkinson (2020) pleads for a speculative or slow pedagogy.

a **speculative** pedagogy underpinned by uncertainty, incompleteness and the unknown. The coupling of inheritance and speculation informs a pedagogical quest to appreciate and support events of learning towards a future that is not known and which, by implication, may require new pedagogical and ethical (ethico-aesthetic) relations in pedagogic work. (Atkinson, 2020, p.108)

pedagogic work cannot be rushed or be too prescriptive but has to take time to explore how a learning encounter matters for each learner. It requires a **slow** pedagogy, in contrast to the proliferation of what we might call fast education that is so pervasive in many countries where education is at the service of economic ambition and competition. (Atkinson, 2020, p.110)

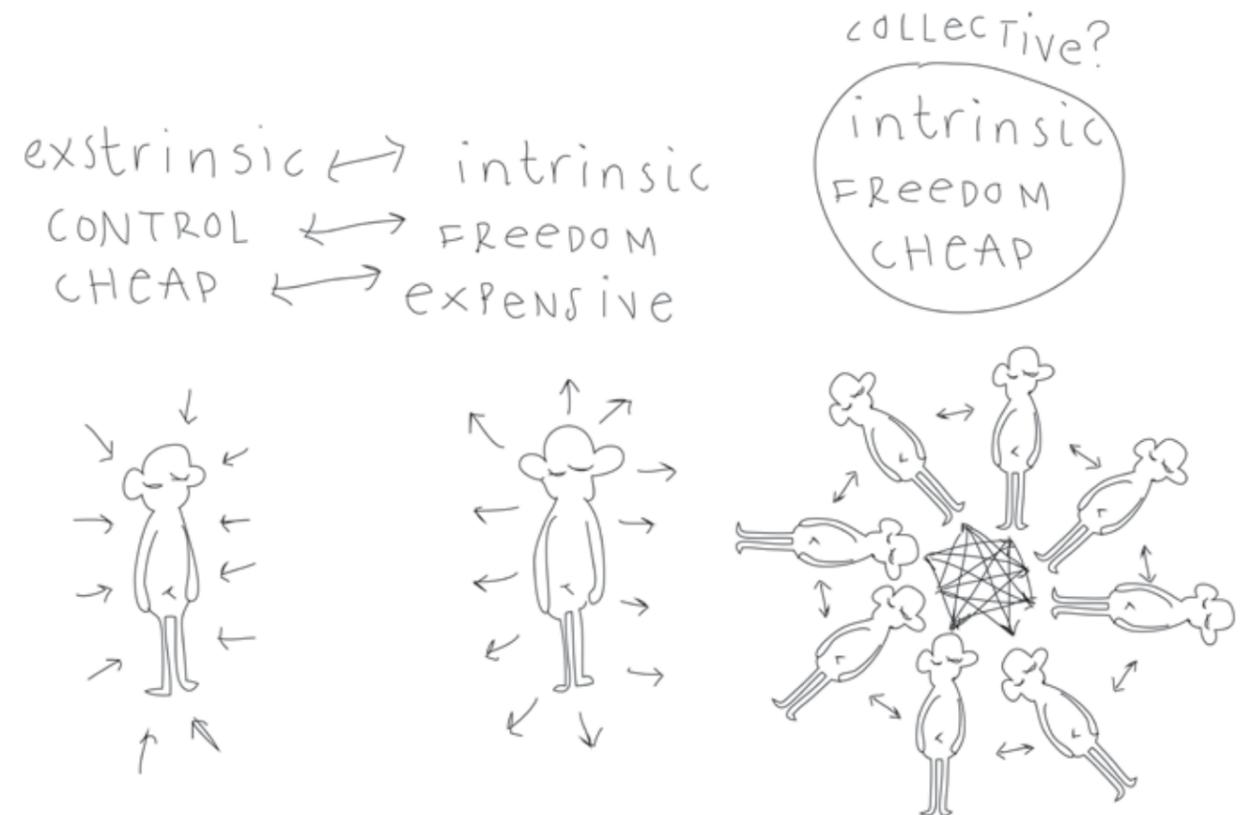
The idea of speculative pedagogies therefore encourages and respects the idea of learning as a process through which an intelligence is revealed to itself, or a process in which how something matters to a learner forms the fulcrum of his or her own orbit and development of learning. Speculative pedagogies attempt, through experimentation, to construct a future whose efficacy and relevance will have to be negotiated. Such pedagogies may expand a teacher's understanding of what it is to learn. (Atkinson, 2020, p.358)

Ingold talks about a poor pedagogy (or weak education).

The choice is between what he [Biesta, ed.] calls a strong and a weak way of education. The strong way offers security, predictability and freedom from risk. The weak way, by contrast, is slow, difficult and by no means certain in its results – if indeed we can speak of 'results' at all. We live in an age when politicians, policy makers and the public are vociferous in their demands that education should be strong. Weakness is perceived as a problem. Biesta's contention, to the contrary, is that if we take the weakness out of education, we are in danger of taking out education altogether. To do so would be to extinguish the fire. (Ingold, 2013, p.32)

What kind of pedagogy is this, in which the teacher has nothing to transmit, nothing to pass on, nor even any specific methods, protocols, rules or forms of testing or certification for doing so? Masschelein has a word for it: he calls it '**poor** pedagogy'. (2010b) It is 'the art of waiting and presenting', an invitation to lead out (*ex-ducere*), offering means to experience and to become attentive. Above all, poor pedagogy is *weak*, and we are weakened by it. A **weak** education, undertaken with poor pedagogy, (...) entreats us to break out of the security of our defensive positions, take off our armour, and meet the world with open arms. It is a practice of disarmament. It is about exposure rather than immunity; it renders us vulnerable rather than powerful, but by the same token, it values truth and wisdom over knowledge. Whereas strong education seeks to instil what is desired, weak education is a search for what is desirable. It is a form of longing, and insofar as it is done responsively and responsibly with others, as a duty, it is also a form of care and correspondence. But above all, it is done, and undergone, with attention. (Ingold, 2017, p.34–35)

State public education vs private education  
diversity vs disparity  
(verscheidenheid vs ongelijkheid)



Perhaps I am talking about a soft pedagogy? Or softer pedagogy? Is a Pony pedagogy a soft pedagogy? Whereas soft data is one of the many important ingredients of our work.

It sounds interesting, a soft pedagogy. Soft as subjective, soft as qualitative instead of quantitative. Also it reminds me of the Soft Atlas by Jan Rothuizen in which he draws maps with information that is subjective. In an interview he says "It came from the fact I felt I was a better artist walking the street instead of sitting in my studio working on paintings" (Rothuizen as cited by Adams, n.d.).

But I am not sure if soft covers it all. Can I better call Pony pedagogy an inclusive pedagogy? Although 'inclusivity' is such a hype these days, it was Henk Oosterling opening it up to me. Henk Oosterling calls himself an (in Dutch) 'ecosooft', which refers to "ecosophy or ecophilosophy (a portmanteau of ecological philosophy), a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium" ("Ecosophy", 2021) He proposes to not talk about bottom-up approaches, opposed to top-down. They both maintain the same hierarchy: linear and exclusive. When one talks about bottom-up one still keeps intact the notion of top-down. Instead of talking about bottom-up, one can (sooner) talk about circulating. Not vertical (top-down/bottom-up), but circular. A system in which everybody takes part, shares, communicates, and participates. Still I am somehow hesitant to use the term inclusive. Are there any other options? Looking back I do think the pony way of working deals with mutuality, reciprocity, kinship. When I google soft pedagogy or inclusive pedagogy I stumble at so many opinions which I need (or want) to consider, and at the same time I recognise that it is not working the way I want, to call our pedagogy soft or inclusive. Too much has been said about these terminologies for me to feel comfortable using them. Does it really cover what I am talking about?

Maybe it is impossible to name it. But here again, I am walking around in the middle. Asking questions. Considering things. And not making any conclusions. Of course I could plead that it is a conclusion to not make a conclusion, but I have been there done that.

Truth is an aspiration: it is what we reach for, long for, but ever evades our grasp. The search for truth will not deliver final answers, nor is that its purpose. It is rather to suspend all prejudice or presupposition, to turn all certainty into questioning. (...) to search again is what the word 'research' literally means. (Ingold, 2017, p.72)

Okay, another try: Pony pedagogy is a learning pedagogy. And to learn you have to relate. Relate to matter, or to material. And as a teacher your matter is your student. But then, a learning pedagogy is like green grass, a pleonasm.

**/ soft, poor, weak, speculative, slow /**

Back to intentions and attitudes. A soft pedagogy, poor and weak, slow or speculative, they all plead for certain attitudes and intentions. There is no fixed end goal. It is all to be found in the middle and to be made in the middle.

Remain open to the not known, may be a better disposition rather than the closure of knowledge. (Atkinson, 2018, p.206) / knowing (not knowledge) (Ibid, p.20)

Looking back on my Pony practice and my educational practice, I found out that

Ingold  
Anthropology and/as Education  
p. 29 (oh yes, about: GROWTH, LIFE,  
EDUCATION)

(...) no more than life can education  
have predetermined 'outcomes'. (...) **the only outcome of life is further life, the only outcome of growth further growth, the only outcome of education further education.** (Dewey, 1966:51)

HOLY SHIT

it is just  
like ❤️ compost ❤️

I am practising my teaching the same way I am practising my practise. My practice with the collective Pink Pony Express deals with site-specific-making and site-specific research, which means that making and researching onsite go hand in hand. This relational setting of working was apparently one in which I learned more than ever before. I realised that whilst teaching I am not transmitting my knowledge, but whilst teaching I hold the same principles as whilst working with the Ponies. Just like all Pony projects relate to their sites, as a teacher I try to relate to the student – as if it were a site. **Teaching then becomes a relational matter.**

(...) to join in correspondence with those among whom we study. Herein, I think, lies the educational purpose, dynamic, and potential of anthropology. (...) to study with people, not to make studies of them. (Ingold, 2017, p.63)

My research question started with asking what the basic principles of Pink Pony Express are, and how these can be translated into an educational program? Looking at this question I realise that translating these principles is not what I am looking for. I think asking “in what way can these principles play a crucial role in art education?” might be better wording. And then ask ‘why should these play a crucial role?’ I first thought I would try to carry these ingredients forward in my educational practice. I soon found out that it is not about rolling these things out, but that these ingredients are all a result of making and being in the middle.

It was Atkinson that pointed me to the middle.

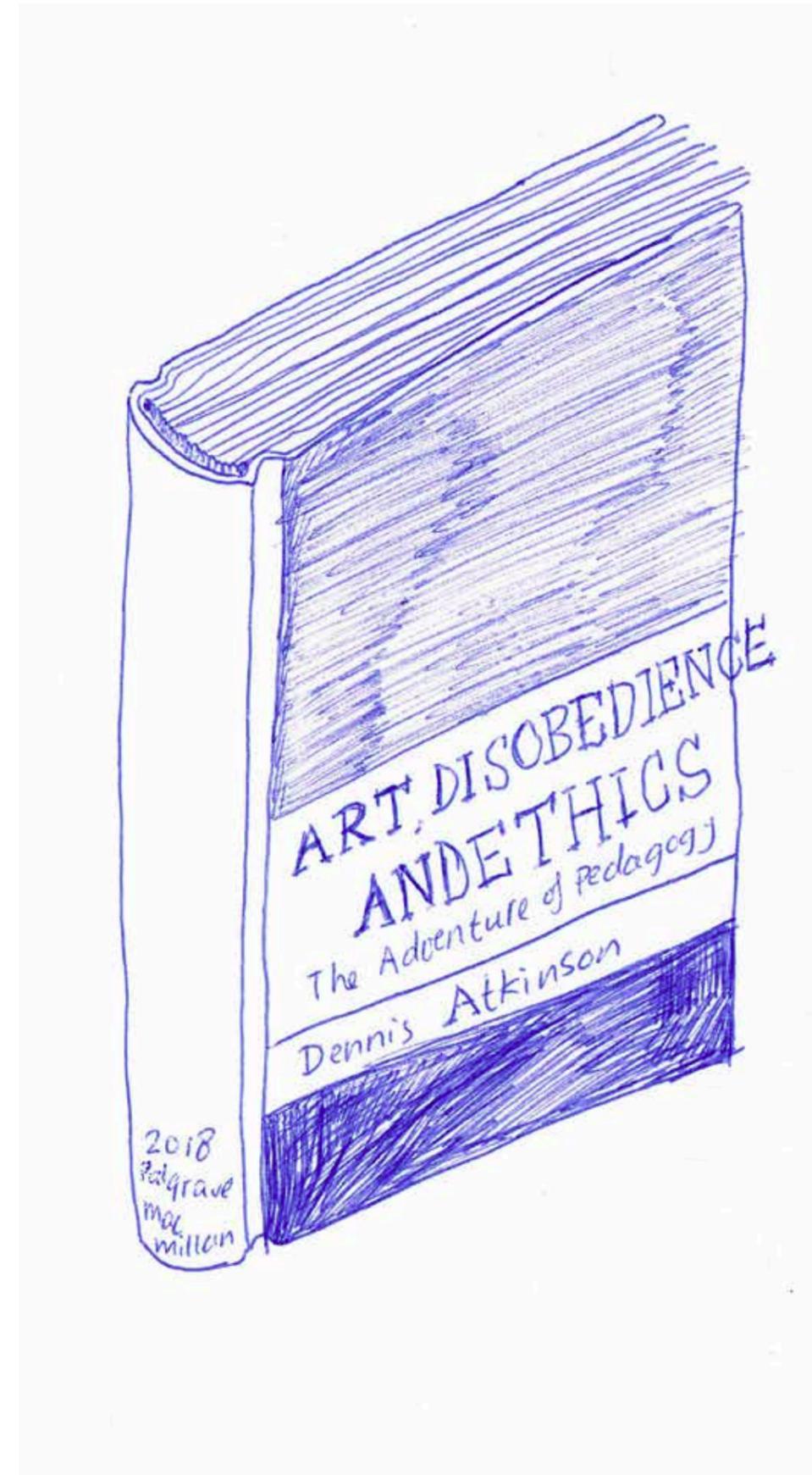
(Deleuze and Guattari) A line of becoming has neither beginning or end, origin or destination, a line of becoming has only a middle. A becoming is always in the middle. (Atkinson, 2018, p.119)

Perhaps this is why I never learned as much as whilst working with the Ponies. All projects operate in this middle that Atkinson is talking about.

Being-in-the-middle, becoming-in-the-middle, moving-to-the-middle, making-in-the-middle, staying-in-the-middle.. The middle is a place where one connects. Where one has to be attentive. Where one steps out of it's bubble. Where one reaches out. The middle is a bold place, it is uncertain and unstable and therefore it is handy to bring some courage, fun, and curiosity.

I wonder if I can make any conclusions in this middle that I am pleading for. In a way this middle pleads for taking a step back from concluding. It is about a never ending process of learning and becoming. It also says that learning is never done.

I remember a teacher at art academy telling me and my classmates that our graduation project should not be the project that shows off everything that you can do. It should better be a new beginning. For something to come – in the future. We should better work towards something new. Now a teacher myself, I pass on this idea of not having to prove the things that you can already do, but to explain that one can still experiment and try out new things. Put on your adventure suit. As a teacher it is then interesting to ask your students what they want to learn (or are curious for) and why they want to learn this. It is handy to direct them into curiosity, and make them think of their own wish(es) that they want to explore. Firstly to make them conscious of these themselves, and



secondly to help yourself as a teacher. When you know what someone wants to learn or explore or is curious for, you can help (or remind) them toward this/ these direction(s).

“I think I’ve only been in the middle, until the end where I made a sprint. I never experienced being in the middle as comfortable as I did during graduation. I discovered the most in the middle. Throughout my studies I wasn’t often motivated to work on assignments and had problems finding what it was that I really like to do. Nobody listened carefully to what I said and only looked at what I made – which was often perceived as fine. In this last year I was listened to and so I was able to see that being in the middle is very valuable.” (Van Oosterhout, 2021)

My conclusion would be to take a step back. From concluding. From knowing. Not closing things up, but to open a door, to look for other ways of making and learning, other ways of design practice and art/design education. In which the middle is a ground base. A place to start but also to end. A place to stay.

Staying in the middle reminds me of Donna Haraway pleading for *Staying with the Trouble*. Haraway is talking about trouble, Atkinson pleads for a speculative or slow pedagogy and about a pedagogy of disobedience, whilst Ingold talks about a poor (or weak) pedagogy.

Trouble, slow, disobedient, poor, weak, other terminologies that one can add to this list are ‘anti-discipline’ (posed by Reinier de Graaf) and ‘No University’ (a book by Jeroen Lutters), the ‘No School Manifesto’ (another book), ‘undesigning’, ‘unlearning’, etc. I don’t want to name drop, but there seems to be a tendency to promote all these interesting ideas, but with negative terminology. It is clear that these flow upstream. They oppose to the current tide, and plead for else-wise. But they don’t make it sound attractive, nor inviting. It is easy to be against things. But what if you plead for what you want instead?

I would plead for a pedagogy in the middle, where nothing is absolute. Where opinions exist next to each other. Where making and researching create new openings for other new things to make and research. Where what you make and what you research contributes to a greater good and in that sense doesn’t create end stations, but instead creates new beginnings or starting points. For you, or for another(s). Or for both.

I don’t like points. I think it’s stupid summing things up. Lines aren’t things running between two points; points are where several lines intersect. Lines never run uniformly, and points are nothing but inflections of lines. More generally, it’s not beginnings and ends that count, but middles. Things and thoughts advance or grow out from the middle, and that’s where you have to get to work, that’s where everything unfolds. (Deleuze, as cited in Lord, n.d.)

**A pedagogy in the middle**, just like making in the middle. How does one do that? Pony work is all about making in the middle as much as my teaching is about maneuvering in the middle. Looking for growth. I could consider my students to be plants. I want them to grow. Some I give water, some need more shadow or sun than others, and again other plants only grow after some time of frost. Some plants will grow anyway, come rain or shine. To me teaching is like gardening. You intend things to happen, you try to nurture the nature, you look closely at what is happening, and what is needed: water, shadow, compost, time, care, bees, worms, or a closer look? And you wait and see. Or you don’t see. It is an ongoing dialogue between me and the garden. I



want the garden to become resilient. So that it needs me less and less. And so that it will be able to cope with heavy rain, heavy sunshine and unexpected frost without losing vitality.

(...) the need to design an education system that fuels and sustains economic growth <--> one that is immersed in a more humanist and communal tradition grounded in the notion of a public good. (Atkinson, 2018, p.13) economies of performance <--> ecologies of practice (Atkinson, 2018, p.17)

So how does a student grow, the same way a pony project takes shape? They grow/take shape in the middle. And then, how does one stay in the middle? Or how does one get there? These are crucial questions to consider.

I learned with the Ponies because we were making in the middle. And because it was okay to not know all the answers to our questions. And because it was okay (or even crucial) to ask others to think along. Or not only think along, but to relate to a subject or a place with/through others. Including the voice of others, or perspectives of others, has always been crucial to shaping our projects. This voice can even be the voice of nature, or that of dogs living in a neighbourhood. Anything that gives more insight to a subject. Important to mention, is the otherness of this voice. That this voice comes not from like minded, but comes from someone outside of your bubble. It can be a microbiologist, a fisherman, a pastor, a neighbour, a satellite data expert, a plant, a rainbow, etc.

### **/ I learn therefore I am /**

I learn whilst teaching since I found out it is okay to not know about all the things that the students need. And that it is okay to ask them what works for them. And that it is more than okay to let them think along each other projects. Including the voice of the students, or the perspectives of the students, in my teaching practice has always been crucial to shaping my classes.

It seems important to ask, for whom is the practice of learning relevant, is it the learner, the teacher, the government.... these imply different agenda's. (Atkinson, 2018, p.61)

I also learned about friction whilst working with the Ponies. Often our projects zoom in on locations where there is friction. Often friction between citizen and (local) government. But there is also friction to be found between politics and nature. There is always one party that wants (or needs) to have control or be in charge, but this somehow never works – and therefore this leads to friction. Not working is perhaps not the right way to say it, but having (to have) control over situations means that not all voices can be heard. It is not an inclusive setting. We would specifically zoom in on this friction and try to see what needs to be exposed to open up this friction.

Looking at my students, there is always friction. The timing of a workshop within the overall educational programme might be mis-planned. Based on the curriculum, certain competencies must be met. I compare the government with the academy as an institution, and I compare the student with the inhabitants.

(...), sometimes assessment criteria may be irrelevant to the relevance of how something matters to a learner in a learning encounter. 'Have a care, here is something that matters!' (Atkinson, 2018, p.86)

Talking about friction myself: I guess half of my teaching practice consists of

♥ des'Ree - Life

Life  
Other

**'Questions are never exhausted by their answers but always give way to further questioning, none of which comes any closer to a solution but which nevertheless opens up to an on-going process of life.'** (Ingold, 2017, p.60)

Life



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKtrWU4zaal>

trying to be open to the unexpected. But how to be prepared for the unexpected? For me this is the hardest part. It makes me feel uncertain, I feel unprepared, and not 'on top of things'.

What is the force of art? (...) it generates new ways of making, seeing, thinking and feeling. (.....) The force of art, like the eventual force of learning, is restless, inventive and experimental, and has the potential to recompose our lives. (Atkinson, 2018, p.30)

Most of the time I feel unprepared. I try to have control over having no control. It is horrible. I sit behind my desk preparing a workshop, a lesson, or a lecture. And I never feel finished or done. And exactly here, to have control and to leave things open don't go along that easy, and therefore cause friction.

It is important to help students navigate to the middle and to help them enjoy staying and becoming in the middle. That is where their (if students be plants) roots grow. And if they can grow some roots, they might feed themselves from within in the near and further future.

Being in a system where students are graded on criteria they have not made themselves, it is sometimes a challenge to invite them to think of their own criteria. I try to tell them there are multiple perspectives on things, and that everybody is different, and I tell them they may have an opinion about these criteria. Also I tell them that it is okay to find other things more (or equally) important. Being in the middle then means that you see these external criteria, but that you also consider your own. And that both are existing, and come from a certain context. Of which one context is the one of the academy which has to deal with requirements from the government, and the other is your own very personal motivation to do things. They co-exist.

For me personally, there was more room to create autonomous work because I was not constantly measuring myself against the test criteria during the lessons. This worked very well for me. (Van den Berg, 2021)

### / the middle /

So, what do I mean with 'the middle'? And how does one stay in the middle. Or, before one stays there, how does one get there? And what does it mean to be there?

The process of a learning event is not linear and predictable, but is a constantly differentiating process beginning again and again in the middle. (Atkinson, 2018, p.124)

- **To work in public space, and/or close to a context helps to be in the middle. In contrast to working alone, on your computer, or in your studio. You have to share your 'appearance' with others in that same space/context. Which creates a setting in which you at least co-exist.**
- **To make work that not always solves a problem but that reveals or shows something (which again then leads to something else) leads to operating in the middle. For revealing something (instead of solving something) creates space for others to relate to the (same) matter.**
- **To take other perspectives into account means that you**



**broaden your knowlegde, your horizon. And to accept / see / research different perspectives is something that relates to staying in the middle. Things are never black and white.**

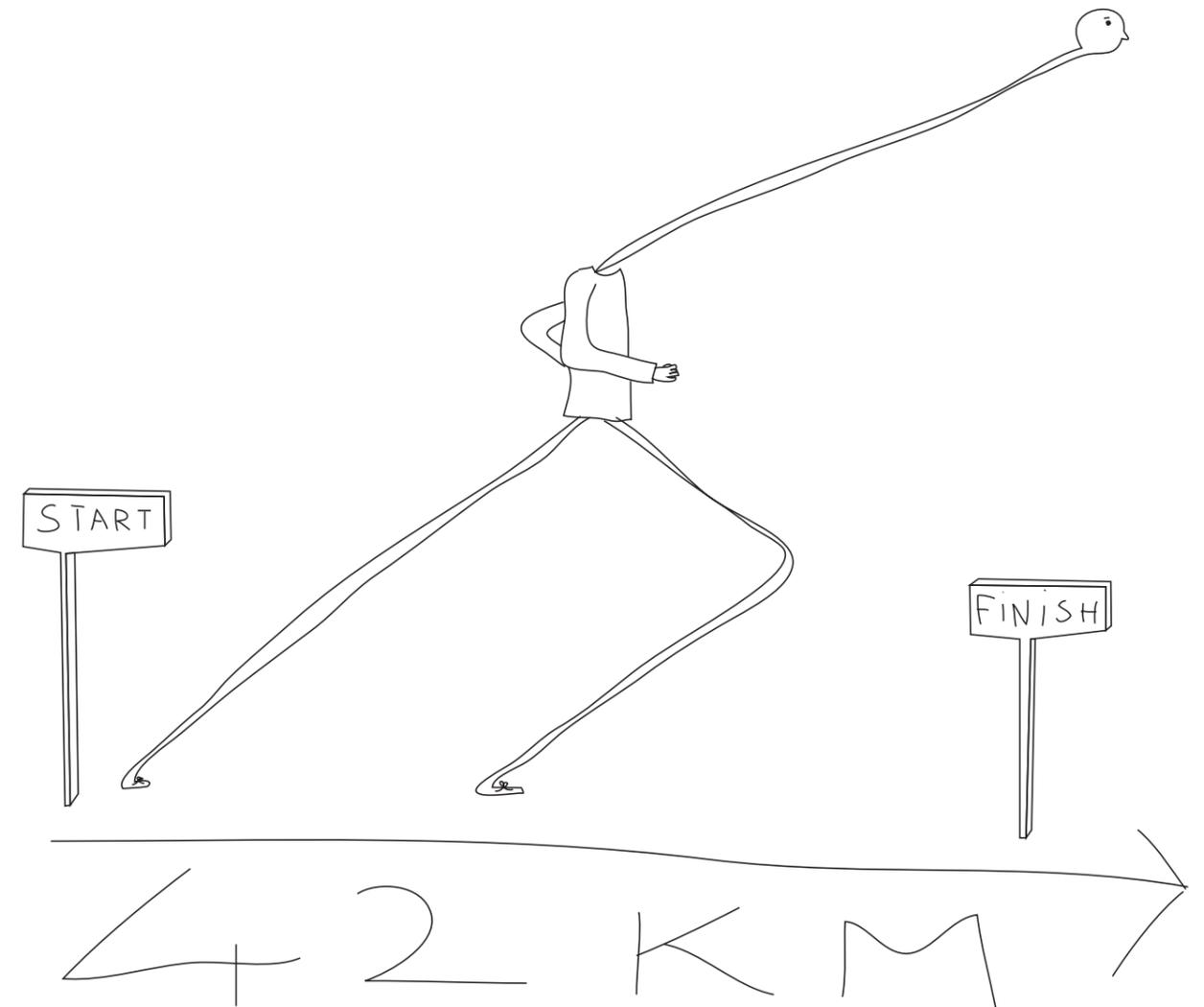
- **To ask questions or to question is something that moves one to the middle. One doesn't ask a question about something one isn't interested in. Asking questions has to do with curiosity. To not know (which is a reason to question, or to research something) and to question go hand in hand. I don't mean to doubt things, but to use the not knowing as a situation that makes you consider things. Not-knowing creates also space for others to contribute.**
- **I guess also the remark that Frans-Willem Korsten made during one of the classes that art and literature until the 18th century had intrinsic pedagogical motivations is something that relates to being in the middle. Art and literature to not be an end station, but to be a means to tell or show something.**

**/ extra /**

One has to be in the middle to be able to learn. Enjoying being in the middle is then a crucial thing. But enjoying being in the middle is also uncertain and unstable, and therefore some courage, curiosity, openness, and even having fun are more than necessary. Whilst writing this down I realise that these are the ingredients that I hold in high regard, and that these ingredients are the most important in my teaching practice. I am curious myself, but try to also water the curiosity of the student. I try to be courageous myself and try to pull the student into a certain daring modus as well. Openness has to do with the mindset that everything is possible, it is all about trying, asking, searching, finding. And, to be open goes along with some uncertainty. Which is good. And lastly, having fun? That was the lesson that Corona taught me. You can't survive without having fun.

I would like to end my writings with an exercise that Marina Abramovic uses in her teaching. In which she talks about not knowing as an interesting starting point. Whilst reading it one can replace the word 'student' with 'teacher', if that is more appropriate.

“Just to give an example, one of my exercises for my students when I was teaching I told them an exercise for three months. Buy 100 sheets of paper and one rubbish can. Put this on the table. Everyday in the same time sit on the chair and write your good ideas. Put the ones that you like on the left side of the table. Put the ones you don't like in the rubbish. After three months they want to present their good ideas, I am totally not interested in good ideas. So I took rubbish can, and every single idea in it was incredible. The ones that you reject are the ones that you don't know how to deal with them.” (Abramovic, 2013)



And now? What can I, or you, or we, do in the future? What should we do? In which environment? And when? And how? And why? Questions questions.

I often feel different. I feel like a different teacher, a different student, and even like a different colleague. Different as in thinking different, acting different, not easily fitting (any) system. It happened once, that I spoke about myself being an 'outsider', in a teacher meeting at art academy. It happened on the spot, and I didn't think much about it, but later I was told to not think of myself as an outsider – and to also not position myself like that. I was asked to not place myself outside of the group of colleagues. 'We are all outsiders', was said. I should be able to be like that within the group and not place myself outside of the group. It made me think. And they were true. To position myself as an outsider, I placed myself outside of the conversation, or perhaps I placed myself opposite the conversation, not in the middle at all. I did exactly what I don't want to do: pose opposites. Since those opposites stand outside of the middle. I thank my supervisors for inviting me back into the middle – and I felt quite stupid stepping outside of this middle.

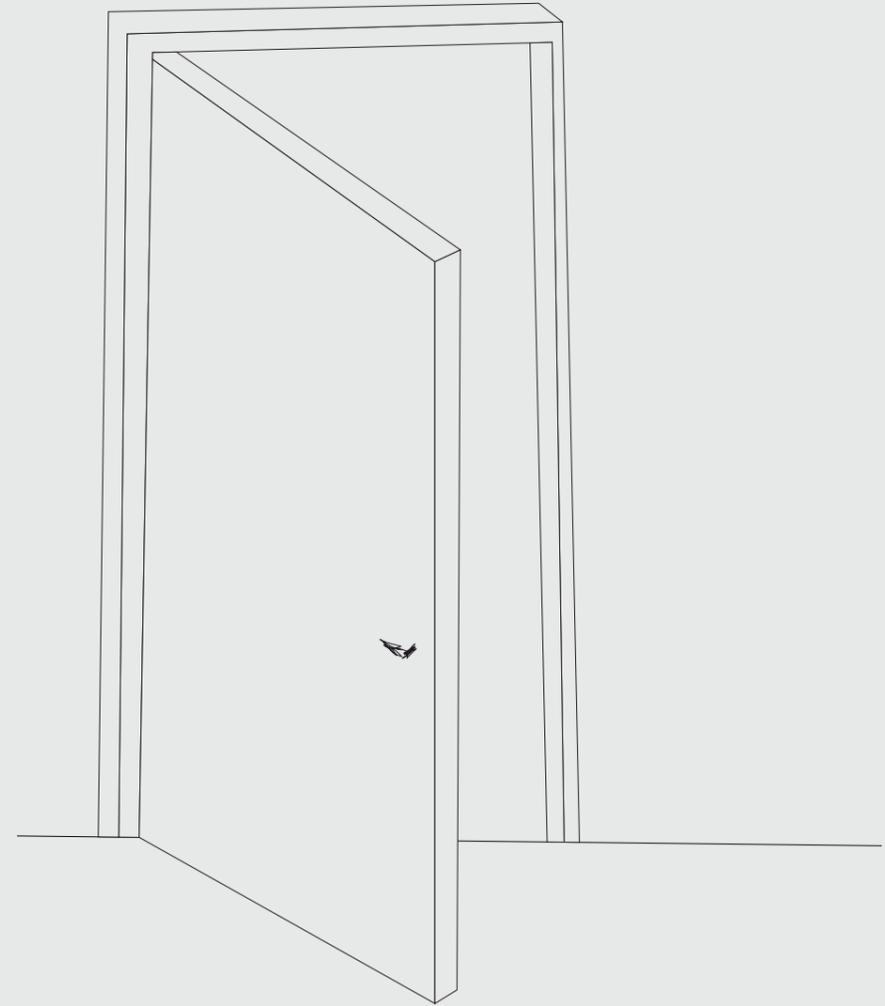
Perhaps we can try to think that there is no outside/outsider, that all is about living together? Can we see learning as an ecosystem, in which everything and everybody is related? In which we practice the act of balancing. And there is no balancing without the/something other.

Perhaps, also, we can try to not generalize? Zooming-in can be a tool for this. When you zoom in you realise that every situation, every context is different. There are no solutions that fit every case. There is no system that fits everywhere. And since formal education, and thus also formal art education belongs to a system, with hierarchy, with bureaucracy, with rules and assesment criteria, there will always be things that do not fit and therefore cause friction. Which is not nice, but at the same time this is just the way it is. The key is to not look for a solution, for you might have to change a whole system.

To not look for a solution is easier said than done. I am a person that easily gets irritated when systems and solutions don't work. Frustration eats me up from inside. I am learning though, to leave my frustration be and instead to try to open a door ajar (in Dutch: op een kiertje). If something frustrates this means something is not possible or not working. What if instead you try to make something possible, or make something work, the smallest thing you can think of?

Now that I imagine a door ajar. I have to think of a list of ingredients that I made in the beginning of my research. My intention of this list was to pinpoint things that are crucial in my pony practice. I made it a whilst ago, and therefore it feels old already. I am somehow hesitant to share this list, it feels unfinished and messy. Also I am not sure how to name it: a lexicon, a manifest, ingredients? But then, if I put my door ajar, you may take a glimpse. Please see it as an attempt to make the middle tangible, graspable, and to show the many possible ways that lead one to a middle or help one explore and stay in the middle.

Pick your cherry. Perhaps pick one that helps you to be in the middle.



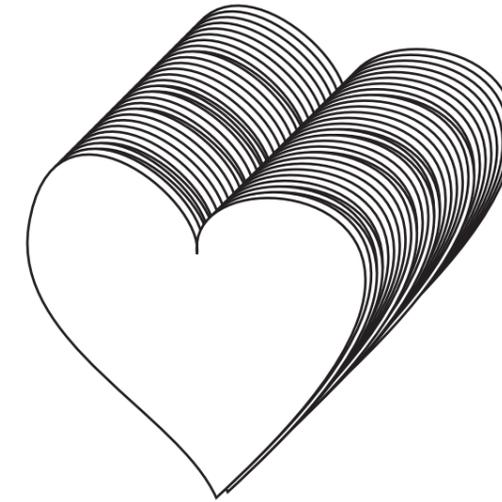
art(istic) value	<p>Show don't tell. Show don't solve. By making things visible they are given a stage. It is not about solving problems and creating solutions, but about showing things that are otherwise left unseen.</p> <p>The force of art cannot be captured by language . (Atkinson, 2018, p.156)</p> <p>Art having intrinsic pedagogical motivations. (Korsten, 2018)</p>
ask	<p>Ask questions you do not know the answer to. Take these as a starting point for your project. Ask questions that you are intrinsically interested in.</p> <p>The pedagogical imperative therefore is to initiate learning encounters, (...) that encourage learners to ask questions and formulate their ways of learning and the materialisation of their world in this world—to become disobedient learners—in the sense of being encouraged to go beyond what might be expected. (Atkinson, 2018, p.33)</p> <p>If we prioritise a pedagogy of immanence, then the pedagogical imperative is to try to understand learning from the perspective of the learner's capacities to learn and not to judge such capacities from external criteria. This form of pedagogical ethics demands that pedagogical work engages with the intrinsic capacities of learners, it requests that we try to understand how something matters for a learner in a particular learning encounter. (Ibid., p.107)</p> <p>Questions are creative tools for exploration that a learner may find relevant to her practice. Relevant questions try to actualise the power of a learner's practice, its particular concern or mattering for the learner. (Ibid., p.213–214)</p>
be attentive to / care / be concerned	<p>To know what is desirable, one has to be attentive to what matters. To what matters for a learner, but also to what matters for the world we live in.</p> <p>The promise of education lies in the capacity to respond and to be responded to: without such 'response ability', as we might call it, education would be impossible. (Ingold, 2017, p.5)</p> <p>(...) to attend to persons and things, to learn from them, and to follow in precept and practice. (Ibid., p.61)</p>
collaboration	<p>Find (a) partner(s) in crime to work with. Together you dare more than alone. To collaborate also means to learn from the other. Together you know more, you question more, you discuss more. You learn to relate to the/an other.</p> <p>Jan Boelen talks about the position of a designer nowadays being decentred. Not 'over and above materiality' but 'in the midst of a multitude of connections'. (Boelen, 2020, p.15)</p>

<p>Always think of the context of your project. Try to stay contextual. If you do an intervention the context is clear. But what if you document this intervention, where will you show it? Or if you have some conversations that you audio recorded, and that you want to write out and make a book of. For whom is this book? In what context does the book function?</p> <p>There are as many contexts of as there are perspectives on a subject. Your research can take place in a certain context. Your starting point can come from a context. Your manifestations have a context. What is your own context. Etc. Be aware of these contexts and think about where you show your project. And why.</p> <p>(...) Conneller warns, we should avoid the temptation to turn understandings drawn from one particular context of material-technical interaction into a meta-theory for everything else. Our task should rather be to describe and analyse every case in its ethnographic specificity. (Ingold, 2013, p.29)</p>	context
<p>Be curious. When you are intrinsically curious for something, your search for the answer will go automatically. We are curious because we care.</p> <p>Find a safe space to play, where learning goals are forgotten, where one tries to find its own learning goals.</p> <p>We are curious because we care. We care about the earth and all its inhabitants, human and non-human. We care about the past, because it helps us to better know ourselves and where we have come from. We care about the future because when we are gone we want to leave behind a world that is habitable for the generations that come after us. In short, curiosity and care are two sides of the same coin. That coin is truth. Research then, is the pursuit of truth through the practices of curiosity and care. (Ingold, 2017, p.71–72)</p>	curious
<p>Connect your project to other fields than your own. Try to avoid 'l'art pour l'art'. Don't stay in your bubble.</p> <p>(...) a dialogue is an ongoing process and an ongoing challenge, also because the question whether justice is done to all parties involved poses itself again and again. The challenge for education, therefore, is to stay in (the) dialogue and to acknowledge that the difficulty of staying in this place is an essential dimension of what it means to engage with and exist in the world. (...) which curricular domains might be particularly suited for the "staging" of the dialogue between child and world. (...) whether art offers specific possibilities here (...) art can – and in my view ought to be understood – as a thoroughly worldly phenomenon, a phenomenon in which precisely the difficult encounter of self and world can occur as an encounter in which the world appears as something different and other, as something that exists in itself rather than that it is just an object for us to master. Art, in this sense, can only be understood as confrontation (see Mäkikoskela, 2012) (Biesta, 2012, p.96)</p> <p>(...); a middle ground where we neither impose our will on to what resists, nor withdraw from it, but aim to establish a dialogue between ourselves in the world, so that our worldly existence becomes possible at the very same tie that the world becomes possible. (Ibid., p.100)</p>	dialogue

<p>encounter with the real</p>	<p>Step away from your desk and your computer. Investigate more in the real than on (the passive) internet.</p> <p>Perhaps the idea of a fundamental encounter proposed by Deleuze as the trigger for thought can be considered through the intense experience of standing inside a waterfall in contrast to standing outside and observing it. (Atkinson, 2018, p.122)</p> <p>(...) pedagogy has to support this encounter with the Real. Rather than being driven by assimilated objects or bodies of knowledge it has to try to accommodate learning encounters that precipitate new forms of learning. We might argue that representation controls thought and practice whereas events or encounters open up possibilities for new ways of conceiving and acting and in doing so may lead to new learning communities. (...) pedagogy as form of critical engagement. (Atkinson, 2013, p.143)</p> <p>(...) education which is neither child-centered not subject-centered but thoroughly world-centered, that is, centred on our wordly existence, that is, our existence in, with and for the world. (Biesta, 2012, p.94)</p> <p>(...) the world we live and act in – and this includes both the material world and the social world –is not a projection of our mind but has an existence of its own. This means that it is fundamentally <i>other</i>. This experience (...) is, in a sense, a difficult and frustrating experience, or it can be so, because it signifies how we might respond to and engage with the experience of resistance. (...) We need to engage with what resists, rather than destroy it or withdraw ourselves from it. (Ibid., p.94–95)</p>
<p>engagement</p>	<p>(...), we play practically no attention to the idea that engagement in school can and should provide intrinsic satisfactions, (...) (Atkinson, 2018, p.16)</p> <p>(...) how we, (in our role) as educators, can help the child to connect with the world or, as I have put it elsewhere (Biesta, 2006; see also Winter, 2011), how education can contribute to the ways in which the child can “come into the world.” Here the educational “task” as seen from the side of the child is one of <i>engagement with the world</i>. (Biesta, 2012, p.93)</p> <p>The task, in other words, is to engage with the world as a subject of action and responsibility and not as an object merely subjected to the world. (Ibid., p.94)</p>
<p>fun</p>	<p>Side projects are as important as main projects.</p> <p>It’s the side projects that really take off. By side projects I mean the stuff that you thought was just messing around. Stuff that’s just play. That’s actually the good stuff. That’s when the magic happens. (Kleon, 2012)</p>
<p>integrity</p>	<p>Be honest, don’t fake, don’t lie, don’t be superficial. Share your honest intentions/curiosity. Be humble. To relate openly to others is easier when you can be honest and open yourself.</p> <p>If at first you don’t succeed, cry, cry again. (Vriesendorp, as cited in Jacob, 2018)</p>

<p>Show, don’t tell.</p> <p>Actions in public space are often twofold. The action in itself can be a work in itself (endgoal), but also the action can be a means that leads to something new, like a shift in perspective, a dialogue, a new revelation that had not come to the horizon without the act.</p> <p>Schlingensiefel’s body of work included a series of actions and provocations intended to jolt German society into recognizing its own flaws. He once famously invited Germany’s unemployed population, which numbered in the millions, to swim in Lake Wolfgang, where Chancellor Helmut Kohl was holidaying. Schlingensiefel’s plan was that these legions of bathers entering the lake would flood Kohl’s nearby holiday home. The project was doomed to failure — only a few dozen people entered the lake — but it attracted enormous media attention, not because it flooded Kohl’s house but because it addressed an issue of national importance in a manner calculated to generate awareness. This is one way in which artists can affect the institutions of power: by organizing actions or interventions that highlight neglected issues. (Obrist, 2017)</p>	<p>interventions in public space</p>
<p>Try things out, try new things, try to stay for a whilst in the not-knowing.</p> <p>[...] think about learning in terms of encounters, lines of becoming, and the task of building a life. (Atkinson, 2018, p.24)</p> <p>Learning, in the Deleuzian sense, is not to remain within established ideas or practices but to try to connect with changes and potentials brought about by new experiences, or encounters that create new kinds of intensities and ideas in relation to actual entities that expand our capacities of becoming. Example: You can teach perspective (or other methodologies) as an established drawing system and form of representation, or you can initiate a learning encounter in which learners are challenged to respond to the problem/s that the drawing system we know as perspective attempted to resolve. (Ibid., p.134)</p>	<p>learn</p>
<p>Not knowing might take time. Don’t rush things.</p> <p>For not knowing might lead to ‘knowing (not knowledge)’. (Atkinson, 2018, p.20)</p> <p>When engaged in art practice, when subject to the lure of art practice towards unforeseen possibilities, often we do not ‘know’ what we are doing, we are experimenting, there is a sense of direction but no clear pathway. Our “primary glimmerings of consciousness may reveal something that matters” but we are frequently unaware of the consequences or outcomes of this process. It is a process of experimentation and struggle without a clear sense of outcomes, yet we are gripped by the lure and force of practice and inquiry. The pedagogic task is therefore to try to respond effectively and discriminatingly to this ‘unknown’ and ‘uncertain’ experimental process as it occurs in each learner’s practice. (Atkinson, 2020, p.120)</p>	<p>not know</p>
<p>There is you(s) and there is the other(s), there is never you alone. How, when, where and why do you connect/interact/infiltrate or relate to the other(s)?</p>	<p>others</p>

<p>perspectives</p>	<p>Realise that there are always more perspectives on a subject than yours. Do find out your own perspective.</p> <p>For example, we might witness an actual situation in which a body is hit by a rock but then read it as an accident or, on the other hand a violent assault; how we read the actual event will change it in its incorporeal being. (Atkinson, 2018, p.134)</p> <p>Some kinds of stone are heavy, others light; some are hard, others soft or crumbly; some separate into flat sheets, others can only be split into blocks. All things considered, Conneller (2011: 82) concludes, 'it is clear that there is no such thing as "stone"; there are many different types of stones with different properties and these stones become different through particular modes of engagement'. (Ingold, 2013, p.30)</p>	<p>Do active research. Not only sit behind your desk and think and google.</p> <p>(...) knowing is a process of active following, of <i>going along</i>. These were people who had always lived by fishing, hunting and herding reindeer, so for them the idea that you know as you go – not that you know by means of movement but that knowing is movement. (Ingold, 2013, p.1)</p> <p>We do not obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because “we” are of the world. (Ibid., p.5)</p> <p>We cannot make the future, however, without also thinking it. What then is the relation between thinking and making? To this, the theorist and the craftsman would give different answers. It is not that the former only thinks and the latter only makes, but that the one <i>makes through thinking</i> and the other <i>thinks through making</i>, The theorist does his thinking in his head, and only then applies the forms of thought to the substance of the material world. The way of the craftsman, by contrast, is to allow knowledge to grow from the crucible of our practical and observational engagements with the beings and things around us. This is to practise what I would like to call an <i>art of inquiry</i>. (Ibid., p.6)</p> <p>You try things out and see what happens. We need (...) not to accumulate more and more information about the world, but to better correspond with it. (Ibid., p.7)</p> <p>Making, then, is a process of correspondence: not the imposition of preconceived form on raw material substance, but the drawing out or bringing forth of potentials immanent in a world of becoming. (Ibid., p.31)</p> <p>The task, in other words, is to engage with the world as a subject of action and responsibility and not as an object merely subjected to the world. (Biesta, 2012, p.94)</p>
<p>relate</p>	<p>Step away from the computer, step out of your head. Into the real world. Relate to this world. Relate in your way. There are so many ways. Don't think and make everything yourself.</p> <p>We should sort things out / If we care / Like we say we do / Not just empty words / For a week or two / Make the world / Your priority / Try to live your life / Ecologically / Play a part / In a greater scheme / Try to live the dream / On a wider scene (The Beloved, 1993)</p> <p>complex trajectories of becoming with: making-with, questioning-with, feeling-with, talking-with, seeing-with, guessing-with, risking-with and learning with. It is a process of co-existing. (...) adventures of making-with. (Atkinson, 2018, p.226)</p> <p>(...) 'interesse'. This Dutch word has remained very close to its Latin root. It refers to taking a position in an 'in-between' ('inter-esse'). (...) 'Interesse' has therefore an ontological dimension – a way of being that reflects the interconnectedness of everything with everything – and a psychological dimension - an open attitude that is willing to connect. (Vandenbroeck, 2012)</p>	<p>Soft data (such as personal stories, nuances, background information) are crucial data. To be able to find these one has to be attentive, make things personal and zoom-in (instead of zoom out), look from real close.</p> <p>Soft data contains qualitative data, whereas hard data contains quantitative data.</p> <p>Soft data is information that is too spread out and too nuanced to be included in statistics. However, this says nothing about its significance. Without involving soft data in the spectrum, an incomplete picture is created.</p> <p>(...) Soft Data (...) is full of opinions, suggestions, interpretations, contradictions and uncertainties. (Objectivity, 2015)</p> <p>(...) I felt I was a better artist walking the street instead of sitting in my studio working on paintings (Rothuizen as cited by Adams, n.d.)</p>



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Writing this thesis I felt very lonely. In a hole like a mole, looking inwards. But looking inward I found a pan on the stove, in which a Pony soup is simmering. I thank you for having collaboratively written the recipe of this soup.

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Questions are creative tools for exploration that a learner may find relevant to her practice. Relevant questions try to actualise the power of a learner's practice, its particular concern or mattering for the learner. (Atkinson, 2018, p.225)

LOOKING BACK

