



Rogue Academy

Conversational Art Events as a Means of Institutional Critique

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Abstract

'*Rogue Academy*', developed as a research project, comprised two curated dialogical interventionist art events presented here as visual arts case studies. The research scrutinised aspects of a university art school as a critique of the common type of institutional structure that provides educational instruction in contemporary art practice. The case studies sought to use a form of parasitic activity independent of, yet attached to, the art school. The strategy was to further develop the relationship between the institution and participants in the projects into mutually symbiotic platforms that would encourage social engagement, artistic autonomy and co-productivity. The platforms were designed as agonistic tools for use in future art programming and education curricula to enable current unconventional practice in the field to be brought into the academy so that they could work together with existing educational and exhibitionary structures.

My original contribution to the field of visual arts is in the identification of a curatorial methodology informed by a 'Community of Inquiry' approach that is self-regulated and has a use-value. It is a conversational tool for staff, researchers and students within tertiary art institutional structures to foster the acquisition of knowledge and empowerment through intervention, curiosity and inquiry-based learning.

Central to the investigation is the idea of an essential coupling of conversation and contestation as necessary to the possibility of creative and productive practice and engagement.

Contemporary institutional structures, such as art schools, and especially the bureaucratic, corporate, and commercial determination of those structures, render problematic the very possibility of such 'conversational contestation'. Likewise, the unquantifiable, flexible processes and outcomes of many unconventional contemporary participatory practices make awkward the development of structured undergraduate teaching and learning. My research identifies a significant gap in knowledge that adequately accounts for social, community and participatory practice, as well as providing critical grounding needed to validate these fields of practice within an academic environment.

The interventions that made up the project were pluralistic and curatorial, devised to foster social exchange, inquiry and conversational contestation in a provincial art school, as a means to understand and deal with the wider cultural ecology that artists in training will come to

experience. The research was undertaken as a response to, and an institutional critique of, the lag between aspects of contemporary art and undergraduate art education—the former characterised by open-ended practices that are socially engaged; participatory, process-driven, co-productive, performative and dialogical, the latter by traditional studio-based models of practice that demand projected and measurable results.

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Preface

The two case studies were durational and reliant on a first-hand experience to grasp the important indistinguishable elements of the projects, such as the mood of discussions, changes of energy in a group situation or fluctuations in the dynamics of a project over time. The PhD examination is put forward here as two case studies plus a written exegesis that combined to structure a written thesis. The decision to submit this research as a written thesis rather than an exhibition and exegesis was based on perceived difficulties in locating the examiners in real-time during these more nuanced aspects of the projects. Finding the most opportune time, however, does highlight the role that a chance encounter plays for public engagement in these works, and echoes some of the concerns of critics toward socially engaged and participatory works of art, which are expanded on in Chapters three and four.

Additionally, I have put forward some potential solutions broadly interpreted from other fields. The research has thus come from an artist's standpoint, rather than that of an educator, philosopher, political theorist or sociologist: nonetheless, approaches from these disciplinary practices have informed the investigation.

INTRODUCTION

This Introduction presents the broad context of the research as a critique of the culture of Western neo-conservatism, in which academic institutions over the last fifteen years have become highly bureaucratic. There was a ripple of discontent around the corporatization and standardisation of education throughout the mid-latter part of last century, in particular, Ivan Illich (1973), Paulo Friere (1970) and bell hooks (1994) for instance. Since the beginning of the new millennium, however, there have been a series of debates on art schools and how they operate in relationship to the neo-liberal realm of global economic politics.¹ Irit Rogoff (2010c) is a leading commentator who identifies the commercialisation and standardisation of higher education as having eroded creative autonomy, flexibility and innovation in curriculum development. My original contribution to the field of visual arts is in the identification of a curatorial methodology informed by a ‘Community of Inquiry’ approach that sits as a ‘useful’² conversational tool alongside existing educational formats, to enable a mode of agonistic engagement and a degree of autonomy. Different types of events and practices are examined for their limitations as well as their ability to explore the idea of social efficacy and agility to mean something beyond a consumerist art culture and bureaucratic capitalism.

The case studies in this research were developed as platforms for communal engagement and intended for staff, researchers and students within tertiary art institutional structures that promote the acquisition of knowledge and empowerment through curiosity and self-regulated inquiry-based learning. Future educational courses that support spontaneous dialogical and community programmes create a unique opportunity for the artist in training. It enables them to produce particular conditions of learning; one where students themselves can develop learning strategies and material rather than being dictated to by the elementary course curricula; and one where more value is placed on the teaching of art as a process in action, rather than as ‘pre-determined content’ (Richardson 2010). The flexibility these courses also offer enable a shift in understanding of the role of the artist from an individual presenting separately authored works to an artist as part of a community—where the artworks are as a result of a communal act of sharing and co-production (De Bruyne and Gielen 2009a).

¹ Through the course of this research, it became necessary to define the term ‘institution’; for this purpose, the meaning of the term will be identified as an educational, museum, gallery or organisational facility. It is also the instrumentalisation of art proper as ‘institutionalised’. Establishment is another such term.

² ‘useful’ in this sense is not a general pragmatic condition that can be easily institutionalised, rather it is in the category of ‘use-value’ that socially intervenes into a situation as a self-regulatory disrupter. See Wright, Stephen. 2013-14. “Towards a Lexicon of Usership.” In *Museum of Arte Útil*, ed Nick Aikens and Stephen Wright. Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum.

While this research is conducted from my position as an artist-researcher rather than a teacher, education has nonetheless been part of my professional art practice over the last fifteen years. The specific development of a Community of Inquiry platform through the research has thus coalesced into an educational *and* artistic tool to value-add to a tertiary art curriculum.

The historical model of the Black Mountain College in North Carolina is an example of the model of education I allude to, however, it was often seen as a failed utopian vision. Refusing to be pinned down to formulaic methods of organising its founder, John Andrew Rice, once argued to potential funders who requested more definite 'plans' that 'the more carefully drawn the plans of what was to be, the less it would be' (Duberman 1972, 15). Because of such passion, Black Mountain College became highly exposed to some of the pitfalls of basing an institution on the dedication and commitment of a few highly enthusiastic individuals and their ideals, rather than taking in some of the established models of educational management. Despite the School's palpable sense of community and educational excellence over its thirty-three year existence, which still influences the community today, it was eventually regarded by many as a failed educational model because it relied on ideology over sound bureaucratic governance (ibid. 526).

While it is essential for any enterprise to have high functioning administrative structures and systems of financial governance, as education moves to become a more consumable product, there is an attendant increase in institutional bureaucracy. A substantial amount of literature published on the adverse effects of proliferating bureaucracies, which include the alienating effects of centralised teaching and administration, the loss of staff and student communities with the casualization of employees and to some extent the streamlining of curricula to include online learning, all collude to impact on the experience and quality of education.³

The principles of educational reformist and pragmatist John Dewey, who was passionate about the *experience* of education and art, played a significant role in the foundation of Black Mountain College. His naturalistic approach to education placed him in the open-minded category of educational theorists whose views still resonate in some quarters today, particularly within the field of social, participatory and collaborative education and art practices.⁴ Dewey argued that the "[E]xorbitant desire for uniformity of procedure and for prompt external results

³ The argument for an overly bureaucratized education system is not a recent phenomenon with John Dewey (1916), Ivan Illich (1973) and Paulo Freire (1970) being amongst the early critics.

⁴ See Finkelpearl, Tom. 2013. *What we made: conversations on art and social cooperation*. Durham & London: Duke University Press. p 343-361

are the chief foes which the open-minded attitude meets in school' (1916, 157). This 'uniformity of procedure' relates to the bureaucratic control in institutions, which increasingly rely on predictability and measurable outputs that reduce an institution's ability to accommodate genuine, open speculation and experimentation to foster new and innovative practice. It could be thus argued that art education, placed within an increasingly corporatised university system is rendered problematic in its service delivery (Smeltzer and Hearn 2015). On the one hand, it must deliver an education that fits into a corporatised system of financial success as defined in a neo-liberal context, while on the other it does so at the expense of open-endedness and autonomy (Mollis and Marginson. 2002). It is this conflicting position within which the university art school finds itself that questions the validity of its 'product'.

In terms of education as a commodity, in my experience as an artist, arts administrator and educator, I found that artists tend to learn the most important aspects of practice *after* their undergraduate schooling. These include those characteristics vital to innovation and exploration such as flexibility, open-endedness and truly unencumbered experimentation. In many cases, this extends to the valuable experiences of social engagement in the arts often not accommodated in undergraduate-level education, either in course curricula or in the social experiences within the modern university. In addition, social practice, community participation and co-production are among the essential requirements being evidenced in the recent push from agencies that provide support to the arts. Their agendas are set towards social and community involvement, open-ended processes, interdisciplinarity and participation, many of which are not covered adequately enough as essential outcomes in base-level art education. Thus, many tertiary graduates are left ill-equipped to yield to the constantly changing conditions in which they must survive in practice after graduation.

Among further discourse at the end of the first decade of the new millennia, many publications were validating Rogoff's concerns (Madoff 2009, Deschooling Society Conference 2010, Allen 2011). While these examples mostly refer to postgraduate courses at universities in Europe and North America, similar issues do not appear out of place when considering undergraduate courses and curricula in Australian universities.

Australian universities are becoming creatively dull. In a post-Global Financial Crisis climate, many institutions have accumulated large, unyielding bureaucracies that are 'killing off original

thought' because of uncompromising fiscal accountability (Murphy 2013).⁵ Another account states that universities are now spending proportionally more on bureaucracies than academia to draw in international students and entice more support for research programs from business and industry (Graves, Barnett, and Clarke 2013).⁶ At the same time, anecdotal evidence I collected over the three years illustrates a deep concern by educators in art schools, particularly at smaller universities and regional centres, that the preferencing of sciences over the liberal arts and humanities drives economic outcomes to satisfy the increasing demands of bureaucracy, and the market.

It is my contention that the overbearing nature of contemporary university bureaucracies, and the way in which they operate within these institutions to enable education as a commodity, creates an imbalance where the pressure to perform means bureaucracies themselves, not educators, end up inadvertently influencing new programmes and courses or creating standardised programs that are efficient and profitable (Sawyer 2009). Partly as a response to this increasing bureaucracy in tertiary art education, artists and other cultural agents in the field are developing new approaches to pedagogy, and cultural institutions, such as museums, galleries and artist-run-spaces, are taking on educational and pedagogical functions normally associated with academic curricula.⁷

*Context: Art and the academy*⁸

Since the beginning of this century, a number of prominent publications, conferences and symposia identify a dilemma in tertiary art education, which comes at a time when there is an increase in pedagogical initiatives by artists. The causes for concern are highly complex, the details of which are outside this thesis, however, two main concerns appear to highlight failings within university education – the lack of autonomy in the production of knowledge and the standardisation of education, both of which are acknowledged in a variety of sources as having a negative impact on creative art practice. While new pedagogical initiatives in universities are not a new phenomenon, artists are initiating new initiatives that include setting up free schools, social events, publications and organising symposia, workshops and conferences as means to

⁵Accessed 24 May 2015

⁶Accessed 20 November 2013

⁷ The author and curator, Nicolas Bourriaud, also confirms this in recent writing, Bourriaud, Nicolas. 2015. "Revisiting the Educational Turn (How I Tried to Renovate an Art School)." *ArtReview* (November).

⁸ The term 'academy' referred to throughout this writing is the generic name given to the university tertiary art school for undergraduate and postgraduate studies

test new and emergent platforms for education and knowledge production (see - Helguera 2011b, Panigirakis 2012, Pearson 2009, Salter 2011, Vidokle 2010b). From the research, it appears that artists are now becoming increasingly involved education, as a mode of artistic practice or as an adjunct to traditional pedagogy, however while there is some evidence of this being attributed to one or both of these factors, it is not conclusive.⁹

From a broader perspective, as I alluded to earlier, there have been suggestions from some quarters that university education more generally is becoming consumed within an extremely bureaucratic system of control (Connell 2013, Manne 2012). In Australia, as in other parts of the world, university education as an entity is commonly understood to transcend pure economics. With an increasing bureaucracy of global neoliberal politics, however, widespread concern over its dominating control has meant that education has moved from a ‘special kind of corporate entity’ into a disempowered economic model of neoliberalism (Aspromourgos 2012). Many writers allude to a multitude of common causes that are a reflection of neoliberal agendas—from the rise of the ego-centric hyper-individual (Charlesworth 2014) and increasingly inflexible bureaucratic structures (Rogoff 2012), to the casualisation of teachers (Brown, Goodman, and Yasukawa 2010) as well as cutbacks to funding resources (Wilson and Watson 2009, Biggs and Tang 2007, 1). In the art world, fora such as the *e-flux* online journal, *Bologna* in (2010), the anthology, *Art School; Propositions for the 21st Century* (Madoff 2009), the *Deschooling Society Conference* (2010) and *Education* (Allen 2011) for instance, outline these and other educational issues which continue to be topical at the time of writing.¹⁰

The most significant key terms used in this thesis are that of **social practice**, which encompasses other terms such as socially engaged art, community art, dialogical art, pedagogical art, participatory art, interventionist art, littoral art—all of which acknowledge direct social engagement with a form of consequence or cultural transformation as a result. It is occasionally described as a form of expanded relational art. **Cognitive forms of aesthetics** is a form of art that takes as its point of departure an intellectual or thinking mode of production that, for an artist, takes priority over a visual aesthetic. **Community of Inquiry** is an approach to communal inquiry that is driven by egalitarian approaches for the production of knowledge. The term **parasitic** is used here is when something attaches itself to a host, and a **sybiotic** process is when that parasitic behaviour results in a shared common good. The term **rogue**

⁹ Evidenced in educational projects such as *Unitednationsplaza* Berlin 2006-7.

¹⁰ These writings predominantly refer to a European context—as a reaction to the Bologna Agreement, a mechanism for university standardisation across Europe. I mention it here because it has had a trickle down effect in other regions including Australia, and is now aligned with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).

describes an aberrant mode of behaviour that employs unpredictability in a way that would normally describe a person or thing that behaves in an unpredictable capricious way.

The development of the two case studies was in response to concerns of a neoliberal drive to market education, where managerial control over the academy has shifted from hands-on to a type of 'remote control', as university managers centralise services into 'hubs' and reshape its core business to fit the market. Within this system, educators who endeavor to put student interests at the fore, are placed under increasing pressures to shape curricula to best suit profitable economic models (Connell 2013, 107-08). Rather than remain flexible to shifting changes in culture and society, I contend here that this remoteness causes a reliance on quantitative measurements (student/ teacher ratios, research outputs, cost efficiency and other performance indicators). This effectively limits the possibilities for genuine understanding in the field of practice outside the academy and places educators in a position of conformity and compliance, rather than knowledge production. As such, the academy has become a non-democratic and non-egalitarian place to learn.

Change to these systems would take a substantial shift in thinking and the probability of transformation in the near future seems remote. The 'Rogue Academy' was therefore developed to test plural models of process-driven creative practice and exhibition to work alongside these systems. Their goal was to engender autonomous modes of communal engagement, collaboration and participation in learning. They were designed to create tension by symbiosis and mutuality—forging beneficial relationships between the highly regulated and ordered system of university curricula, governance and powers, and the practice of art in the field.

In relation to the 'educational turn', the 'Rogue Academy' was a response to a gap between what is being taught in the academy (as a site of learning), and what is going on in the field of creative practice (acknowledged as a site of research activity). In my view, the gap is an issue that is caused by the detached control over university curricula and the freedom of learning. As a mode of institutional critique, I mounted two projects that were educational as well as exhibitionary—research experiments that used conversational hermeneutics, based on the work of the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), and a Community of Inquiry approach from the Philosophy for Children movement, to stimulate egalitarian

thinking and learning. Experimental platforms such as these could be future working models for a new ‘social pedagogy’ (see -Smith 2012).¹¹

The two sub-projects that comprised the ‘Rogue Academy’—which I refer to in this research as ‘case studies’, were the creative component or the ‘studio-based’ equivalent of this practice-led research. Developed as two unique platforms for structured and unstructured participatory processes, the projects encompassed social gatherings, artworks, and discussion events, stimulating modes of play through non-hierarchical but agonistic, or quietly discordant activity. These sometimes formless and open-ended activities elicited social agency through curiosity and inquisitiveness. They were fundamentally co-productive, process-oriented, dialogical and performative. The events were set out to be accessible, multi-dimensional platforms that included workshops, installations, master classes, residencies, meetings, round table discussions, potluck dinners, performances, discos and collaborative writing. They were devised as ‘alternative’ thinking spaces as much as they were alternative spaces for pedagogy and the presentation of art.

This utopian gesture was, for a number of reasons, compromised at times, from the project’s location within the institution’s dominating power structures to the limitations of funding application requirements and security issues—all of which weakened a claim for true egalitarianism. It is argued that these restrictions were recognised and dealt with as a useful way to rethink how pedagogy might overcome hegemonic conditions in art making. The aim was to see if the production of experimental forms of knowledge production, through means of a conversation art project, could be successful when applied to formal art schools. This idea was to augment—not replace, traditional experiences and platforms for learning—their purpose was to quietly disturb, and thus put into question, ingrained forms of understanding, expanding the production of knowledge. This model was not antagonistic; rather it sought to provide the means to quietly trouble fixed understandings as *agonistic* modes of behavior (Mouffe 2006).

¹¹ The term *social pedagogy* originated in Germany mid last century and referred to progressive modes alternative learning. <http://www.infed.org/mobi/social-pedagogy-the-development-of-theory-and-practice/>. Accessed 9/7/14

The research problem

Two main concerns underpin the rationale for this research; the autocratic and inflexibility system of pedagogy brought on by the neo-liberalisation of contemporary institutional structures, and the reliance of art schools to remain with a formal modernist paradigm, are problematic for contemporary artists in training. As previously mentioned the rising demands and interference by an increasingly oppressive bureaucracy on academic institutions, as they move education into the marketplace, hampers curricula experimentation needed to keep atop current practices (Bishop 2007). Coupled with this, is the continuation of tertiary art schools to teach to a studio or 'silo-based' (Beaux Arts) model, which not only reinforces the hierarchical principles but makes course curricular less relevant, in a practical sense, to those working across disciplines and fields of knowledge in the art world (Fleischmann and Hutchison 2010).

At issue is the matter of control over truth; using top-down management designed to satisfy a set of bureaucratic, governmental and corporate requests, today's academy has a greater need to comply with modern demands, rather than be faithful to the fundamental values of autonomy in institutions and practices (Graves, Barnett, and Clarke 2013, Manne 2012). Education as a marketable product, student as customer, (Sharrock 2013) the reduction of government support across the sector with concomitant pressure for more innovative research to attract corporate funding, all play a role in the way bureaucracy controls the production of knowledge through education. When the language changes to describe what education entails it sounds something like this:

The university finance department can describe students as customers, while their employers may describe them as products of one kind or another and their teachers, simply, as students (Gaita 2011).

When the language of commerce invades university culture, these scenarios bring into question the preservation of a rigorous, autonomous teaching, learning and research platform.

From university mission statements, city council policies and government funding bodies, a growing importance is now placed on public art, that encourages greater social and community inclusion in art making. This includes collaboration, participation, community engagement, and cross-disciplinary and institutional engagement, which are encouraged as a means of expending public fund and fulfilling specific agendas.¹² Despite some cynicism by those in the

¹² An example is the Hobart City Council that closed its only art gallery, The Carnegie Gallery, instead redirecting its focus on for more people-oriented, community engaged art projects.

field (as described in Kester 2015), these practices are nonetheless becoming popular and little about their development, processes, history or consequences are taught at the basic bachelor degree level.

Translating this into the field, for example, the Australia Council for the Arts has, in recent years, supported 'live art' that included 'social practice'. It likewise stated that 'in 2013, one-third of Australians reported engagement with community art in the previous year, an increase from a quarter in 2009'¹³ The Council also developed a new initiative called 'The Platform', an interactive online resource for artists working in social and community engagement.¹⁴ This notion of live activated works that include forms of sociability and community has been similarly recognised in other countries including in the UK by national arts bodies, and major museums and art galleries (Froggett et al. 2014, Higgins 2012).

Despite the increased popularity of funding agencies toward social and cooperative engagement in public art, it remains an important question as to why more activity in this area is virtually absent in foundation-level art courses. Authors Katja Fleischmann and Clive Hutchison from the James Cook University argue that many contemporary workplace settings, particularly those that are involved in IT and communication are working in cross-collaborative conditions. However, due to the 'silo mentality of disciplines', teaching students to prepare themselves for working in these situations after leaving university becomes problematic, and this constitutes a significant gap in knowledge (Fleischmann and Hutchison 2010, 25).

Within studio-based teaching at an undergraduate level in most parts of the Western world, medium specificity and material objects for visual display, as determined by a formalist modernist aesthetic, predominantly frame the primary, tertiary art course structures (Jackson 2011, 105, Pujol and Henry 2013, 110).¹⁵ In Australia, this becomes apparent when looking, as a potential undergraduate might, through the various visual art programs and award levels found on art school websites.¹⁶

¹³ See http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/artforms/experimental-arts/news_items/live-art Accessed 30/6/14 For information on participation; <http://artfacts.australiacouncil.gov.au/overview/participation-14/>; Accessed 12/10/15

¹⁴ See <http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/artforms/community-arts-and-cultural-development/>; Accessed 30/10/15

¹⁵ These references are just two are among many across different field in visual and performative art that describe the dominance of the modernist aesthetic in art school curricula structuring.

¹⁶ This sample is to show how prospective students might view the potential visual art programs, which are still predominantly structured toward medium-specificity. See the small-scale sample in 'University art school undergraduate courses' in Appendix C

Part of the issue for art schools and most tertiary education for that matter is that there are inherent problems with the assessment processes for collaborative work, due in part to the complex nature of social engagement. Despite a substantial volume of writing published on the development and criteria for critical analysis of collaborative group projects, they are nonetheless often unpopular with students. They present a variety of problems, from organising mutual times to issues over the fairness of input into the project and how to conduct the assessment criteria at an individual and group level (Biggs and Tang 2007, 219). For some the 'liberal arts', those that teach critical thinking and analytical skills, are not conducive to modern education curricula because collaboration is key, and most collaboration is learned *out* of school (Ruoff 2015).

Critically, there are inherent problems associated with the assessment and most particularly the handling of participatory works that have 'edgy' social modes of engagement. These are wide ranging and include issues to do with ethics, political opinion in activist works, legal implications and obligations as well as occupational health and safety. However, connections can be drawn from progress in the analysis of performance art. Performance art (not to be confused with the performing arts) is described as a:

performance presented to an audience within a fine art context, traditionally interdisciplinary. Performance may be either scripted or unscripted, random or carefully orchestrated; spontaneous or otherwise carefully planned with or without audience participation. The performance can be live or via media; the performer can be present or absent. It can be any situation that involves four basic elements: time, space, the performer's body, or presence in a medium, and a relationship between performer and audience. Performance art can happen anywhere, in any type of venue or setting and for any length of time. The actions of an individual or a group at a particular place and in a particular time constitute the work.¹⁷

While not offering a definite solution for assessment of social engagement in art schools, fundamental advances in the management of social art have been made by author and educator Shannon Jackson in her book *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. She brings performance art and theatre, which has a record of management strategies, assessment criteria and judgments, more closely aligned with socially engaged art and its diversity (2011, 19).

¹⁷ Wikipedia contributors, 'Performance Art', *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance_art Accessed 31/10/15

The problem of curricula development and assessment of social engagement are emblematic of general issues that artists in the field of social and community practice might endure—that of the quality of the social engagement and the ‘criteria of judgment’ (Bishop 2012, 245). Social engagement in a general sense is easy to attain, with Claire Bishop arguing, ‘there can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of collaborative art because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond’ (2006b, 180). These blurred values raise inherent questions about how to evaluate and assess the *level* and *quality* of social engagement in relation to the intention of the artist.

The artist and educator, Suzanne Lacy agrees that social practice is a tough area to develop teaching curricula. The fieldwork and background learning necessary for critical social practice in the visual arts is extensive, and art schools are not yet able to adequately equip students in areas such as systems analysis or social theories for instance (Lacy 2015, 3:05).¹⁸ The wide-ranging field of knowledge required in conducting critical socially engaged art places it in contrast to the standard art school assessments that value expertise in a particular medium. It is hard to identify expertise in a specific ability, when so many varied skills are required in socially engaged art (Helguera 2011a, 83-84). Besides the inherently process-based, durational and active nature of the works, live art forms have a propensity towards indeterminate outcomes, not a premeditated outcome like an object for display. The collaborative character of these works tends to be an awkward fit within scheduled timetables, individual assessment requirements (Barrett 2006), and the production of something to *look* at.

In summary, educators such as Claire Bishop (2011, 198) and Irit Rogoff (2010c) are among those from a wider pool of scholars who question the value of corporatised, bureaucratised, commodified education and associate these tendencies with broader neo-conservative politics.¹⁹ Drawing on the preceding work of political theorists and, in particular, the work of Chantal Mouffe (2006), these writers pose a problem of institutional consensus and hegemony maintained to the exclusion of radical modes of creative practice from the curriculum (Ault and Beck 2006, 6).

¹⁸ Some universities, however, have established postgraduate courses such as the University of Melbourne’s, VCA-led Masters of Community Cultural Development, but currently there appears to very few undergraduate courses in social practice. Lacy herself has developed a graduate course in social practice at OTIS in Los Angeles.

¹⁹ The corporatization of education appears to have begun around the end of twentieth century where there is a move toward the market-driven mode of tertiary education described in the writings of Henry Giroux (2002, 2015) for example. In Australia an increasing bureaucracy is thus needed within universities to maintain market profitability, however some suggest that such managerialism has profound affects on the quality of education, its autonomy and standardisation (Saunders 2006, Sawyer 2009, Thornton 2013).

The vast majority of Western art-schools, at an undergraduate level, are still lodged in the traditional beaux-arts segregation of studio models that prioritise technique-driven, studio-based practice, yet some argue that the modernist ‘mastery of separate traditional materials is irrelevant to most of this generation’ (Ewing 2010, 160). Indeed most Australian university art schools teach predominantly from a studio-based model (Frankham et al. 2009, 26).²⁰ A brief survey of undergraduate art school courses²¹ taken from introductory promotional material found on university websites indicated no specific courses that teach socially engaged or community art.²² These results are despite the fact that for over forty years interactive and socially engaged modes of art making, described as ‘new genre public art’ for instance, have gained prominence as methods of professional practice (Lacy 1995, 12).

Along with others, it has been identified that consensus and hegemony, which occurs because of a highly bureaucratised education system, becomes problematic when economic formulas rather than epistemology determined teaching and course curricula (Manne 2012). The working proposition with which I began my research was that new social conditions of cultural creation have the capacity to generate useful tensions. These frictions attempt to alleviate static situations created by institutional consensus and hegemony, and provide alternatives that add value to the knowledge base by offering a view of contemporary art through a more social lens rather than through a specific medium or object-based practice that have a visual dominance.

My point in saying this is not to imply that artistic assessments in tertiary art education are simply based on a visual assessment, rather the aim is to counterbalance dominant method and studio-based learning by developing pedagogical platforms that support spontaneous dialogical and foster community. These open up a unique opportunity for the artist in training whereby there is a shift in understanding of the role of the artist as an individual presenting separately authored works to an artist who shares their ideas and content as part of a community of co-produced knowledge.

²⁰ This is not just restricted to Australia, but is a general global issue - see Ault, Julie, and Martin Beck. 2006. "Drawing Out & Leading Forth." In *Notes for an Art School*, edited by Mai Abu ElDahab, Anton Vidokle and Florian Waldvogel et al. Philadelphia: International Foundation Manifesta. 6

²¹ See ‘University undergraduate art school courses’ Appendix C

²² There are some examples of institutions in Australia that seek to diversify from the traditional silo-medium based modes of teaching, by introducing special units within courses, such as the University of Newcastle, which has recently developed an interdisciplinary creative arts major, See <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/degrees/bachelor-of-arts/what-you-will-study/majors/creative-and-performing-arts> : Macquarie University also provides an undergraduate unit: Participation and Community Engagement in Arts: See <http://handbook.mq.edu.au/2015/Units/UGUnit/FOAR300>, however, examining course curricula on many Australian art school websites, this does not appear normative.

The proposition prompted a number of questions that guided the case studies.

The questions were:

1. How can academic institutions evoke and explore social agency, used in alternative education, to intentionally generate new conditions for cultural creation?
2. In what way might it be possible to create ‘thinking’ forms of aesthetics that disrupt, yet complement, a traditional formalist emphasis on visual aesthetics?
3. What role can hermeneutic conversation play as a pedagogical approach to the creation of useful tensions to foster and enhance the production of knowledge in university art school settings?

Project aims

The objective of this research was to develop a ‘safe’ platform as a flexible tool for art schools to introduce, develop and enable contemporary modes of social and communal engagement. The ‘Rogue Academy’ would effectively support emancipatory forms of knowledge production by quarantining projects from authority and regulation through bracketing them out in time and space. In a manner, similar to how we understand a ‘festival’—as a separate time and space for specific celebrations (Gadamer 1986, 39), these projects too are insulated, providing them with the capacity to develop new initiatives, rethink rules, conventions and economic constraints that hamper many creative endeavours. The aim was to quietly unsettle the hegemony of the modernist inspired beaux-arts system of teaching—an uncontested and outmoded teaching and learning situation driven by an overly bureaucratic, economic-driven curricula currently underpinning the production of knowledge in art schools (Bishop 2011, Rogoff 2010c, b, Robbins 2010, Pujol 2009).²³

The motivation to develop a platform for ‘new conditions of cultural creation’ was in the reprising of a Situationist imperative drawn from the leader of the Situationist Internationale movement, Guy Dubord. In 1957 he addressed a company of would-be avant-gardists, with this provocative statement, ‘It’s not a matter of knowing whether this interests you, but whether you yourselves are capable of doing anything interesting in the context of new conditions of

²³ While formalist art practices were part of the program of art courses designed when visual arts first entered the university systems in Australia in the 80s, there appeared to be, from anecdotal evidence, a certain amount of freedom. This seems to be associated with a lack of experience in the transition process of formally placing art into a method-based institution rather than artistic freedom per se. However, with increasing neo-liberalisation within tertiary education, these freedoms ‘regarded as a thrilling hotbed of experimentation, bohemianism’ now appear to be curtailed. See Tamara Winikoff ‘What’s happening to Australia’s art schools?’ 2016

cultural creation’ (Debord 1957, 42-43).²⁴ I sought to build opportunities that might create a ‘situation’ for others to do something interesting, as an artistic and pedagogical ideal.

This ideal would provide as Irit Rogoff (2010b, 48:20) has termed “productive tensions”, whereby the hegemony of authority and tradition can be quietly unsettled. These modes of social engagement did not set out to overpower and replace tradition with yet another consensual form, but rather to engage social processes that ‘unveil all that is repressed’ (Mouffe 2006, 162). It was done in a manner that keeps the conversation open to generative and transformative processes; processes that are indeterminate and more likely to be accepting of the wide variety of artistic practices. These engagement processes would not be to make change for change’s sake, or as an activist protest—rather, it would be to generate a dialogical disturbance that provides the capacity for empowered action—one that confronts and reinvigorates stagnant situations. This is described by Chantal Mouffe as a form of political action called ‘conflictual consensus’, which is created by generating ‘friendly enemies’ (Miessen 2011, 109).

The dialogical dimension of the research drew on hermeneutical philosophy; that of conversational approaches to understanding. This approach sought to test the capacity of a ‘conversational event’ as a way to inform, in a pedagogical sense, as well as to challenge and critique more democratic and pluralistic ways to garner emergent knowledge (Palmer 2001, 39).

The Rogue Academy thus sought to superimpose conditions for social and communal dialogue in order to question and critique the current situation by:

- reinvigoration of the purported mission
- as a counter to stagnancy
- provide avenues for empowerment
- encourage plural rather than singular activities
- supporting open-endedness and ambiguity

My practical research aimed to identify and test modes of social engagement that might confront the consensus and hegemony of institutional control that I see as patterns of behavior perpetuating the myth of the single artist as author and producer of art. The legacy from the modernist drive for the solo artist as supreme genius occupies a particular space that instills a separation from the real world. It does this by putting the artists and their work on a pedestal,

²⁴ I also accessed part of the report in Bishop, Claire, ed. 2006a. *Participation, Documents of Contemporary Art*. London: Whitechapel Gallery/MIT Press.

and to some degree gives them celebrity status. For an artist this trajectory has in the past, integrated well into a consumer-driven art world (Pujol 2009, 7, De Bruyne and Gielen 2009b).

Artists being subsumed into a consumer driven art world were not only under interrogation, it was accompanied by an equally robust examination of the site in which art was presented, a critique that jolted the ‘innocence’ of the institution as a space for the ‘universal viewing subject’ to intersect with art. This institutional space was put under scrutiny by a number of artists in the 70s and 80s, (Kwon 2004, 13) and continues today in the form of discursive activity. Artists such as Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren and Marcel Broodthaers put forward their works as an institutional critique, but largely in a gallery context. Some years later artists were discovering other ways in which the notion of site was being examined. Mirwon Kwon argues that:

the distinguishing characteristic of today’s site oriented art is the way in which the art work’s relationship to the actuality of the location (as site) and the social conditions of the institutional frame (as site) are both subordinate to a *discursively* determined site that is delineated as a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate (2004, 26).

Kwon’s interrogation of the site sits in relationship to Grant Kester’s book of the same year *Conversation Pieces* (2004), where ‘dialogical aesthetics’ was becoming a cornerstone of institutional critique through increasingly social, communal and participatory conditions. The Rogue Academy would seek to interrogate the site of academia through these modes of social and discursive means.

Methodological approach

This research contributes to a body of literature and practice that has developed over the last forty years and which defines new and emergent forms of participatory and communal practice in what has since been called the social and educational ‘turn’ in art (Rogoff 2008, O’Neill and Wilson 2010). There is a network of artists and commentators whose practice and reflexive commentary give form and a theoretical framework, and to some extent practical guidelines to this branch of contemporary practice. They include Anton Vidokle, Pablo Helguera and Tania Bruguera, as well as art historians Grant H Kester and Claire Bishop, and aforementioned curator, writer and cultural theorist, Irit Rogoff. They continue a line of questioning of established modes of teaching, curating and indeed art practice itself, in an attempt to define

alternatives to consensual and authoritarian methods of learning, and this builds on earlier discourse on education by such protagonists as John Dewey (1859–1952).

Along with other writers I drew a connection with these ideas, taken from the art world, and the term ‘deschooling’, associated with the writings of Ivan Illich (1926–2002), a pioneering educationalist who promulgated alternatives to the authoritarian structures that support standard education. He maintained that a more fluid, open approach would improve the schooling experience and produce better thinkers. Illich and others, such as the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921–1997), championed a redistribution of authority; the handing over of the power invested in the one who knows (the teacher) and shared with those who do not know (the students). The aim was to undermine the overly rigid structures common to traditional education systems (Illich 1973).

Numerous commentators have taken Illich and Freire’s lead, arguing that authoritative educational structures are formed through entrenched systems of domination or a universal consensus. A similar situation has been observed in the reception of art, whereby we subjugate artistic practice to what Mouffe calls ‘uncontested hegemony’ (2006, 153). In other words, we apply convenient and well-worn categories of history to art making, and if they do not fit the practice, then we marginalise that practice. This relegation causes the practice not to be addressed in a critical way, a condition that I and others contend, has happened with the different modes of social practice in Australia (Badham 2010). Claire Bishop argues that socially engaged art is one such mode of practice that has failed to be properly criticised, and that critics and the academy have been negligent in this respect (2012, 245).²⁵

Foundation-level courses in the main appear to have declining relevance to art practice in the field (Richardson 2010, Pujol 2009, 3) and the established pedagogy that remains has been increasingly overlaid with these neo-conservative values based on bureaucratic control, aimed at marketing education as a commodity. As the educator and artist Ernesto Pujol comments ‘the history of creative expression is linked to the history of freedom’ (2009, 9), and this intrusion works against the central purpose of an educational institution as a place where creativity and autonomy are validated (Gaita 2011).

²⁵ Apart from a number of peer-reviewed essays, the case studies in this research likewise have not undergone critical analysis. As test-sites for dialogical and communal activity, they have been subject to the author’s observations and reflections as well as research higher degree scrutiny by peers, visiting scholars and supervisors.

New genre public art, including social and community practice are increasing forms of practice in the field, with public and community engagement becoming an important aspect for supporting and enhancing our understanding of political and social culture. However the managerial complexities, involved in establishing critical courses at a fundamental level, are expensive and time-consuming (Lacy 2015, Helguera 2011a). The question remains however, as to whether or not bureaucratic and old school hegemonies can be shifted to include socially engaged art and community art into an art school curricula, bringing it more into line with real-life experience for an artist in training. 'The Rogue Academy' attempts to fill this gap in knowledge.

If emerging artists are to yield to the constantly changing conditions in which they must survive in practice, they need to address this absence and often return to self-directed graduate study to learn about contemporary social and community practice. The gap likewise appears to be filling at a graduate level, where some universities are now offering specific courses that appear to be addressing the push from funding and support agencies toward social and community involvement, open-ended processes, interdisciplinarity and participation. Some American and European schools offer masters degrees in social forms of practice however at a foundation level, as mentioned previously, the complexity of teaching social practice, requires flexibility and a multi-disciplinary approach to establishing a critically engaged curricula, which for most academies would prove to be economically challenging.

Over the last few decades, models of established pedagogy have been increasingly overlaid with the neo-conservative values and bureaucratic constraints.²⁶ These limits work against the central purpose of an art school as a place where a cultural value is placed on creativity and autonomy—validated by the very idea of separation from the market as a political agenda-driven force. These bureaucratic activities, seen in the push by governments to restructure their arts funding reduces autonomy by offloading public funding into the private system. This is through new research initiatives with public and private corporations, as well as through crowd and philanthropic funding, for example, all of which bring into question the autonomy of the material and knowledge produced.

²⁶ This is anecdotal evidence collected over the past 20 years of my practice where colleagues, students and fellow artists suggest that when art schools first entered the university systems in the 80s, there was a degree of freedom, or honeymoon period, that appeared to diminish as art became enmeshed in bureaucratic and academic standardisation. See also Winikoff, 2016.

Tertiary art institutions in the main are still educating artists to produce works suitable for museum and gallery exhibition, which by extension places them into the public realm as objects to be consumed, as a viewer audience, but also as a buying audience (De Bruyne and Gielen 2009b). This is in the face of recent closures of many commercial art galleries.²⁷

For promotion, most of my artist friends and colleagues who have been through or are teaching at art schools, place great emphasis on significant curricula vitae to attract an art gallery, a collector, curator or a museum as a form of an agent for marketing. One only has to look at the websites of most commercial galleries to note that along with the works on display, there is a page for their curriculum vitae or biography. The great value placed on the breadth of detail, such as the important names and institutions provided in this document, has its drawbacks. As Pablo Helguera writes in his book *Art Scene: The Social Scripts of the Art World*, it is difficult to maintain ‘an aura that guarantees the elevation of one’s work to a realm of notoriety, while at the same time dealing with the terrestrial realities of everyday life’. Artists are storytellers; known to blend art with life—as the biography is a key source of information in deciphering an artist’s worth; these profiles become problematic for critics and historians (Helguera 2012, 42-43).

However, the art world is changing. In global financial systems, there is a declining economic environment, and the commercialisation of art has been hindered. Individual attainment, medium specificity and notoriety increasingly become less relevant with some artists finding it difficult to consider product-driven modes of thinking in a troubled society. Society is thinking in ways that are more diverse; more multidisciplinary and social in the way they do business evidenced by the emergence of the sharing economy typified by the rise in popularity of Uber and Airbnb. Artists are no exception, as they become more socially responsive and entrepreneurial (Deresiewicz 2015). Many visual arts practitioners are moving into the public arena, developing socially engaged projects that focus on community engagement, sharing dialogue and working in other multidisciplinary ways outside the gallery system, rather than exhibiting individual object or medium-based works (Ravetz and Wright 2015). Furthermore, I am observing that many artists are thinking in more communal ways when leaving art school; with artist-run initiatives now turning into shared spaces for public discussion and engagement. By way of example, two such projects are the ‘A Centre for Everything’ organised

²⁷ In 2013 up to 30% of Melbourne’s commercial galleries have reportedly closed see; Petrie, Andrea, and Benjamin Preiss. 2013. "Bleak picture emerges as galleries battle to hang in." *Sydney Morning Herald* May 12. Accessed 12/10/15

and facilitated by artist-curator Will Foster and artist Gabrielle de Vietri, and writing projects and publications such as *Das Super Paper* and *Un Magazine*.

There is a global body of evidence to suggest that social engagement, community engagement and participatory practice is increasing (Badham 2010, 84). The mantra of funding bodies and institutions is community engagement and participation, particularly at a local government level. This is evident in initiatives such as Creative Hobart, Perth City Council's Public Art Strategy and Melbourne City Council's 'Arts and Participation program' all of which suggest socially engaged art, community and participation as part of their inclusion policies. The Australia Council has also released a Community Relevance Guide with some state government's arts agencies publishing guides to community engagement.²⁸

Marnie Badham, one of the few academic writers in Australia on the topic of socially engaged art argues, due to its interdisciplinarity and relatively obscure aesthetics, very little critical value is placed on it as an art form. She maintains that if we neglect to address the artistic merit of these modes of practice, 'we will lose the social impacts'(2010). Likewise, social practice falls into what writer and academic Gregory Sholette calls 'Dark Matter'. In this he describes as 'all work made and circulated in the shadows of the formal art world, some of which might be said to emulate dark matter by rejecting art world demands of visibility, and much of which has no choice but to be invisible' (2011, 1). It can only be a matter of time before tertiary institutions add to their degree programmes by embracing 'dark matter' in the form of new communal modes of social practice that motivate collectivity over individualism. This project seeks to disrupt some existing institutional programmes and structures in an attempt to *rethink* the fixity of foundation-level degrees and add the notion of 'sociability' and 'community' to the way in which artists are educated.

My role as a researcher in these projects came out of an interest in, and frustration with, facilitating conversation as a process in artistic practice. The move toward hermeneutics was faithful to Gadamer's writing and his approach to conversation itself; it was an occasion in which I already found myself "in' the world 'along with' that [conversation] which is to be understood' (Malpas 2009), so it became a natural pathway. Past experiences of facilitating

²⁸ <http://www.creative.vic.gov.au/the-community-relevance-framework/about-the-community-relevance-guide/>

Accessed 31/10/15.

The Queensland Government's 'Engaging Queenslanders: Methods and Techniques' – <http://www.qld.gov.au/web/community-engagement/guides-factsheets/> Accessed 15/6/15:

Creative Victoria's 'Making Art with Communities – A Work Guide'

http://creative.vic.gov.au/research_resources/resources/making_art_with_communities_a_work_guide Accessed 30/10/15

conversational processes in my art practice were inquisitive, reflexive and enabled me to observe and respond as the conversational events unfolded, however these erred on the side of conservative, convivial niceties. More valuable to my practice would be to develop challenging conversations with a provocative, yet non-combative element. Gadamer's interest in the structure of conversation was significant in this respect. Further investigation into the Community of Inquiry approach revealed that hermeneutic conversations, if conducted well, have the potential to expand artistic practice for artists and educators. The flexible and inquisitorial nature of the methodology lends itself to developing structures that can readily adapt to current issues, topics and debates in society and integrate them into art projects and art education.

Conversation thus played the central role in the research with the development and processes of the case studies in the form of conversational events. Throughout both case studies, many versions of dialogue such as a chat or verbal discussion between two interlocutors or people occurred extensively. As well as in the colloquial sense, a more particular sense of conversation (as an event) delineated in hermeneutical philosophy, has been put into operation. In this sense, conversation specifically takes the 'other' into consideration; the purpose of conversation understood in this way is that it generates understanding by establishing shared horizons or viewpoints, but always in respect to the matter at hand, and that understanding is never final.

The matter at hand is at the heart of conversational hermeneutics for we need to establish the core of the discourse. The commitment to the fact that something matters is an idea that comes out of the writings of Martin Heidegger in his essay *The Origin of a Work of Art*, where he illustrates that for truth to reveal itself, something has to be 'set' up in the 'light of its being', or for the bringing of 'something to stand'. In other words, Heidegger identifies the opening up of a realm in which something at stake can appear (1935-37, 162).

My role in the 'Rogue Academy' was that of a facilitator of these conversations—a role that comes from the Philosophy for Children movement's Community of Inquiry approach, which has been applied to Habermasian communicative discourse as well as to Gadarmarian hermeneutics. An important element of my role is in the establishment of a flexible platform around which the matter at hand can be examined in a critical, yet emancipatory way. Characterised predominantly as a participant-observer, this facilitatory position was as an interlocutor in a conversation but also an enabler whose responsibilities were to keep the

dialogue going. This required that I be a curator, instigator, administrator, provocateur, co-producer, ringmaster, witness and artist, but over all my function was two-fold—to assuage and incite ongoing dialogue.

The more provocative element of this facilitatory role conversely uses several versions of ‘weakness’ associated with hermeneutics. The most obvious being that which could be considered the ‘weak’ aspects of conversation itself, such as respect, sharing horizons and admitting to not knowing something, using play and the festival (as opposed to the more brutish carnival) for instance. All of which conveyed in the right way can disarm the violence (in Arendt’s terms) in discourse just enough to strengthen the quality and outcome of the conversation.

Another application of weakness, is seen in the notion of ‘weak thought’ a term used by Gianni Vattimo, a student of Gadamer, who conversely advocates hermeneutics as a mode of political force to emancipate the oppressed. Weak thought is born out of relinquishing a certain mode of metaphysical thinking and with it any metaphysical conception of truth (Malpas and Malpas 2015). In his interpretation, Vattimo considers the ‘weak thought’ of the weak as ‘revolutionary’ in that it draws back from fixed modes of thinking that would attempt to determine in advance. It is flexible. It draws back to allow things to emerge as themselves and it does not coerce. It is playful. Vattimo and his co-author Santiago Zabala argue in their book, *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx* that:

hermeneutic weak thought is the thought of the weak, of those who are not satisfied with the established principles imposed on them and who demand different rights, that is, other interpretations. In this politics of interpretation, conversation becomes the realm where the powerful describers of the world can listen to the requests of the weak and perhaps change their selfish priorities (2011a, 107).

Vattimo and Zabala apply this quiet (or weak) revolutionary theory politically as a conversation, in which it acts as emancipatory by ‘weakening absolutes, truths, and foundations... because of the enemies it has attracted’ (2011a, 96). Their position described as the ‘anarchical vein’ of philosophy, attempts to tie hermeneutics to politics and more explicitly incites ‘an effective conception of existence for those who do not wish to be enslaved in and by a world of total organization’ (2011a, 139). Theirs is the weakness of the dis-empowered, a weakness that challenges oppression and provides the capacity for emancipation.

Vattimo and Zabala recognise that weak thought causes discreet but important changes to hierarchical systems by undermining entrenched fixed ideas. As a facilitator of the two case studies, I sought to illustrate the weak aspects of hermeneutic conversation as a mode of thinking that refrains from metaphysical certitude, and to use in the projects as a strategy to give capacity for empowerment and transformation.

The research seeks to add to a scholarly field of writing and adjunct art projects, conferences and journals that are attempting to reconcile unquantifiable, open-ended forms of art practice, and in some respects attend to hierarchical modes of fixed behavior through the development of more democratic modes of engagement in art education. Traditionally schooling, as we tend to associate it, is ‘a discipline for increasing the territory of what is known’, however, we are culturally accustomed to believing that not knowing something is an experience that is ‘somehow lacking in merit’ (Cocker 2013, 126), instead preferencing fixed modes of thinking and determinable outcomes. Hermeneutics attempts to counter this by retreating and acknowledging the unknown, and using these weak attributes as a flexible and powerful tool for understanding. Art practices that encompass elements of hermeneutics seek to expose or lay bare already known truths, opening them up for re-interpretation.

Irit Rogoff best describes these modes of practices as having “inconclusive processes”—those she says, “whose outcome might be learning, or researching, or conversing, or gathering, or bringing new perspectives into circuits of expertise” (2012, 8:26). The ‘Rogue Academy’ investigated platforms for contestational conversation using hermeneutics as a means to establish sites of tension—for evaluation, empowerment, pluralist activities and open-ended, processes. These ‘unsettling projects’ cultivated useful tensions to reinvigorate outmoded systems of teaching and learning—flash points that enabled opportunistic, fluid, transformative and emancipatory conditions through providing facilitated and multifaceted dialogical events.

The ‘Rogue Academy’ draws a link between conversational hermeneutics (Gadamer 1975) and ‘agonism’, a term that has been a strong element of recent discourse on social art practice associated with the political theorist, Chantal Mouffe (2006). In conversation, agonism is created by a tension or contest—which opens up a realm of understanding by renouncing violence (the shutting down of conversation by strong opinion for instance) and through the application of weak thought or non-coercive engagement. These findings have their genesis in Nietzsche’s thinking on agonism as contestation, and are illustrated in *Homer’s Contest*, where

he examines the importance of the ‘action of the *contest*’ itself rather than the win (Nietzsche 1871-2, 177). The notion of a *agonism* can also be seen in the work of Hannah Arendt, who understood the political distinction between ‘power’ as collective, emancipatory and congenial, and ‘violence’ which justifies its means by a different overpowering, artificial mode of control that is achieved by disabling engaged dialogue (Arendt 1970). This analysis considers that these agonistic interpretations have their foundations in hermeneutics.²⁹

Mouffe, whose views are used here as they currently occur in the discourse on social practice, has a more nuanced version of agonism in which she describes it in various ways as ‘friendly conflict’, but which nonetheless comes out of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Arendt. Making these connections both supports the ramifications of—and yet challenges, the critical concerns of those such as Bishop, Rogoff and Kester over democracy, autonomy and evaluation in socially engaged art and its pedagogical associations.

These terms are among a number of commonly used references throughout the thesis and are a culmination of ideas drawn from Mouffe, Kester, Gadamer and others, as they relate to social and communal modes of dialogical engagement. The term autonomy is referred to here as a sense of freedom and self-understanding that is derived not through thinking and being independent as separate from others, say in the case of heightened individualism, rather through an open and ongoing interrogation of oneself that continually attends to others—and the place in which we find ourselves. I see autonomy applied in this way in the individual and in public institutions and structures of governance. In the same manner, public entities must always reflect on their self-entity—but always in relationship to, and respect for, the people and situation they find themselves in. Autonomy thus is like a communal conversation where one needs to remain open to recognise one’s position in relation to others and the wider parameters of our existence in the world.

Democracy is also another term used frequently through out this research. It is referred to here not just as an attempt at inclusion and equality in participation, but as an egalitarian mode of behaviour that is ongoing in its questioning of top-down authority, particularly those that are dedicated to finiteness. It is that which enables an open ended, hospitable space for

²⁹ This is despite some doubt as to Nietzsche’s unusual contribution to contemporary hermeneutics. This may be reflected through his broad sense of hermeneutic concerns, his generalist views on interpretation and a relative lack of the word ‘hermeneutics’ in his texts. See Babich, Babette. 2015. Nietzsche and the Ubiquity of Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics and Interpretation in Nietzsche. In *The Routledge Companion to Hermeneutics*, edited by Jeff Malpas and Hans-Helmuth Gander. London: Routledge. 85

emancipatory, autonomous ways of thinking across class-based distinctions. Importantly this space enables potentiality through disagreement that questions consensus.

Leadership is referred to in terms of how a teacher, a curator and an artist—even an institution behaves in their role in the exchange and development of knowledge. It is implied that leadership requires being recognised as having some authority over the subject at hand or in control of a situation. Again, in this research I question top-down modes of leadership as a way of interrogating the power of authority and its place in art and pedagogy. Rather I see leadership as a facilitatory position that is intertwined with my understanding of autonomy and democracy. This is where there is a relationship between the entity of leadership, the people and the situation. Good leadership too is like good conversation where there is an open space to lead, but also to be led.

By infiltrating the academy itself, establishing symbiotic modes of socially engaged art—conversational events that are able to quietly destabilise some of the normative conditions that have become entrenched in education, the ‘Rogue Academy’ through its sub-projects, offers a template of sorts for artists, educators, curators and scholars to openly address any issues of concern.

Moreover, hermeneutics used in this manner answers some of the critical discourse on the evaluation of socially engaged practice by offering a form of self-criticism; as a communal process of reflection, analysis and repurposing dialogue, the studies attempted to validate some of the ambiguities encountered in the presentation of people-oriented and participatory art practice. Of importance though is the fact that the conversation is not over; critical analysis of these projects is an ongoing process of evaluation, particularly in the papers, journal articles, collaborative writing projects and conferences, spawned from the two studies.

The practical research that comprised this project was conducted in the small arts community of Hobart in southern Tasmania, within the University of Tasmania’s School of Art. Over the span of the three-year project, it was amalgamated with the Tasmanian Conservatorium of Music and the northern art school in Tasmania’s second city, Launceston—the School of Visual and Performing Arts. The newly formed entity now takes the name of the Tasmanian College of the Arts (TCotA). Thus, the research unfolded amidst dramatic structural changes within the University, which significantly influenced the direction of the project.

The majority of professional artists living in Tasmania are alumni of this University. As the sole provider of higher education in the state, the University of Tasmania is a dominant employer and player within the local arts ecology, and, therefore, sweeping structural changes in this institution have ripple effects in the wider arts community. Though these critical changes have deep local significance, they are also representative of a wider phenomenon, since amalgamations and rationalisations are known to be occurring in higher education nationally and globally.

A strategy in the interrogation of the academy as a space of learning was coupled with a questioning of the role and function of a traditional university art school gallery. In a time of fiscal restraint, universities are struggling to justify their operations in purely economically rational terms, which for art schools include dealing with the increasing costs associated with the exhibition of art. To justify their ongoing support internal bureaucracies and external funding bodies are progressively demanding that the display of art meet certain criteria to remain relevant in culture and society and in this project, the gallery under observation was facing such a challenge.³⁰ Again, while particular local conditions prevailed, a crisis unfolding within this particular gallery can be related to other exhibition spaces that have traditionally formatted exhibition programming and rely on funding support from internal and external sources. These exhibition spaces are not only vying for relevance in the face of a downturn in arts funding, but also making a general transition from the 'white cube' standards of visual display towards pluralistic modes of audience address and exploring new ways to implicate their audiences.

In a recent anthology on education, the editor Felicity Allen has presented extracts from a number of papers written by artists, theorists and educators that indicate education has been at the core of many art projects, particularly since the seventies (Allen 2011). Since the beginning of the millennium, however, a number of artists embracing social pedagogy into their practice have been challenging traditional educational methodologies by setting up free schools, establishing online journals, and creating new social gatherings as educational platforms (Bishop 2007). It is within the spirit of such heterodox undertakings that this research stems.

³⁰ Increasing visitor numbers, engaging community, providing educational programs and targeting inclusion and diversity through youth, disability, multicultural and Indigenous programming are common criteria for justifying funding support from internal institutional bureaucracies and other external funding sources.

While conceptual art in Australia stems from the 1970s there is a dearth of substantial scholarly writing on socially engaged art in Australia, much less those aligned with dialogical or pedagogical art forms. As such, most of my references come from European and North American sources, as well as central and southern America where discourse that is more critical has taken place.³¹

My background in socially engaged art grew out of disappointment—mainly in the lack of expanded forms of practice at my art school and in my local community (which were to become the subjects of the present research). It also developed out of a newfound interest in relational aesthetics—when it eventually hit our southern shores in the early 2000s.

I became curious about the idea of a social ‘thirdspace’ for new knowledge, which I defined at the time as an undiscovered potential space that lay in the gap between the subjective and the objective.³² As a working modality, I interrogated subjects who had a working association to a particular physical space, trying to find new and not-yet-discovered intelligence about that relationship—which formed a series of conversations that developed into a final display of objects. (**Fig 1**)

³¹ These references are in addition to those already noted: Hurtzig, Hannah. 2003-ongoing. "The Mobile Academy." <http://www.mobileacademy-berlin.com/>, Nollert, Angelika, Irit Roggoff, Bart De Baere, Yilmaz Dziewior, Charles Esche, Kerstin Neimann, and Dieter Roelstraete eds. 2006. *A.C.A.D.E.M.Y.* Frankfurt am Main: Revolver Books, O'Neill, Paul, and Mick Wilson, eds. 2010. *Curating and the Educational Turn*. London/Amsterdam: Open Editions & De Appel, Podesva, Kristina Lee. 2007. "A Pedagogical Turn: Brief Notes on Education as Art." *Fillip* (6), Ranci re, Jacques. 1991. *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, Sholis, Brian, ed. 2009. *Anton Vidokle: Produce, Distribute, Discuss, Repeat*. New York: Lukas & Sternburg. Ault, Julie, and Martin Beck. 2006. "Drawing Out & Leading Forth." In *Notes for an Art School*, edited by Mai Abu ElDahab, Anton Vidokle and Florian Waldvogel et al. Philadelphia: International Foundation Manifesta, Deliss, Clementine. "Future Academy." <http://www.futureacademy.info/>, Esche, Charles. "Protoacademy." <http://www.foruma.co.kr/workshop/eng/proto.htm>, Farzin, Media. 2009. "An open history of the exhibition-as-school." In *Anton Vidokle: Produce, Distribute, Discuss, Repeat*, edited by Brian Sholis. New York: Lukas & Sternburg, Fletcher, Annie, and Sarah Pierce. 2010. "Introduction to the Paraeducation Department." In *Curating and the Educational Turn*, edited by Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, 195-200. London/Amsterdam: Open Editions & De Appel.

³² Based on the writings of Soja, Edward. W. 1996. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.



Figure 1. Fiona Lee, *CAST Board*, Plaster letters and extracts of a conversation, Contemporary Art Spaces Tasmania, 2010.
Image source: www.aboutconversation.com

After a while, I found this mode of art making formulaic, where it became prescribed and thus predictable; it felt as though I was simply repeating someone else's voice and lacked an edge or tension. Moreover, I began to recognise that in my social consciousness, the reinterpretation of someone else's information into my voice (or an object) felt high-handed and highly authored.

My interest moved more towards the *usefulness* of the conversations themselves and the transformative and generative capacity they were able to evoke. These thoughts led to the current research project, which is an attempt, through developing hermeneutic conversational approaches within an existing university art school, to find a way to make the institution a place that delivers empowerment and heuristic agency to individuals who teach and learn.

With the rise of a more technologically connected, networked society, where information and visual material is more globally accessible, public audiences for contemporary art are becoming more discerning. There is no doubt that we are operating in a context where audiences expect more and artists need to work harder to deliver more creative experiences to their public (Doherty 2014a). The Situations organisation from Bristol in the UK, has been developing

public artworks for the last ten years and have established ‘The New Rules of Public Art’ that confirm the difference in attitudes, where both artists and audiences must now start to experience and work by (Situations 2013).³³ While on the one hand I find these rules to be an over-simplification of some very complex and nuanced artistic conditions, on the other they do draw links to some key aspects of socially engaged practice in the public art arena, such as building community, temporality, authorship and democracy. They are included in the Appendix C as an exemplar.

The significance of this research

The significance of this research lies in the way in which the two sub-projects brought aspects of indeterminacy into the academy through educational platforms that support spontaneous dialogical and community programmes. This strategy created a unique opportunity for the artist in training where a value is placed on the teaching of art as a process in action and foregrounds the sharing of knowledge produced. This approach enables a shift in understanding of the role of the artist from an individual presenting separately authored works to an artist as part of a sharing community. It was a curatorial strategy that enabled the amorphous characteristics of indeterminacy to value-add, rather than compete with, the more rigid structures of quantifiable modes of evaluation. In doing so, it invoked the notion of a ‘non-project’. Accordingly, different events and practices were examined for their limitations as well as their ability to explore the idea of social efficacy and agility to mean something beyond a consumerist art culture and bureaucratic capitalism. The research provides a working model for the academy of the future by providing a critical connection between educational practice and current creative practice in the field.

This research project unfolded as two conversational projects as art events where the second, *The Plimsoll Inquiry (The PI)* built on the first, *Our Day Will Come (ODWC)*. *The PI* drew more forcibly on philosophical and theoretical considerations, some of which arose out of the first project, and as such was subjected to a greater level of critique and reflection—by me as a participant-observer, and by peers and other participants. *ODWC* was organised and physically sited as an adjunct; an appendage to the school developed by cultural outsiders, while *The PI* was positioned within the school itself and run by staff and students.

³³ See Appendix C for this document.

Establishing social and participatory modes of engagement appears to be in line with the contemporary need for culture to embrace community, collaboration and sharing—and as such, hermeneutics is a timely mode of practice. The relevance of hermeneutics to this research lies at a period in time where we need to question, while at the same time embrace, the set motives and agendas of agencies such as those from government, funding bodies and institutions, those who insist that we must engage more in community, develop more collaborations and share our resources. Coincidentally these engagements are hermeneutic in nature yet they also play an important role in developing pathways for disclosure and the capacity for emancipation by setting up strong linkages for the realisation of evaluative and self-critical approaches. This stealth-like style enables the development of platforms for an authentic socially engaged art practice to be inside, but adjunct to those who wield (financial) power, in effect acting in a mutually parasitic fashion.

Apart from some recognition from larger institutions that have educational programs such as the Tate Gallery, and some postgraduate courses both here in Australia and overseas, I have concluded that contemporary art education has its priorities on individual authorship, medium specificity and material objects for display.³⁴ It appears that despite some recognition for community projects becoming important in art, there is a dearth of opportunities for artists in training to experience and learn social forms of practice.³⁵ It appears that university education in art fails to address, at an undergraduate level at least, social, community, dialogical and participatory modes of art making that are occurring in the field.³⁶ A conference poster (see Appendix C) that I generated at the beginning of this research demonstrates that while my concepts have become more robust, the initial premise of the research remains with this tenet. It is with this in mind that ‘conversational contestation’ or agonistic conversation becomes essential in this research as a condition of the case studies undertaken. To my knowledge, the use of hermeneutics and the philosophy of communal inquiry in socially engaged art, as a tool for the production of knowledge, have not been previously demonstrated in a university setting.

³⁴ There are of course exceptions such as *Hyperwerk* in Basel Switzerland that have an undergraduate degree focusing on projects rather than specialized subjects, and challenges the boundaries and connections of different disciplines in real economic and practical situations.

³⁵ For example, the Turner Prize for 2015 was won by ‘Assemble’ the first non-artists to win the award for a community project.

³⁶ I mention only undergraduate courses here because Higher Degree Research candidates have, in the main, the opportunity to choose their subjects and are therefore (as this research has) able to undertake projects and research in the areas of social, community, dialogical and participatory modes of art making.

Contextual Background

The practical and theoretical research was positioned within the cultural ecology of Hobart, Tasmania and more specifically within the University of Tasmania's College of the Arts, which is located in the wharf area some distance from the university proper. (Fig 2) Through an analysis and incorporation of national and international artists and key cultural thinkers, the research project also addressed a global context. As suggested previously, the genesis of this research came about through observation and an understanding of what has been described as an educational dilemma, where the autonomy in the production of knowledge is slowly being undermined by the resolve of bureaucratic, corporate, and commercial forces. Kristina Podesva describes the backdrop of neoliberalism that underscores the hegemonic consequences of this course of action. She notes:

Besides privatization, neoliberalism has also systematized academic work such that knowledge production operates according to market logic where patentability, utility, and quantitative methods are valued over collaborative, speculative, and qualitative approaches. The inevitable outcome to this hierarchical arrangement is that critical experimentation is discouraged, or worse, rendered obsolete (2007).

These neoliberal agendas have been the topic of many publications and fora; for example, a key argument put forward at the *Deschooling Society* conference at the Hayward Gallery, London in 2010 was the problem of homogenisation and the freedom in creativity caused by the 'Bologna Process'. This is where European ministries developed the 'Bologna Accord' that determined the makeup of degree courses. The benefits derive from a lack of discipline or medium are that they provide more opportunities to work with aspects of spontaneity; chance and the social nuances of the way people behave are crucial for many emergent practices. For artists working in social, communal, participatory or dialogical fields, these serendipitous moments are a vital part of the action in process, and cannot necessarily be corralled into market logic or summed up by quantitative measures. As the *Deschooling Society* conference alluded to, many art institutions have rejected the Bologna model globally for these reasons.

Along with other faculties, art schools were now required to develop standardised courses so that knowledge and students could transfer across institutions. In Australia, the concern over the federal government reduction in funding to universities has meant that there is a greater reliance on funding from the corporate sector through providing support for academic research. This trend may lead to a conflict of interest and leave a question of doubt over the autonomy of the research knowledge produced. This problem has contributed to a small but

significant rise in collective and social forms of practice, in part, because of dominating capitalist agendas existing across most of the Western world.



Figure 2. Tasmanian College of the Arts, Hunter St Hobart. Image source: University of Tasmania http://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/image/0020/115184/ArtSchool_Small.jpg

Individualism could be considered an essential ingredient for freedom and democracy, and for artists' individuality and originality—it seems to go hand in hand with creativity.³⁷ However, individualisation has conflicting consequences: on the one hand it can enhance autonomy and democracy, but on the other it can destabilise them through a loss of unity—an undermining of the genuine relationship between the 'self and others' (Hoyle and Slater 2001). In this instance, it can segregate individuals so that they are more susceptible and disposed to coercion.

This plays out as a problematic condition of contemporary capitalism in which there is uncontested control over our position; it has conditioned the individual not to contest,

³⁷ "The quality of being an individual; individuality" related to possessing "An individual characteristic; a quirk." Individualism is thus also associated with artistic and bohemian interests and lifestyles where there is a tendency towards self-creation and experimentation as opposed to tradition or popular mass opinions and behaviors'. Wikipedia contributors, 'Individualism', *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individualism>: Accessed 30/10/15

question or challenge, giving rise to the compliant hyper-individual.³⁸ The French political thinker and author of *Democracy in America*, (1835-40) Alexis de Tocqueville noted it has been;

observed that, for all its virtues, democracy also has its vices. It tends to go to extremes. When it does, it produces destructive imbalances in the lives of both individuals and organizations. The task of leadership in a democracy, Tocqueville maintained, is to recognize the points at which democracy tends to become imbalanced, to get others to see them, and then to mobilize a collective effort to correct the imbalances before they go too far and undermine democracy itself.

One of democracy's principal imbalances, Tocqueville says, has to do with the relationship between self and others. For various reasons, democracy undermines over time our capacity to develop profound connections with others. It fosters *hyper-individualism* [my italics]. In a democracy people have the opportunity to become self-sufficient and self-reliant, and as they become more so, they need others less and less. Tocqueville was convinced that, as individualism continued to grow, "each man may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart." Preoccupied more and more with their own concerns and successes, Americans would increasingly let the government manage their general affairs, thus giving it increasing amounts of power. Ultimately there would come a time when power would become so concentrated that freedom itself would be lost and democracy would be replaced by tyranny and despotism (Hoyle and Slater 2001).

'Hyper'-individualism promotes the singular at the expense of the plural, and this is a control mechanism that separates us to the extent that we have become detached and disconnected from each other—and from other occupations; hyper-individuals must comply with the system to stay ahead. Submission and disengagement while it can be incapacitating for the individual, is barely noticed in everyday life as a capitalist mechanism of control.

Problems arise however for creative practice where the artist must inflate or modify his or her artwork, beyond the original intention, to remain viable and popular in such a competitive climate. The question as to what this manipulation does for the artists' original intention is problematic and questions the authenticity of the artworks. In New York 1984, the Australian writer and artist Ian Burn argued that 'not only do works of art end up as commodities, but there is also an overwhelming sense in which works of art *start off* as commodities'. The nurturing of formalist principles by the market, he continues, has 'conclusively eradicated every possibility of a social practice in relation to art, even the thought of it—the expression of modern art has become the rejection of society and of our social being' (Burn 1984). With this

³⁸ (Taken from the field of sociology) 'A tendency for people to act in a highly individual way, without regard to society'. Wikipedia contributors, 'Hyper-individualism', *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/hyperindividualism>: Accessed 30/10.15

form of separation from life, it could be said then that capitalist control influences the intention of the artist, making it remote from what artists do—reflecting the society in which we live. Ironically, this was a provocation for Claire Bishop who raises the issue of funding by government and other vested interests as a problem of potential manipulation of artistic intention in social practice (2004, 2006b).

Despite the aging notion of the artist as ‘solitary genius’, designed to keep art at arms length from the masses (Deresiewicz 2015), over the last half-century the notion of individuality has continued to play well into the hands of consumerism. The consumer market and the spectacle it entailed, so derided by Dubord, created the artist as a solo superstar. This status is represented by the proliferation of notoriety that surrounds professional artists at such events as large museum solo exhibitions, prestigious art prizes and the rise of the commercial art fairs—those that promote individual artists as much as the works themselves.³⁹ The magnitude of growth in some sections of the art world, principally for the elite and wealthy (Thornton 2008) has, on the one hand, reinforced the demand for predominantly visual art objects for consumption and acquisition. On the other hand, it places the artist, along with their dealers, curators and critics, as part of an ongoing spectacle—at the theatrical centre of the art world.

The art school has not helped this situation, where there are high expectations for career prospects awaiting aspiring artists as they leave art school; this is not so. In the past artists had to earn respect, to show their work over some years for it to be valued by peers and the market place, which took time. Now graduating students believe they have receive all these privileges from their training alone, expecting to leave art school as ready-made practicing artists with a defined career ahead of them. This is not what is actually available to most graduates (Coates 2014).

I have become aware in recent years, however, reading the seminal works of Grant Kester (2004), Claire Bishop (2012) and others who support the non-formalist practices of participation, dialogue and community related art, that many artists have been forced to or are not now interested in being mere functionaries of a market driven system. Apart from the minority of very successful artists, most are not able to rely on the commercial gallery system or lucrative commissions for support nor, as I have alluded to earlier in this introduction, can they rely on autonomy in the education system. As a result, artists are setting their own

³⁹ There are however attempts to engage critically with the works in a series of lectures, conversations and essays that now tend to accompany most commercially orientated art fairs and exhibitionary events.

boundaries of control; though a multiplicity of means, such as alternative schools, artist-run initiatives and publications they are now becoming ‘creative entrepreneurs’ (Deresiewicz 2015) who critically manage some of the interpretive mechanisms in which art functions for its audiences and publics.

Socially engaged art in the main is not geared toward the marketplace, yet their ever-growing presence is posing some questions as to how these works are acquired and recorded in historical terms. That is not to say they are unmarketable per se, their complexity as events however, do make them more likely to be sought by institutions rather than individual buyers.

Although these practices have had, for the most part, a relatively weak profile in the commercial art world—collective projects are more difficult to market than works by individual artists, and they’re also less likely to be “works” than social events, publications, workshops, or performances—they nevertheless occupy an increasingly conspicuous presence in the public sector (Bishop 2006b).

There are a number of acquisitions by institutions of performative and social engaged work. By way of example, the Tate Modern acquired a performance work by Suzanne Lacy called *The Cristal Quilt* (1985-87), part of which was reenacted in the Tanks at Tate in 2013. The curator Catherine Wood and Lacy decided that the acquisition should be assigned to the collection rather than placed in the archive as documentation (Lacy 2015, 12:5). This was a significant move for Lacy who has spent many years educating and promoting recognition for non-object-based art forms such as community and socially engaged art.

Lacy’s work is interesting in that she retains the position of the central artist in what is, essentially, a collective work. The artist in a traditional sense appears as much of the marketable product as the work itself, which can be seen, in the monetary and star status attached to the notion of the ‘living artist’.⁴⁰ The question remains as to how to reconcile artworks for a market, used to individual and recognisable art and artists, where the artist or authorship is not clear.

Artists using the generative medium of conversation in social practice are greatly assisted by the capacity to work anonymously in collaborative situations (Gillick 2008). Part of the interest in socially engaged and collective practices for many artists is the condition of collective authorship and anonymity, where the work itself often involves dissolving singular voices into

⁴⁰ <https://news.artnet.com/market/100-collectible-living-artists-2015-346139> Accessed 30/10/15

the collective—an historical example of this would be the US group Guerrilla Girls. Artworks from these collective groups are not necessarily contingent on the making of material objects for market acquisition; rather they attend to the precarity of our current global condition through active communal dialogue, or in the case of Guerrilla Girls anonymous performative acts.

Discursive collaborations do enable one to remain in relative obscurity, and this becomes an emancipatory condition, allowing artists, for instance to work without the pressures of conforming to a capitalist agenda—or to satisfy a consumer market. However, Guy Debord argued that ‘the economy’s domination of social life entailed an obvious downgrading of being into having that left its stamp on all human behaviour’ (Debord 1995, Thesis No. 17) This thesis tended to imply a broad understanding that everything is subject to capitalism, including ordinary discourse in everyday social life. Perhaps it is too simplistic to think that dialogue, as a cognitive function central to the emancipatory processes in many socially engaged and community art practices, still enable some vestige of freedom that have not been corrupted by the prevailing neoliberal ideology. The British artist and writer Liam Gillick provides some hope when he argues that:

The discursive is a practice that offers the opportunity to be a relatively un-examined, free agent in a collective project. While the discursive appears to be an open generator of positions, it actually functions best when it allows one to ‘hide within the collective’. It allows the artist to develop a set of arguments and individual positions without having to conform to an established model of artistic or educational quality (2008, 30).

Artists need not always comply with anonymity however, there are those who use community and socially engaged art publicly in a way that ‘rehumanizes—or at least de-alienates—a society rendered numb and fragmented by the instrumentality of capitalism’ (Bishop 2006b). For example artists such as Paul Chan’s *Waiting for Godot in New Orleans* (2007) from Samuel Beckett, a community-staged play in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and Jeremy Deller, who, along with many of the original miners and other members of the community, reenacted the 1984 union battle with police for workers’ pay rights in the *Battle of Orgreave* (2001).⁴¹ Other artists use public media as a way to draw attention to capitalist inequality, corruption and truth—those such as The Yes Men, a ‘culture jamming duo’ who publically infiltrate, disrupt or

⁴¹ <http://www.jeremydeller.org/TheBattleOfOrgreave/TheBattleOfOrgreave.php>: Accessed 30/10/15

emulate systems of power to emphasise the dehumanising powers of corporations and governments.⁴²

This project then is sited amidst a cultural shift in the small state of Tasmania, where recent changes in the cultural ecology have troubled a ‘de-centred’ and fairly well entrenched arts community. Canadian artist, academic and curator, Gary Pearson’s short essay called *The Outskirts of Town; A Peripheral Centre for Art, Agency and Academia* has relevance to this situation when he conceives of marginalisation as an opportunity; using its associated dissatisfaction as an incentive to build a case for interesting art-making in the margin. Pearson writes that with the onset of globalisation, which at one and the same time both expands and shrinks our world, it raises more opportunities for those at the margins to think and act differently to those constrained by living and working in the big centres of art (2009, 164). His point is that rather than modelling education and thinking like the larger (and louder) centres of art—repeating the same methodologies of the big universities, the big art centres and the key thinkers—there are ways of harnessing the peripheral condition. That is to navigate modes of operation that are oblique and disruptive; approaches that, because of their marginality, are able to quietly trouble entrenched ways of thinking and provide something other than what is being said at the centre.

To give some background to the location of the research, Tasmania has a population of around 512,000, approximately 211,000 of which live, at this time, in Hobart where the research was located. Being isolated, few art visitors of note bothered to come to Hobart until the opening of David Walsh’s private Museum of Old and New Art, MONA, in 2010. (Fig 3)

Historically, however, the Tasmanian School of Art (the TSA as it was known until 2012) has been regarded as a dynamic space of education, and in fact, a leader in the field of art education at tertiary level. In the past, it employed staff such as Paul Taylor, who was a founding member of *Art & Text* in Australia. The TSA employed Taylor on graduation in 1977. Academics, Heather Barker and Charles Green have written that the: ‘The Tasmanian School of Art under its Dean, Geoff Parr, had a reputation for hiring adventurous young staff from the mainland, and an ambitious and substantial weekly program of visitors to compensate for its isolation’(2010, 2-3). It also became one of the first

⁴² The Yes Men are now educating other practitioners through their ‘Yes Lab’, focusing on assisting other practitioners in activist techniques to promote change. <http://theyesmen.org/>: Accessed 5/11/15

university art schools globally to offer a Masters degree by research in fine art, and one of the first doctorates in fine art.⁴³



Figure 3. Museum of New and Old Art, MONA, Hobart. Image source: Sydney Morning Herald 7th January 2012

A number of institutional changes unfolded over the period of this research, within the University of Tasmania and the city of Hobart. The design of this proposal was responsive to these, and many of the changes were consistent with policy shifts elsewhere, however some are unique to the local Tasmanian cultural ecology. In sum, these were:

- The Financial Crisis, causing major problems to economies worldwide, which has, in the main, similarly affected art funding bodies and universities alike across Australia and internationally—many of whom have had to restructure.⁴⁴ Within this competitive space, it could be said that the focus changes from the quality of the education offered, to achieving favourable market outcomes for these institutions to survive.⁴⁵
- The new Museum of New and Old Art (MONA) changed the face of art in the state of Tasmania. In some ways the extravagance and ingenuity of the MONA's promotional strategy have created a double standard: on the one hand, it has created a local mass

⁴³ In 1981, it was the first institution in Australia to introduce a Master of Fine Arts, subsequently establishing a PhD programme in the mid 1990's. <http://www.utas.edu.au/art-viscom/about> Accessed 1/11/15

⁴⁴ This is despite an increase in top end art sales worldwide during the Global Financial Crisis – see Sholette, Gregory. 2015. "Delirium and Resistance after the Social Turn." *Field: A Journal of Socially-engaged Art Criticism* Spring 2015 (1).

⁴⁵ For example, the University of Tasmania has restructured its ten academic Arts programmes into three, one of which is the Tasmanian College of the Arts, now consisting of three creative programmes in one main school across three campuses. The University has also cut teaching staff and reshuffling resources into 'hubs' that operate from the central university campus. See the 2012 *University of Tasmania Annual Report*. The Local arts funding body, Arts Tasmania, has cut funding to several public art galleries and organisations (including the Plimsoll Gallery—the subject of the second case study), and the Hobart City Council has closed its Carnegie Art Gallery after recommendations put forward in the Discussion paper: Hobart City Council – Cultural Strategy Review 2011-2012, p 21

audience to experience contemporary art, as well as creating a much invigorated tourist industry of national and international art visitors. It has created service employment for many members of the local arts community, and promised exposure for local artists to an international face of art. On the other hand, it has distorted the local art scene. MONA developed at a time when all other resources for creative activity were contracting, and publicly supported agencies that present local art have withered. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many artists feel that local experimental art is struggling to gain an audience in the local community, and with the art visitors to the state. As the largest private museum in the southern hemisphere, the power, resources and influence of MONA eclipse other local institutions.⁴⁶

- In southern Tasmania, the recent closure or loss of resources for several public galleries, the Carnegie Gallery, the artist-run initiative 6A, along with the closure of a prominent commercial gallery, The Criterion Gallery, has decreased exposure for local artists. The Hobart City Council has made non-gallery projects their emphasis, instead focusing on programmes of inclusion and participation in community arts activities, local infrastructure and social projects.
- There is little critical dialogue around art in Tasmania, an observation that discussion in this research underscores. The number of art writers, curators and theorists is very low despite having a healthy number of arts higher degree graduates skilled in the art of critical writing through their research activities. There is virtually no rigorous criticism of art published in Tasmania. In addition, as part of its brand, MONA has adopted a decidedly anti-intellectual stance.⁴⁷
- More generally, it has been said that Tasmania is a backwater in overall education; at the time of writing, it had the highest national unemployment rates, with one critic pointing to a widespread belief amongst Tasmanians that to have an education is a social disadvantage.⁴⁸

In my research, I have treated these issues as catalytic in that they framed and prompted the development of strategies eventually used in the two case studies. When I began this research in 2010, this local perspective coalesced with an international discourse, I mentioned previously, on art education and the nascent acknowledgement and critique of socially and communal forms of art practice. As these were topical at the time, my position emulated that of many artists who practice at the boundaries of socially engaged art: in education for instance, the Brazilian artist and senior MOMA educator, Pablo Helguera; the communication and pedagogies of someone like *e-flux* founder, Anton Vidokle and his group of collaborators, and the more political focus of Cuban artist Tania Bruguera. These artists used local conditions and

⁴⁶ Over the last four years, Professor Adrian Franklin and a group from the University of Tasmania have researched *The Mona Effect* with the subsequent release of the book *The Making of MONA*. To my knowledge, there is no data in this research that studies the effect of MONA on the local art sector.

⁴⁷ Most art organisations, museums and art galleries hold public artist talks as part of their education programmes, but very few have critical art programmes in place, much less any art writing or publishing that critiques practice.

⁴⁸ The Conversation has published a series of articles on the current crisis in Tasmanian, but the most significant to this research see, West, Jonathan. 2013. Obstacles to progress: what's wrong with Tasmania, really? . *The Conversation* January 7.: Accessed 7/2/13

global perspectives to frame and develop their projects. In the following chapter, I will describe the work of these artists, their relationship to social engagement, their participants, localities, publics and their relevant pedagogical ideologies, in order to examine new modes of operation that contest convention and as a consequence, opportunistically seek attention to, or cures for, gloomy situations.

Chapter one frames the practical research by presenting a survey of social art practice and describes examples of unorthodox structures for devising alternative forms of knowledge production. These are presented as a brief overview of philosophical modes of hermeneutics, the political space of agonism, and a survey of socially engaged artists who work within these realms and that of pedagogy.

Chapter two reports on the symbiotic, adversarial and inquisitorial nature of the case studies in relation to their host institution. Devised as parasitic events, they happened in an art school structured around traditional medium-specific studios, such as painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking. As a social experiment with an empirical component, my method was to apply a 'Community of Inquiry' (CoI) approach, which is informed by the Philosophy for Children movement (Lipman 1991, 15). The chapter expands on participant engagement—at times playful and at times earnest. In my role as curator, provocateur, and prime organiser, my aim was to kindle a participatory space of democratic agency for participants. I was a reflexive researcher, as the unfolding of events provided me with participants' feedback that informed subsequent actions, and which can become a knowledge base for informing institutional pedagogy—an argument I develop through the subsequent chapters.

Chapter three presents the first case study, *Our Day Will Come (ODWC)*, a four-week free-school project curated by me and led by Irish artist Paul O'Neill and five visiting international artists (see Case Study No. 1). *ODWC* engaged local and international participants in a series of activated daily events based on a sequence of topics raised as questions: they asked What is a school?, What is usefulness?, What is autonomy?, and What is remoteness? The material gathered by participants in answer to the questions and documentation from the *ODWC* events culminated in the co-production of a series of weekly 'zines'.

Chapter four recounts the development of the second study, *The Plimsoll Inquiry (The PI)*. As distinct from an 'exhibition' proper or purposive 'project', *The PI* took an inquisitorial, yet

pluralistic approach that involved both the display of objects, performative and social events. A parade of activated events staged within the gallery-as-laboratory, occasioned a mix of curated events and ‘pop-up’ spontaneous happenings, some of which had an exhibitionary component while others were purely dialogical or performative. Most of the self-selected participants—staff, students, alumni, local artists and members of the public, sought to shift their own and the institution’s prevailing cultural perspective from a dated modernist orthodoxy; to deconstruct and transgress entrenched studio-based practice, and to envisage new social approaches to pedagogy as an art form. Phase Two of this project is continuing at the time of writing, and more programmatic and purposive research and projects instigated out of this experiment will be developed in the future. (Appendix D is a draft copy of one of the outcomes, *The PI Report* and Appendix E is a short black and white Powerpoint film made to explain the event (called *OUT TAKES*) to new audiences at art school gallery, The Academy Gallery, located in the northern campus of the University)

In the final chapter, I provide a discussion and analysis of the research findings. Here I argue that flexible symbiotic complementary structures, as distinct from more purposive outcome-oriented art processes, can foster speculation and genuine trials. They have value for interrogating established structures and practices, and for seeding future more intentional projects. I conclude that facilitated dialogical events, those that support open-ended and relatively inclusive artistic inquiry, can be evaluative and self-critical. With careful reflexive curation, the ‘non-project’ or ‘unsettling project’ can operate as a productive flash point, causing disturbance or upheaval of sedimented institutional, cultural ecologies. Useful tensions can be deliberately cultivated for rethinking and repurposing moribund conditions, to become opportunistic, fluid, transformative and emancipatory. In my opinion, roguish behavior, such as that defined in bohemian circles of creative endeavour (Moore 2004), coupled with an egalitarian and agonistic inquiry, can enable university art schools to keep abreast of current experimental practice and to remain agile in a threatening conservative political and economic climate.

The research principally comprised two case studies, each a series of events configured as communities of inquiry. For each of these I took the role of facilitator and participant, in the mode of ‘artist-curator’. Both studies were proximate to, and, to different degrees, integrated into the formal structures of learning and teaching within an established provincial art school. I have described the relation of the ‘Rogue Academy’ as a parasitic and a symbiotic association

with the host institution: The Tasmanian College of the Arts. These parasitic, yet symbiotic relationships, underpinned the formation of the two case studies both in securing the school's consent and encouraging participant involvement.

The methodological approach I took was that of a dialogical artist and the processes I employed were insight-driven and philosophically informed by conversational hermeneutics and the free-school movement. The project sought to investigate democratic measures by searching for equality in conversational discourse around the task or object at hand, and to an approach that drew community together.

The key references I have drawn from include works by artists, Anton Vidokle— (e-flux); Tania Bruguera—*Cátedra Arte De Conducta* (2003-09); Pablo Helguera—*The School of Panamerican Unrest*. The principle texts referenced are by Claire Bishop—*The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents* (2006) and *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012); Grant Kester—*Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* (2004); Irit Rogoff—*Free* (2010), *The Expanded Field-Actors, Agents, Platforms* (2012) and *Academy as Potentiality* (2007); Paulo Freire—*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970); Hans- Georg Gadamer—*The Relevance of the Beautiful* (1986), *Truth and Method* (1975); Chantal Mouffe—*Which Public Space for Critical Artistic Practices?* (2006); Pablo Helguera—*Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook* (2011). Other key references are from Suzanne Lacy, Tom Finkelpearl, Shannon Jackson, Claire Doherty, Paul O'Neill, Jeannie van Heeswijk, Hannah Hurtzig, John Dewey, Ivan Illich, Joseph Beuys, Mathew Lipman and Guy Debord, Included in this thesis are other references and resources including: field notes, images, extracts from film and audio recordings, observations and anecdotal references.

The concept of the term 'curatorial' outlined in the publication *The Curatorial: The Philosophy of Curating*, edited by Jean-Paul Martinion and Irit Rogoff (2013), became an important reference in identifying a way of developing and producing projects that are emancipatory and outside pre-existing frames. The curatorial in this sense reveals a freedom and a tension that does not become 'entrenched in a particular discourse' and one that 'cannot be singularized or totalized and that it is perfectly OK to live and work with such a warring term' (2013, 4).

Predictably, this research raises further questions; with some of the material found warranting additional investigation, particularly research toward project development that encourages inclusiveness and empowerment. These questions include:

- how we might use a reflexive curatorial framework (or curatorium) as a non-hierarchical model?
- the use of social media for participation in conversational works?
- what might the impact and relevance of documentation be as a mode of dissemination for these types of process-based works?
- how do we repeat projects for standardised research methods (and should they be)?
- who are the secondary audiences (the casual installers, cleaners, the security staff), those that come into the projects as non-intended interlopers, and how do they engaged within these works?

These could not be thoroughly investigated within the scope of this project and leave a number of opportunities open for the future.

CHAPTER 1 THEORETICAL CONTEXT

This chapter frames the research and identifies key contributions to the debate on social practice and conversational forms of art used for pedagogical purposes. In recent years, the use of dialogue and conversational art has grown to include a number of other related terms that I refer to as 'pedagogical art'. Other terms are used such as dialogical art (Kester 2004), conversational art (Bhabha 2008), transpedagogy (Helguera 2011b), social cooperation (Finkelppearl 2013), socially engaged art (Bishop 2006b), littoral art (Barber 2004) community-based art (De Bruyne and Gielen 2009a) or discursive art (Gillick 2008). However, the use of dialogue and conversation are all more commonly based on 'dialogical aesthetics', a term coined by historian Grant Kester in his key text *Conversational Pieces; Community + Communication in Modern Art* (2004). In this text, he argues that there are specific qualifications required of true dialogical or conversational art. In his analysis, Kester contends that:

It is clearly not sufficient enough to say that any collaboration or conversational encounter constitutes a work of art. What is at stake in these projects is not dialogue per se but the extent to which the artist is able to catalyze emancipatory insights *through* dialogue' (2004, 69).

The use of the dialogical or conversational aspects in this research as an event, implicates the politics of conversation in the formation of new understandings. It broadly draws from a hermeneutical interpretation of the social, pedagogical and political aspects of communicating through communal dialogue that aim to fill a void in how we understand democratic art practices. It begins with an historical overview of the recent history of art education and alternative forms of education, and reviews literature on the following topics: Social agency in academia (section 1.1); new cognitive forms of aesthetics (section 1.2); conversation and power (section 1.3) and finally a brief summary and implications of the propositional element of the thesis (1.4).

Historical endeavours in social and pedagogical practice

Social practice is generally recognised as having its genesis in the early to mid twentieth century avant-garde; the Dadaists, Surrealists, Situationists, Fluxus and conceptualists were

considered its forebears. The early experimental projects were very often process-based, experiential, collaborative and activist. They produced experiences, happenings and events primarily spurred on by a rejection of hegemonic forces, as a reaction to consumerism, high culture and the art world, or issues on the current political scene. Documentation and left over ephemera were often the only visible remainder, and it was this material that was primarily shown in galleries, museums and other institutions—post event.

The French curator Nicolas Bourriaud, in his book *Relational Aesthetics*, coined the term ‘relational art’ (2002, 33). He defined what he saw as a new ‘set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space’ (Bourriaud 2002, 133). Relational art brought inter-human relationships together as acts of sociability (such as hosting, conversations and other modes of social exchange), and observed them in a gallery context. Bourriaud’s texts ignited a number of debates including the value of relational engagement and its place within non-object, non-material modes of public art. His observations came at a time that followed a general groundswell of new interpretations surrounding public art, which was now being termed ‘new genre public art’. This was first described in an edited publication in 1995 by Suzanne Lacy called *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, and included papers by prominent writers of the time, including Mary Jane Jacob, Lucy R Lippard and Allan Kaprow (Lacy 1995). In this publication, they identified ways in which artists were engaging more directly with their audiences, implicating them in a range of current issues including the political, environmental and social urgencies of the day. A series of commentaries and subsequent publications followed and from around 2004, there was a gradual accumulation of theoretical discourse, particularly from a number of prominent academics and critics of the day, which led to the term being more specifically defined as ‘socially engaged art’.

Historians Grant Kester (2004) and Claire Bishop (2006b) were among those who appeared to begin the discourse, noting that new modes of engagement for people-oriented projects were becoming more frequent.⁴⁹ Relational art had fostered relationships between people, but largely in a gallery context, whereas socially engaged art went deeper into the generative and

⁴⁹ Emanated from Nicolas Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics* were a number of publications including; Kester, Grant. H. 2004. *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art*. Los Angeles: University of California.; Helguera, Pablo. 2011a. *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook* New York: Jorge Pinto Books, Bishop, Claire. 2012. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*. London: Verso Books, Bishop, Claire, ed. 2006a. *Participation, Documents of Contemporary Art*. London: Whitechapel Gallery/MIT Press, Jackson, Shannon. 2011. *Social Works : Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. London: Routledge, Finkelpearl, Tom. 2013. *What we made: conversations on art and social cooperation*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

transformative capacities of social engagement. Artist Pablo Helguera explains that socially engaged artists were ‘promoting ideas such as empowerment, criticality, and sustainability among the participants. ...a platform or network for the participation of others, so that the effects of the project may outlast its ephemeral presentation’ (2011b, 312).

Recently, artists have taken relational art further by using its social capacity for engagement, forging a way into the realm of pedagogy by mounting social educational platforms for the production of knowledge. These moves appear to have raised the level of intellectual engagement previously not found in relational art (Bishop 2011, 198). Moreover, Claire Bishop suggested this ‘pedagogical turn’ where the ‘art event’, typified by dialogue as the production of knowledge, has insidiously ‘migrated into the work of art itself’ (2007, 86). As a result, artists were now developing schools, performance lectures, public discussions, conversational forums and inciting participatory writing projects. While these manifestations have led to a range of new art terms including a newly invigorated community-based art, it is curious to note that most stop short at naming ‘pedagogical art’ as a practice—they are mostly referred to as artists working in pedagogical art projects, environments, education as art or art as education.

Bishop notes that there is a greater demand from the public for knowledge about art, over and beyond what was taught, seen or experienced in the traditional art museum or art institution, and this collective desire to know more about art and to further engage with it intellectually has given rise to various new modes of dialogue about art. Bishop contends that the genesis of this collective need for dialogue, and its pedagogical objective, seems to have been incited by Catherine David’s Documenta X (1997). Programmes such as *100 Days 100 Guests*, where invited participants from a wide range of fields of interest, from politics, economics, philosophy, architecture etc., were asked to join a typical debate on art, but art in relation to the current global urgencies in the closing years of the millennium (Bishop 2007). Bishop and others have defined a shift in the role of the artist from producer of art for consumption, in the traditional sense, to a producer of knowledge for public pedagogy, and this ‘inter subjective space’ becomes their ‘medium’ for investigation (2006b, 279). Kristina Podesva likewise contends that:

[T]he use of dematerialized mediums such as lectures, classes, and discussions may have conditioned a shift from site-specific art making, in which particularized, physical space was a paramount concern, to institutional critique, which expanded the notion of site to include its sociological frames or institutional context (2007).

Each time socially engaged art is presented however; it raises questions about quality, usefulness, potentiality, inclusiveness, accessibility, elitism, criticality, ethics and other matters of deep concern to artists and their critics. Bishop has written extensively on the failings that she perceives in relational art practice (and later, by implication, in socially engaged art). Her concerns focus on the uncertainty of what the viewer is supposed to actually get from these experiences and this ambiguity leads her to question the quality of the work put forward as social art—where to some degree it cannot be measured (Helguera 2011b, 300). Moreover, Bishop argues in her essays, ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’ (2004) and ‘The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents’ (2006b), that some socially engaged art reveals a corruption of the artists intentions, particularly those that are sponsored by government agencies and other regimes that have specific quotas, financial, welfare or other political agendas. This for Bishop forms lingering questions over the autonomy of some socially engaged works.

It has been noted that traditional creative-based education systems are failing students because they do not reflect real workplace experiences (Fleischmann and Hutchison 2010, 23). By way of an example, the rise of socially engaged forms of creative art practice are increasingly becoming aligned to the rise in social media networks, those that create a greater general public awareness of failures in social policies and support systems. This move toward social justice is something that has caught institutions unaware. The writer and artist Gregory Sholette, in a paper for the new *Field: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism*, suggests that these practices are transitioning from the experimental ‘community engaged arts’—parting from the historical models of conceptual art and using an online awareness as part of participatory action. He contends that institutions that have been caught out by these early developments, now find themselves scrambling to catch-up with the real world. The rise of socially engaged art as sites for action fostered through social media, means that institutions now need to develop strategies to deal with the ‘the paradoxical ascent of social practice art in a socially bankrupt world’ (2015, 98). Sholette argues that to attempt to address social justice in activist practice, artists need to distance themselves from the contemporary art world to avoid being consumed by it, or, more specifically appear to be caught up in a melee of association—that of capitalist indulgence, excess, social dislocation and apathy.

As social practice has extended into education, community and activism, its sometimes-unwieldy nature makes it difficult to compartmentalise and analyse, with very few measures in

place against which it can be evaluated. In recent years, Bishop and her combatants—Grant Kester, Boris Groys, Shannon Jackson and others—have debated the quality and social efficacy of such creative practice. The polarity of the debate seems to hinge on many factors but the two that concern this research are,

- the endorsement of a discreet set of practices with social outcomes focused on generative and transformative conditions that have open-ended outcomes,
- the reading and validation of these practices within the traditional canon of art history, one that a strong inclination towards a visual aesthetic, object and medium specificity and in some cases, spectacle.

From this, I have found that conversational models of social practice, in the main, are being critiqued through a distorted lens—a conventional one that mandates that art must be seen through a clear set of principles based on historical tropes in art history. Grant Kester argues this case through the work of Jean-François Lyotard's attempt to encapsulate the problem of academic traditions in the new age of impressionism. For Lyotard:

discursive systems of meaning, embodied in the realist tradition in the visual arts, are irrevocably compromised by their associations with a conventional reason, which negates or ignores experiences that cannot be articulated through a fixed set of conventions (Kester 2004, 85).⁵⁰

This may go some way in explaining that the reach of socially engaged art's (despite it beginning to be regarded by some in the international field as the new avant-garde), infiltration into the academy curriculum has been remarkably slow (Bishop 2006b, 179). This Bishop and others recognise as a lag, which constitutes a major failure in art school education (Ault and Beck 2006, 6).

Despite a number of new publications, conferences and other portals for discourse, social practice in general and expanded forms of socially engaged art, in particular, are yet to find a place in the canon of art.⁵¹ This research aims to add to the ongoing discourse on what artist and writer Dave Beech describes as 'the art of the encounter'; to add meat to a 'post-Duchampian ontology' of social practice by bringing it into a pedagogical frame (Beech 2009).

⁵⁰ This is a complex issue, faced by many artists who engage in alternative forms of art, not just those involved in dialogical modes of social practice. I will briefly follow this discourse as it contributes to the discussion at hand, however it is not meant as a comprehensive evaluation of the debate, which is outside the scope of this exegesis. More information can be found in the many books and publications on social practice, among them: Thompson, Nato. 2012. *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*. Edited by Creative Time. Massachusetts: The MIT Press. p 32-33, Ault, Julie, and Martin Beck. 2006. "Drawing Out & Leading Forth." In *Notes for an Art School*, edited by Mai Abu ElDahab, Anton Vidokle and Florian Waldvogel et al. Philadelphia: International Foundation Manifesta, Jackson, Shannon. 2011. *Social Works : Performing Art, Supporting Publics*. London: Routledge, Rogoff, Irit. 2007. "Academy as Potentiality." *Summit: Non-aligned initiatives in education culture*.

⁵¹ As this exegesis is being written, a new online journal has been launched to address this issue, with its first issue in 2015. *Field; A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism* <http://field-journal.com>

A current history of art as education: education as art



Figure 4. *Unitednationsplaza*. Image source: Taken from *e-flux* Art and Education 'Announcements' web page for the Unitednationsplaza Inaugural Conference 27-29 October 2006. See <http://www.artandeducation.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/wpid-1160472823unp1.jpg>

A skirmish at a major art biennial paralleled an apparent 'crisis in education' looming over Europe and North America (Vidokle 2006). In June 2nd 2006, the international art festival *Manifesta 6* was cancelled. Russian-born New York-based artist Anton Vidokle and two curators had proposed to run an art project as an experimental art school within the divided capital city of Nicosia in Cyprus. A row broke out opposing the school's bi-communal programme that was to encompass both Greek and Turkish Cypriote communities. No resolution was reached, and the Mayor of the Nicosia had the organiser's contracts terminated (Abu, Anton, and Florian 2006a). Rather than abandon their plans, Vidokle and his collaborators moved the school to the formerly divided city of Berlin and renamed it *Unitednationsplaza (UNP)* (2006-7). (**Fig 4**) The outcome of the festival, the *UNP* project, was described as an 'exhibition as school as work of art' (Vidokle and Rosler 2008).

It has been suggested that not only did this project underscore the educational crisis, but it heralded an 'educational turn'. This manifested in a number of debates, books, conferences and symposia about the failings of art education and the development of a series of socially engaged

art projects focusing on education and the generation and production of knowledge (Bishop 2012, Rogoff 2008).

Furthermore, a number of other events occurred that problematised art education and proposed alternative educational frameworks: *ACADEMY* (2006-8)—a process-based exhibition conceived for three locations: Hamburg, Antwerp and Eindhoven, and the *Documenta 12* exhibition, *What is to be done?* (2012), organised by Roger Buergel and Ruth Noack, who examined neo-liberal agendas in a globalised world. Numerous symposia, conferences and round table discussions took place, such as *Transpedagogy: Contemporary Art and the Vehicles of Education*, at MOMA, New York (2009), and the *Deschooling Society Conference* at the Hayward Gallery in London (2010).

After the release of *Notes for an Art School* (Abu, Anton, and Florian 2006b), a publication in response to the failed *Manifesta 6 School*, numerous other edited publications appeared. These included content from artist-writers: Steven H. Madoff's publication, *Art School: Propositions for the 21st Century* (2009); from the Documents of Contemporary art series; *Education*, edited by Felicity Allen (2011); *Curating and the Educational Turn*, by Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (2010) and, in Australia and Canada, Brad Buckley and John Conomos's book, *Rethinking the Contemporary Art School: The Artist, the PhD and the Academy* (2010). Most of these publications provide a suite of essays by professionals in the field, and most lament the condition of Western university art education as it struggles to adapt to the homogenising tendencies in a changing economic and political climate.⁵²

Artists too are becoming prominent in their dissatisfaction with art education in the academy, taking an active part in all the above fora as well as establishing their own practical platforms for change. Claire Bishop suggests that many artists are questioning the very institutions of art that educated them, responding to the 'straightjacket of efficiency and conformity that accompanies authoritarian models of education'. They seek new and dynamic modes of education that 'beg for playful, interrogative, and autonomous opposition' to contest the art institution's increasing homogeneity (2011, 198). While it appears that pedagogical art projects are primarily developed in response to failures in education, the question remains—are these

⁵² For several years, European schools have been engulfed in a dispute with governments of their regions to standardise education through the Bologna Process. In essence, this is a European system of standardising curricula. Many critics of the Bologna model point to its method-based accountability as highly bureaucratic and formulaic, and argue that it is homogenising and leaves little or no room for the creative industries to question, test, engage and react to the continual fluxes within cultures and societies. For a range of viewpoints from a number of writers, see Rogoff, Irit. 2010a. "Bologna." *e-flux Journal* 3 (14).

real protests, or are artists simply using these shortcomings as a means to develop alternative modalities for the production of knowledge.

Some methodologies used by artists subvert and challenge existing traditions and structures, such as experimenting with the existing knowledge in each discipline and how traditional education models impart it. A way in which this can happen is by intruding into other disciplines, for instance as a parasitic, or opportunistic mode of intervention. The educational academic Jack Richardson contends that: ‘an interventionist art education would be defined not by its difference from other subject areas, but rather, by its ability to absorb other practices distinct to other disciplines’ (Richardson 2010). While it is an unsettling methodology in education, its flexibility and ability to infiltrate into other forms of knowledge, makes it a useful tool for exploring and expanding new knowledge. The purpose of an interventionist model of art education therefore might be to unobtrusively undermine fixed disciplines in order to question traditional models of knowledge production and authoritarian bureaucratic systems in education.

From my early research and past projects, I note that not everyone is suited to participatory and social engagement in art. While this is a topic outside the scope of this thesis, it is worth mentioning its presence. Grant Kester, in a reading of the work of artist and philosopher Adrian Piper, suggests that there are certain personality types that are more suited to engaging in social forms of art making (2004, 74). On the one hand, there are those Piper terms as ‘Kantian’—people who more social, empathetic or relational in their manner and generally open to organic processes, change and difference. On the other, there are the ‘Humean’ personality types who are more structured in their thinking and motivated by self-interest and desire. These people are less likely to be open to engagement.⁵³ There is a short synopsis in Appendix A for more information on this concept as it has some relevance to engaging participants in the two case studies.

The sixties and seventies were characterised as a time of protest and volatility—set amongst a backdrop of civil rights, Vietnam, gender inequalities, artists became deeply involved (Lippard 2007, 409). Education became just one of the social and cultural issues that prompted ordinary citizens to become militants. Commentators suggest that despite a few isolated demonstrations, we now live in an era of anti-protest—the political theorist and writer, Chantal

⁵³ These terms are based on the philosophical writings of David Hume (1711-1776) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

Mouffe, argues that the ‘uncontested hegemony of liberalism’ has created a situation in society where there is a learned lack of ‘antagonism’—where we simply do not argue. Non-arguing has come to a point where we are conditioned to negate or stultify oppositional thinking, instead we just play along without argument in what Mouffe sees as a ‘rationalist belief in consensus’ (2006, 153). The curator and writer Florian Waldvogel, likewise argues that social activism and dissent were common in the mid-sixties and ‘students would have fought against this kind of chaos in the name of education’ but as a manifestation of our neo-liberal age a form of uncontested hegemony has developed where ‘their children just accept it in silence’ (2006, 2). A culture of apathy about the failures of the art academy is as a form of uncontested hegemony, which is in line with what Gadamer called a ‘universal leveling process in which we cease to notice anything’ (1986, 36).

This research explores the notion that alternative schools, pedagogical art projects and other discursive activity instigated by artists constitute a form of quiet rebellion. In the West today we do see the more vocal political agencies such as Occupy Wall St, the Singapore protests and pockets of political activism in art practice. These are described in publications such as *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture* (Sholette 2011) and *Truth is Concrete: A Handbook for Artistic Strategies in Real Politics* (Herbst and Malzacher 2014), using activism and other radical measures as a dynamic protest, aggressively demonstrating to draw attention to economic and democratic issues. In place of direct protest, marches and loud demonstrations, this investigation suggests that many artists are instead creating alternative learning platforms that quietly disrupt hegemonic systems in a more stealth-like fashion. These nascent models of art are not loud uprisings—they are unobtrusive modes of opposition that are quietly undermining traditional university art education (Panigirakis 2012, Batty 2013). The quiet opposition to pedagogy suggested here is not a spectacle, and it is not about challenging University education directly—as in an overt Occupy Movement action. Rather, these changes have quietly responded to an urgency—filling a void for a public that appear to be seeking an alternative to the standardised production of knowledge. As such, this response is un-melodramatic in its intent, often disregarding the political and just getting on with delivering new platforms for pedagogy.

Alternative art education as political reform – A short history

Two main concerns motivating my investigation are the lag between particular developments in contemporary art and tertiary-level art education, and the constraints imposed upon educational institutions by changing cultural, social, political and economic conditions. To expand upon this second concern, I will now turn to the politics of education, and discuss state and institutional policy, and the methodology of pedagogy. I will describe unconventional art educational platforms, ranging from alternative art schools, free schools and children's education, and discuss the ways in which these have challenged the status quo by establishing new and innovative approaches to learning as a critique of standard education. My own research drew ideas from experimental schools and used some of their approaches for use as working models in the 'Rogue Academy'

Scholars Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich are key figures whose ideas were instrumental in the development of many of the alternative modes of schooling and are fundamental to much of the current discourse on pedagogical art projects. For Freire, the style of autocratic state-run education has a clear purpose: to make members of society 'adaptive' and a 'fit for the world'. He argued that the authoritarian's 'tranquility rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it' (1970, 76). Paulo Freire addresses an inadequate educational system that does not really teach how to learn, but it tends instead to give over to what he says is the knowledge that is already known. It is simply a reverberation by authority figures, such as teachers or instructors, in a top down-mode of teaching in which teachers deposit knowledge and students receive it as passive entities, described by Freire as 'banking' systems' (1970, 72-6). For Ivan Illich, the capitalist drive for consumerism was highlighted through the notion of educational credentialing. In his opinion, this 'did not lead to life-long thinkers, but rather, produced in them a consumerist drive and produced life-long consumers' (Robbins 2010, 28:20). The two radical thinkers have driven much of the current discourse on critical and public pedagogy in which modern day thinkers attempt to address widely acknowledged problems associated with neo-liberal education.

In response to such critical observations, many movements have been established that design educational opportunities for children by providing a democratic and inquisitive space for generating knowledge through critical analysis and reflection. These are aimed at life-long learning skills that can be carried through into adult education. The methodologies of most of these types of approaches reject the imposition of quantifiable knowledge *onto* someone;

instead, they place emphasis on the worth of communal process—in other words, it is the value gained during the *activity* of communal learning. I looked briefly at a series of method-based approaches that ranged from the Italian Reggio Emilia and Montessori schooling to the Philosophy for Children movement, from which I finally drew the Community of Inquiry (CoI) approach, taken from the philosophical writings of American philosopher and pragmatist, C.S. Peirce (1831-1914). I adapted this approach as a methodology (outlined in Chapter two) in the second case study so that it could be used primarily in undergraduate teaching curricula, but also for use in postgraduate, curatorial and graduate artists working in the field.

In 1991, the educational theorist Mathew Lipman published *Thinking in Education*, in which he further developed the CoI approach as a platform for bringing philosophy into primary and secondary schools. His aim was to integrate philosophy into the teaching methodology of existing disciplines, rather than taught as a separate and distinct subject. Since then, CoI has been extensively referenced in literature on the general education of children (Sprod 2001, Gardner 1995, Murriss 2000), and writing on children’s art education (Hagaman 1990). Given the usefulness of this methodology it is interesting to note that, apart from CoI methodologies used in commercial applications,⁵⁴ and some early research on the similarities of the Swedish ‘Study Circles’ in the late 90s (Ohlsson 1998), very little material is available regarding how CoI can be transferred to adult learning or tertiary education.⁵⁵

That being said, a substantial number of papers referencing CoI as a useful tool for online learning in tertiary education were published following an article, *Critical Inquiry in a Text-Based Environment: Computer Conferencing in Higher Education* (Garrison, Anderson, and Archer 2000). There have been follow-up articles recommending further research into the positive aspects of the CoI approach for learning in distance education (Garrison and Arbaugh 2007, Xin 2012), however very few discuss CoI’s transferable skills and the flexibility it offers as a platform to all levels and approaches to learning, much less as a strategy for engagement in the visual arts.

Part of Lipman’s reasoning may help to ameliorate this where, in his seminal work, he based his emphasis on intellectual freedom—he felt children were not being prepared to think more

⁵⁴ As discussed in Chapter two and referenced in Appendix

⁵⁵ Along with Tim Sprod, Laurence J Splitter and Anne Sharpe, in a number of essays including *Teaching for better thinking: the classroom community of inquiry* (1995), have contributed substantially to children’s education, particularly through the Australian Council of Education Research. However, in much of the literature references to adult Community of Inquiry generally allude to teaching adult teachers to think philosophically for children’s education.

philosophically for when they enter university. He argues that despite 'higher education without philosophy [being] admittedly almost unthinkable', it is often viewed on campus as a destructive 'parasite' that has the ability to separate people, and their disciplines, into insiders and outsiders, further isolating and segregating disciplines from each other (1991, 266). Many universities, or the bureaucratic managers that administer their structures, do not place value on the philosophy departments, regarding philosophical thinking as 'fantasies [that] are the expression of elitist nostalgia' (Gaita 2011). For Lipman, however, philosophy is more than this—it 'prepares us to *think* [my emphasis] in other disciplines' (1991, 266), and is fundamental to intellectual life—something that this research is aiming for.

On the one hand the problem for Lipman lay with elementary education, which he saw as a system that 'elicits intellectual conformity', on the other hand he argued universities were seen to 'elicit intellectual creativity', and this autonomy was generally the privilege of undergraduates and postgraduates (1991, 267). However, this freedom in universities is now being eroded, as I presented in the Introduction, and has made emancipation questionable in our current age of commercialised tertiary education.

The rationale for using this methodology was the way in which the Col's framework supported emancipatory thinking, an approach that draws on 'reasoning, evaluation and judgment' to encourage 'higher-order thinking' (Lipman 1991). This communal framework uses a methodology that supports 'meta-thinking' through a 'problem-focused, self-correcting, empathetic and multi-perspectival' approach (Murriss 2008). I concluded that this would make a solid base around which I could build a dialogical programme of inquiry that could be used as a tool for egalitarian teaching of undergraduates, higher degree researchers, curatorial strategies, as well as having 'use-value' as a tool for artists working in the field.

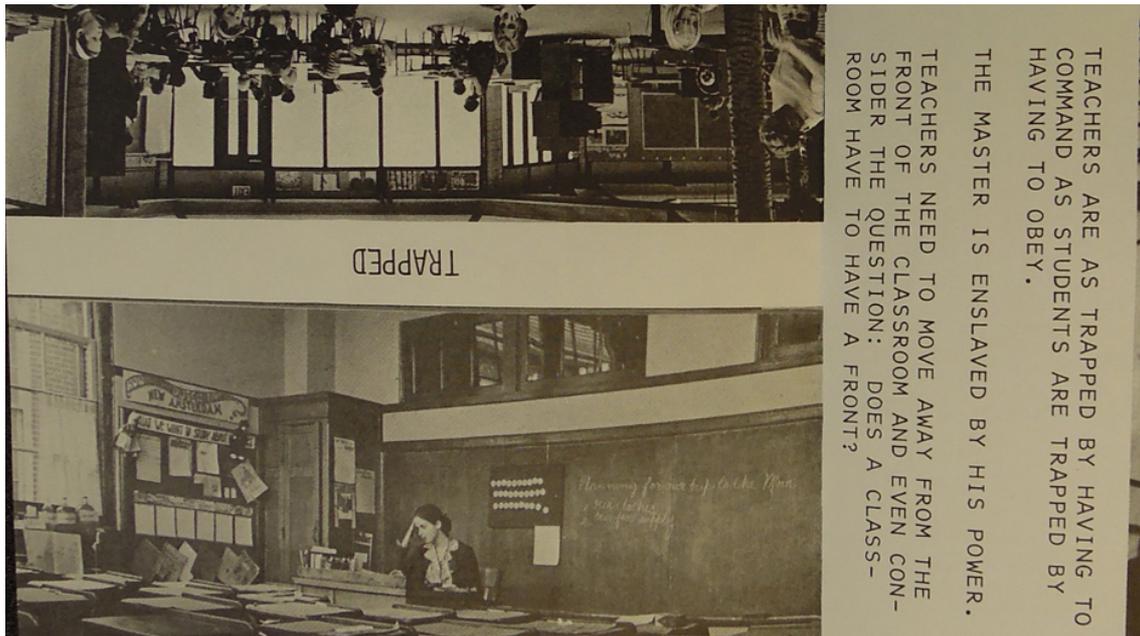


Figure 5. Allan Kaprow documentation, *Back to School* exhibition at TPW Gallery Toronto, Canada, September 2013. Image source: <http://gallerytpw.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/essay-image.jpg>

Individual artists too have concentrated on the political failings in education by initiating projects that address inequality, and invent new models that seek to break down hierarchical modes of education. Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), Allan Kaprow (1927-2006) and Robert Filliou (1926-1987) and George Brecht (1926-2008) are prominent examples, with Beuys and Kaprow now widely acknowledged as originators of early social form of pedagogical art practice (Kester 2004, 9). (Fig 5)

Their projects, such as Beuys' *Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research* in Dusseldorf (1972) and Kaprow's critically acclaimed project in 1969 within the Berkeley Public School system called, "Project Other Ways" with educationalist Herb Kohl, were two of the most noted exemplars of pedagogical art projects. Political idealism was at the centre of Beuys's practice, and he was lauded for his democratic views, however, some argue that as artist-producer, Beuys still did not give up the authoritarian 'lecturer' role (Podesva 2007, Verwoert 2008). Podesva says of this:

Beuys did not relinquish control of his productions so easily and generously, alternately maintaining and mocking the authority invested in his position as artist and as pedagogue. ...Beuys simultaneously challenged *and* reinforced the patriarchal power structure of the academy and the authority of the artist; a benevolent father he might have been, but a father he was nonetheless. Still, despite its many contradictions, Beuys' practice laid the groundwork for

subsequent movements including institutional critique and relational aesthetics, which have, in turn, revived education as art. (Podesva 2007).

By contrast to Beuys, Kaprow took his ideology from John Dewey who maintained that ‘The solution of this problem requires a well thought-out philosophy of the social factors that operate in the constitution of the individual experience’ (Dewey 1938, 19). In faith with Dewey, Kaprow and Kohl took their project out into the community and sought to give children an opportunity to gain empowerment through thinking differently (and critically)—a radical departure from the standard teaching at the time. The more dominant role of the artist as a ‘Beuysian author’ appears to be less evident in social practice today, where the inclusive and egalitarian nature of many of the projects requires the agency of the organisers to have diminished authority.



Figure 6. Josef Albers's drawing class on the porch of Lee Hall.

Photo courtesy North Carolina State Archives, Black Mountain College Papers.

Image source:

<http://www.blackmountaincollegeproject.org/ARCHITECTURE/CAMPUSES/BLUE%20RIDGE/BLUE%20R10.gif>

Perhaps less known was the work of the European members of Fluxus—Robert Filliou (France) and his collaborator George Brecht (Germany). It was called *La cédille qui ne finit pas* (The Cedilla That Smiles), held over the summer of 1965 in a storefront in Villefranche, a seaside

village in Nice in which they established the ‘Non-School of Villefranche’—a school that was not much more than a letterhead. At the very extreme of alternative schooling they proposed:

Carefree Exchange of Information and Experience.
No Students. No Teachers.
Perfect freedom,
At times to listen, At times to talk ⁵⁶.

This seeming indifference towards common types of systems and behaviour that is taken to the liminal edge was also evident in Allan Kaprow’s ‘happenings’. His role as a teacher and educator of student artists is highlighted in a series of essays published in the edited book *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* 1993, in which he sought to ‘reeducate artists’ by shifting their perception of the common experience as an alternative way of making art (Kaprow 1993, 97-147).

Over the years, dissatisfaction with educational standards of teaching and learning have occasionally peaked, and artists and educators have often united to incite and generate change on a larger scale. Such revolutionary moments led to the formation of the Bauhaus (1919-33), Black Mountain College in North Carolina (1933-57) (**Fig 6**), and later, the Hornsey uprising in London in 1968 (Tickner 2008). Later the aforementioned *Unitednationsplaza* in Berlin (2006-07) caused uproar over the quality of arts education and knowledge imparted by universities. The fact that this line of critique has persisted despite earlier revolutionary moments in the history of art indicates that there has been no wholesale transformation in democratic modes of art education. While there is an argument that there has been a proliferation of projects and research that critique institutional failures by attempting to ‘sidestep the closure[s]of critiques’ there are a number of ‘para’ sites of education and the emergence of a new model of the free-school phenomena that take on a wider scope by ‘offering instead to open up the academy through reinvention’(Podesva 2007). Artists, in response to addressing failings of the more regulated education systems, or as a way to highlight or embrace a specific cultural, geographical or political failure—often form these educational platforms.

There is nothing new about democratic education and free schools. Leo Tolstoy was said to have set up a free school for peasants in his home in Russia in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁷ In a more contemporary history, democratic elementary schooling still exists today at Summerhill

⁵⁶ Quoted from Erlhoff, Michael (ed) *The Eternal Network Presents Robert Filliou*. Sprengel Museum, Hannover exhibition catalogue (1984). 166 in an essay by Dr Annette Gomperts, from the catalogue of a site specific work, *Thin Air* (2009) by artist Paul Rooney at Leeds Metropolitan University.

⁵⁷ Wikipedia contributors, ‘Democratic Education’, *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_education. Accessed 12/12/15

School in the UK, founded by A.S. Neil in 1921 (Smith 2001), and is seen as a cornerstone to democratic thinking that paved the way for the ‘free school movement’ of the 60s and 70s in America⁵⁸. There were child-centred progressive education approaches that were mostly seen as alternatives or supplements to structured, institutionalised forms of education.

In recent years these models for child education have become a significant influence on artists seeking to mobilise alternative ways of pedagogy as a new form of practice in socially engaged art (Allen 2011, Podesva 2007, Rogoff 2010c). Unlike the Beuysian model, however, the contemporary free schools are most often self-organised, and operate with the inspirations, motivations and style of collectives or artist-run initiatives (ARIs)⁵⁹

Many of the ‘schools’ or educative art works and organisations sit outside the conventional forms of pedagogical institutions, some complimenting more standard education, while others operate in stark opposition. Despite these discrepancies however they all display very similar ideologies, described by Podesva as:

- A school structure that operates as a social medium.
- A dependence on collaborative production.
- A tendency toward process (versus object) based production.
- An aleatory or open nature.
- An ongoing and potentially endless temporality.
- A free space for learning.
- A post-hierarchical learning environment where there are no teachers, just co-participants.
- A preference for exploratory, experimental, and multi-disciplinary approaches to knowledge production.
- An awareness of the instrumentalisation of the academy.
- A virtual space for the communication and distribution of ideas. (2007)

Using these principles, in the main, free schools and alternative education and research platforms tend to work against most of the ideologies engrained in standard education, with some deliberately distancing themselves from structures that are based on quantifiable outputs and relatively stable formats of delivery. While the majority of alternative educational activity exists outside formal institutions, others to varying degrees, are supported or have associations with the established academies.

⁵⁸ The Philosophy for Children movement grew out of the American Free School Movement. See Wikipedia contributors, ‘Free School Movement’, *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_school_movement. Accessed 12/12/15

⁵⁹ A comprehensive catalogue of alternative schools titles and links is available from ‘the Teachable File’ (tTF), which was established by Carson Salter and maintained as a resource from MOMA in New York. See Salter, Carson. 2011. *The Teachable File*. edited by Museum of Modern Art. New York: MoMA Library <http://teachablefile.org/> .

The Mountain School of the Arts in California, a free school established in 2005, was devised by two artists, Piero Golia and Eric Wesley, to act independently, but also as an adjunct to art education in the established university system. The Future Academy, initiated by independent curator Clementine Deliss in 2002 at the Edinburgh College of Art and University of Edinburgh, is a global educational research project examining the future of art academies and is now supported by a number of institutions in the UK and Bangalore.

The cultural theorist, Irit Rogoff attempted to establish a school called 'Free' at Goldsmith's in London, which was a free-school that was to exist outside the university, but implicated within it, in a parasitic mode of working.⁶⁰ 'Free' was conceived as a site for the production of 'uncontained knowledge' based around some kind of urgency, with the aim to generate, extend and transform in a way that was immediate and, as far as possible, unmediated. In standard education, this is often problematic because the kind of entrenched systems are not adaptable enough to account for the amorphous nature of contemporaneity. Rogoff argues,

thinking 'academy' as 'potentiality' ...means dismissing much of the instrumentalizing that seems to go hand in hand with education, much of the managerialism that is associated with a notion of 'training' for this or that profession or market. Letting go of many of the understandings of 'academy' as a training ground whose only permitted outcomes are a set of concrete objects or practices. It allows for the inclusions of notions of both fallibility and actualization into a practice of teaching and learning (2006, 133).

Her bid to begin a 'free' school at Goldsmiths failed, as she was unable to convince the institutional board of its value as a generator of 'knowledge', which highlights some of the problems with embracing potentiality and possibility—fundamental characteristics of learning and the production of knowledge. In this, we can see that non-knowledge, or unquantifiable knowledge, for Rogoff is as much a part of producing knowledge as that which is already known. Students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, are capable of adding to a knowledge pool in this way. Instead, many institutions have no capacity to endorse, capture or use non-knowledge and thus resort to a view that the reception of knowledge is a passive exercise, which, according to Freire, is an oppressive mode of learning. In general, art education is implicated within this thinking.

⁶⁰ Other similar examples are *Proto-academy*, and *Department 21*. An independent MA programme can be found at *Maumaus* in Portugal and MA course set up by artists Bik Van der Pol called *The School of Missing Studies*. They were set up as alternatives or adjuncts to current structures to tackle what is seen as the failure in regulated systems, while at the same time taking advantage of these failures. It is interesting to note that many of these para-institutional platforms are aimed at graduate students, not integrated into undergraduate studies. Other alternative schools can be found on Salter, Carson. 2011. *The Teachable File*. edited by Museum of Modern Art. New York: MoMA Library

A typical postgraduate program in curatorial studies at Goldsmith's Department of Visual Cultures, refers to the course being structured around student-led research and works towards the 'curatorial', as opposed the curated. I identify 'the curatorial' elsewhere as a mode of working that underpins the platforms and structure of this research proposal as it is in Goldsmith's own publication *The Curatorial, A Philosophy of Curating*, which I reference. While my allegiances are clearly aligned with this form of open-ended practice as a means to increase knowledge, I nonetheless appreciate that this methodology is potentially fraught with problems for students who may well fail through what appears to be lack of direction. It is therefore assumed that this mode of operating is not suited to all, least of which are the 'Humean' types of personalities who require a more structured form of practice. With this in mind, I consider that it takes a deal of self-discipline, direction and organisation to work under such freethinking conditions.

While the discourse on social practice and alternative art education has been extensive in Europe and North America, it has been far less so in Australia, and the historical lineage of early alternative forms of socially engaged art and art education here is much less clear.⁶¹ Instead of initiating schools and learning platforms, a generalised discourse criticising the hegemony of Eurocentric and object-based art came from writers such as Donald Brook and Ian North during the 1970s. The Experimental Art Foundation (EAF) in Adelaide produced some of that early writing, (Brook 1975, North 1975, Brook 1977-81) and followed by a number of artist publications and artist-run initiatives. The discourse was not leveled against teaching and learning as such, but against centralised perspectives on art that had come out of Europe and North America. Champions of post-object art saw the movement as a means to break away from the Eurocentric obsession with national identity (Barker and Green 2009, Brook 2008). A focus on the 'alternative' and artists' expanded practices was also evident in the work of Melbourne writers and artists such as John Nixon and Paul Taylor, and the new avant-garde journal, *Art & Text*. In Sydney, precedents for alternative practice manifested in the artist-run spaces Inhibodress and the Tin Sheds.

While these early models predate Bourriaud's relational forms of art there has been some activity in socially engaged art in Australia in recent times by organisations such as Spaced: Art

⁶¹ Small inroads into understanding socially engaged art practice in Australia have been made by academic and artist Marnie Badham (RMIT, Melbourne), and its inclusion in interdisciplinary conferences such as AAANZ 2013 Conference at Monash University, Melbourne in 2013, however there is no clear voice and overview of Australian practice, despite many artists becoming involved in these types of practice.

out of Place, formerly known as IASKA⁶² in Western Australia, and smaller artist-run initiatives such as *The Centre for Everything* in Melbourne. However, there is very little critical or academic literature on pedagogical modes of practice and free-schooling in Australian post 1990, despite small pockets of discussion and writing on projects coming through less academic sources.⁶³ Melbourne-based artist and writer Spiros Panigirakis (2012) contends that pedagogical art environments are on the rise and are producing innovative forms of experimental teaching that expose and challenge the 'atelier system of tuition that still dominates art schools in Melbourne', which is likewise true of art schools in general across Australia. The increase in activity has not been widely documented nor has it been reciprocal between art schools and contemporary art practice, evidenced by the lack of social practice, or its wider discourse, in the course curricula of Australian art schools.⁶⁴

This begs the question of how aspiring artists are to learn about social practice. Julie Ault and Martin Beck take up the question in *Notes for an Art School*. They point to the fact that despite Bishop's suggestion that socially engaged artists are the new avant-garde, 'Art as social process, collaboration and collective production are largely omitted as topics and models from many schools and institutions' (2006, 6). Given that there is an identified trend in social practice, art schools are out of step with what is happening in the field. It appears that part of the problem lies in the fact that there are no ready rules to enable critical assessment for this form of practice, and to a greater degree, the lack of resources to successfully run such complex activities associated with social modes of practice. Instead, if they are recognised at all in foundation courses, they become a misfit—positioned as units within traditional medium-specific practices.

From my experience and observations, artists have tended to become involved in alternative forms of practice in spite of their education. In other words, they find their way through no

⁶² IASKA (International Art Space Kelleberin, Australia), http://www.spaced.org.au/one/content/about_us/

⁶³ Much of the commentary has happened outside academia in Australia in journals and magazines such as UN Magazine, however books such as *Rethinking the Contemporary Art School: The Artist, the PhD and the Academy* (2010) have provided a platform for some commentary from academics about the Australian situation. The Melbourne Free School operated in 2010–11 <http://melbournefreeschool.blogspot.com.au/> by Uplands Gallery and the Melbourne Free University <http://melbournefreeuniversity.org> See Panigirakis, Spiros. 2012. "Teacher, Teacher, Teacher." *UN Magazine* 6 (2). Also for an overview of community forms of discursive engagement in Australia, see Ihlein, Lucas. 2009. "Public Art as Public Conversation." In *Harmonic Tremors: Aesthetic Interventions in the Public Sphere*, edited by Stephen Rainbird. Melbourne Gasworks. 33–44

⁶⁴ Relational, social or participatory forms of engagement are occasionally found in theory or integrated into studio practice as research methods, but generally not formally taught as art practices in themselves. Professor Marie Sierra, former head of Sculpture & Spatial Practice, School of Art at Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne, and Head of the Tasmanian College of the Arts, now Deputy Dean and Head of School, UNSW Australia Art & Design. Email conversation 20th December 2011

clear precepts offered by art school, but do it by themselves.⁶⁵ Artists working with social and pedagogical agendas are more likely to be supported by dedicated art organisations with experimental and open-ended pedagogical intentions, rather than teaching programmes in art schools or public museum-based education programmes. This is particularly so in central Europe and North America where there are small numbers of avenues for the presentation of such work, and in some cases critical forums for discourse, evaluation and publication.⁶⁶ Utrecht offers some examples worth highlighting: the programmes called *FORMER WEST*, (2008-2014) and *Future Vocabularies* (2014-2016) initiated and organised by BAK, and CASCO's extensive programme of events.⁶⁷ These have a pedagogical role that supports artists who engage in conversational work and allow them to realise their projects and to mobilise discourse and exchange. The projects often stem from issues under consideration by artists and organisations that evolve over time rather than being immediately visible. The outcomes of the art projects are not fixed presentations but as the former director of CASCO, Emily Pethick explains, they are about exchange and dialogue with 'multiple points of entry and layers of resonance' (Pethick 2008).

By referring to earlier models of alternative and experimental education and the social conditions that prompted them, the present conditions of economic constriction and political conservatism suggest that the time is right for artists to attend to art's pedagogy, and to be part of a pedagogical 'turn'. On the one hand, the evidence is that alternative models of education are proliferating in Europe and North America as part of artistic practice, bringing with them democratic modes of pedagogy and art production. On the other hand, there is no scholarly writing that demonstrates a trend in this form of practice in Australia, despite a modicum of pedagogical projects that have surfaced in recent years from artists such as Sean Dockray, Gabrielle de Vietri and Lucas Ihlein. By highlighting and testing some of these key points of difference between traditional education and free schools, my intention is to put forward new modes of cultural creation in art schools.

⁶⁵ In recent years there have been at least three candidates who have completed PhDs that reference relational and social modes of art practice at TCotA, yet very little about its role in professional practice is formally acknowledged within the school's academic discourse.

⁶⁶ At the time of writing a report, led by the Psychosocial Research Unit at the University of Central Lancashire, in partnership with Situations was released in which methodologies for establishing evaluative measures in socially engaged practice were put forward. See - Froggett, Lynn, Julian Manley, Alastair Roy, Michael Prior, and Claire Doherty. 2014. Public Art and Local Civic Engagement. In *Development Grants 7042 Cultural Value Project Awards*. Preston UK: Psychosocial Research Unit, University of Central Lancashire & Situations, Commissioning and Production Agency.

⁶⁷ BAK's FORMER WEST and Future Vocabularies projects can be found at; <http://www.bak-utrecht.nl/en/Program/1stFWC?parent=Research%2FItineraries%2FFutureVocabularies> and CASCO, Office for art, Design and Theory at; <http://www.cascoprojects.org/?casco=about>

1.1 Social agency as education

Artists, Anton Vidokle, Tania Bruguera and Pablo Helguera are three groundbreaking artists who have each created a number of projects that provoke social agency. Their work exemplifies the production of new knowledge through the effective linking of art practice with educational and exhibitionary platforms to develop a community. Using different modalities, they have developed multi-dimensional projects and platforms that are dialogical in intent and emancipatory in outcome. Through their work they have opened up new democratic spaces for potential change; they have created the capacity to challenge dominant modes of knowledge production and promoted the rethinking of traditional and entrenched social situations.

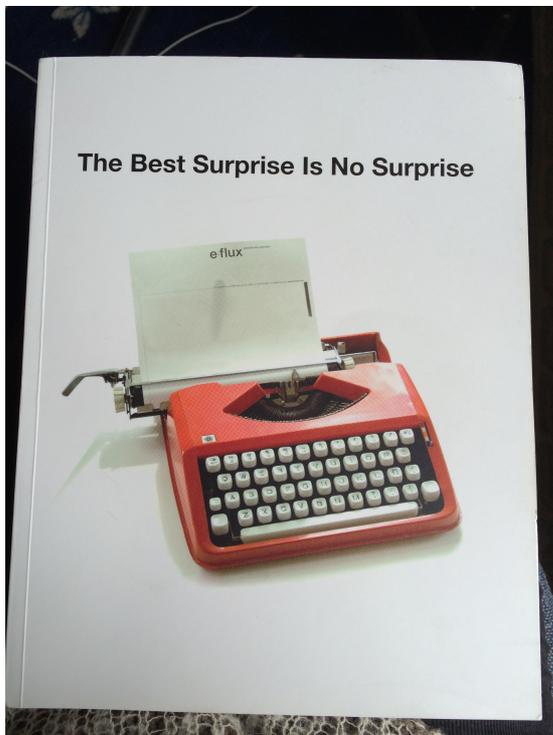


Figure 7 *The Best Surprise is no Surprise*. (2006) published by *e-flux* Image Source: Fiona Lee

The *UNP* project run in Berlin during 2006-7 instigated by Vidokle confirmed these attributes in its twelve-month free school-as-exhibition, which was undoubtedly concerned with the production of knowledge. His other major collaborative undertaking, *e-flux*, is not so clear in its mission, as we understand it. Although *e-flux* could be defined within the realm of commerce it is, as I argue below, a form of alternative pedagogy because of its curious capacity to generate and disseminate knowledge along with its service announcements.

e-flux began in 1998 when Vidokle and his colleagues were looking for an inexpensive way to promote *The Best Surprise is No Surprise*—an

exhibition showing the works of three fellow artists to be staged in a New York hotel room. Email technology was just catching on and they managed to rally over 500 people to attend by contacting just a small number of connected individuals and friends. The all night event serendipitously signaled the beginning of the unique and networked venture, *e-flux*, as an art phenomenon based around access and the sharing of knowledge and information—and one

that now sees over 90,000 online subscribers tune in (or not) to a daily myriad of commercial exhibition announcements, free edited publications and collaborative projects.⁶⁸

e-flux combines the distribution of knowledge through free online scholarly journals and develops and plays host to a range of participatory projects, often framed around the generation of knowledge. These art activities are boldly financed through the business of service announcements, which distributes art information to a wider online art community⁶⁹.

Controversially, this multi-faceted project sits at the edge of art, education and commerce. On the one hand, globally broadcasting information (about art exhibitions, gallery openings, book launches, fairs, biennales, university conferences and other artist projects and events) is a business venture and not necessarily educational. On the other hand, the format of *e-flux*'s announcement notices not only provides an array of information such as the usual websites address and event schedule but a short erudite description, premise or theoretical text and valuable links to other sites of interest.

Thus, the *e-flux* advertising arm is more than just a service of announcing: it is a research site and archive of mini-essays that provide a greater understanding of the various art projects and programmes for a vast number of subscribers, nearly all of whom will not buy the books or participate in events or enroll in courses. (Fig 7)⁷⁰ While there is debate about what *e-flux* is, for the most part it has been a godsend for cultural producers who are geographically distanced from the larger global centres of art, because from one convenient site, it manages to keep its readers critically informed and offers them a sense of connection (and participation) with the rest of the world. It prompts a sense of social agency through community (Sholis 2009).

In 2003, the Cuban artist Tania Bruguera began *Cátedra Arte De Conducta* or the Behavior Art Department, which was a seven-year free school art project located in Havana, Cuba. It was initiated as a critique of the Cuban education system, born out of the lack of available art education, the autocratic mode of teaching and life in Cuba, the need to promote less

⁶⁸ These figures were reported on the website in 2012 and would be substantially increased at the time of writing. <http://www.e-flux.com/about/>

⁶⁹ In late 2015 *e-flux* began *e-flux Conversations* a new platform for participatory online conversations about urgent artistic or social ideas. <http://conversations.e-flux.com/>

⁷⁰ This publication, with essays by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Daniel Birnbaum, is a compilation of announcements from *e-flux* during the period 1999- 2006 and shows the modes extended texts used in the advertisements. *e-flux*. 2006. *The Best Surprise is No Surprise*. New York: e-flux.

commercialised art for the burgeoning US market and to provide an avenue for artists to voice political concerns.



Figure 8. Tania Bruguera, *Cátedra Arte De Conductor*, 2007
Thomas Hirschhorn as guest
Image source: <http://www.taniabruquera.com>

The project's aim was to provide an alternative art education provoked by conversations organised around art and politics; it was to be *useful*.⁷¹ Described as 'Behaviour Art' it dealt with sociopolitical behavior and the use of art as an instrument for the transformation of ideology through civic action. She describes behavior in her work as 'not only a material for the artworks, it is also part of life, and as such it has to be functional' (Finkelpearl 2013, 184). This was achieved through a series of typical art school structures such as workshops, lectures, performances, interventions, international exchanges and residencies, themed exhibitions, including presentations at the Havana, Gwangju and Liverpool Biennials. The programmes were generally organised around the interloper as a guest provocateur. Actors, anthropologists, lawyers, visual artists, art dealers, curators, architects, writers, scientists and dancers made up the guest list. (**Fig 8**) As a pedagogical achievement, Bruguera was more interested in developing civic spaces for sociopolitical conversation in Cuba that had the collective capacity

⁷¹ The term 'useful' art is recognised in projects such as Tania Bruguera's *Art de Útil* and more widely acknowledged in commissioned programmes such as Hudson, Alistair. 2015. "Part one: Use Value of Art." *Beyond The Gallery* <http://www.axisweb.org/features/news-and-views/beyond-the-gallery/what-is-art-for-part-one/>. for the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art., and in published essays such as Wright, Stephen. 2013-14. "Towards a Lexicon of Usership." In *Museum of Arte Útil*, ed Nick Aikens and Stephen Wright. Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum.

for generation and transformation of human potential, not the mere transference of information and knowledge (2013, 180).

Amidst arguments about its identification as art, Bruguera's agenda for *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* was clear: it was an artwork that was a mutually symbiotic experiment in pedagogy. It was instigated and run within a formalised national institution, the Instituto Superior de Arte and was both critical of, and subject to, institutional scrutiny (Bishop 2012, 249). Bruguera's goals were that *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* would be a long-term interactive, interdisciplinary and participatory artwork that would use the education of a generation of younger artists to empower and change entrenched attitudes and ideologies. Using friction and unaccountability as strategies for her teaching, she worked and developed the ideas of the younger Cubans, because she felt that they were not already conditioned to deep-rooted systems of power.⁷² Her accountability then was not to satisfy the art historian, theorist or critic; rather it was to the young Cubans, and the system (the Cuban education system and the art world system) within which they will operate into the future. Helguera has suggested that this 'transpedagogy' plays on Michel de Certeau's notion of 'the tactic' whereby 'individuals "manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them"'.⁷³ I suggest that accountability for Bruguera, in this case, was not about the quality of the visual aesthetics or other standard judgments that come out of our current interpretation of art, but to use the system to broadening the art world's actual horizon of accountability.

It could be said that socially engaged art is aleatory and thus by nature anti-structural, making it difficult to categorise and assimilate into the more formal art institutions, both museum and art school. Nevertheless, social projects that use these qualities as modes of operation, can often have a positive effect upon more institutions. Pablo Helguera is a significant contributor to the debate on pedagogy in socially engaged practice and is an artist and educator who employ reciprocally beneficial techniques that serve both exploratory and institutional structures.

Helguera's publication *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook* published in 2011 is an elementary user's manual for artists and educators. The book

⁷² These older habits or conditions included an understanding that a career as an artists meant that you went on to produce consumable art works for the growing US tourist market in Cuba. Finkelpearl, Tom. 2013. *What we made: conversations on art and social cooperation*. Durham & London: Duke University Press. 179

⁷³ This quote was found in another edition of "Transpedagogy" by Pablo Helguera – see- https://s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/75021/helguera_transpedagogy.pdf. Accessed 15/5/2014

is not intended to be an academic analysis of socially engaged art, rather I would argue it is a facilitator; negotiating the complexity of a of field practice for its readers, who have found scant acknowledgement or understanding within academia. He has likewise used his role as a performance artist to deliver art lectures as a critique of the formality and stiffness of the public art lecture, *Theatrum Anatomicum* (2009), and he has been involved in critical debates at the juncture of art and education, which he identified as ‘transpedagogy’, a term now quite broadly employed (Helguera 2011b).

For some time, Helguera’s day job has been as an educator in a museum, a position in which he has developed the capacity for reciprocal exchange. When I interviewed him in New York in 2013, he described the contrary positions he occupied, as both a socially engaged artist, and as an educator within an institutionally bureaucratic structure. While it seemed likely that these positions would be antagonistic, he described precisely that it was this conflict feeding both his art practice, and his role as an educator. The exchange provided a rich ‘thirdspace’ for experimentation and the production of knowledge that was not singularly afforded by either role. In the interview, he says that: “[T]he role I fulfil [as an educator]—I have never met anyone else who does exactly the same thing, and it is a very strange dichotomy that I have to confront – this dual identity. Perhaps it has informed my way of understanding what an institution can be and is, and what it means to operate outside of the institution” (Helguera 2013).

In this way Helguera deliberately uses his social-engaged practice to circumnavigate some of the more rigid operations and regulations that artists often come up against working within large organisations, institutions and regulators, nonetheless he remains indebted to these formal constraints that provide structure for social practices. “Ultimately, at the same time, I am equally sceptical of the idea of being completely independent from any framework and sometimes I’m not as pessimistic about a work being within and institutional framework” (Helguera 2013).

Between 2003- 2006, Helguera established and ran the *School of Panamerican Unrest*, (*SPU*) in which he used the structure of a school as an institutional framework to corral, engage, empower and educate disparate communities. This was achieved by reconnecting with the way



Figure 9. Pablo Helguera, *School of Panamerican Unrest*
2003-2006

Image source: Pablo Helguera website http://creativetimereports.org/files/2012/08/helguera_slide01.jpg

in which Pan Americanism was used by former travelling missionaries and the pioneers of early settlement to broadcast knowledge.⁷⁴ (**Fig 9**) A community art project that sought to reframe established modes of discourse surrounding political and historical subjects, it did so by linking different regions across the Americas through dialogue and social agency. *SPU* was developed as a mobile schoolhouse that physically crossed the Americas covering almost 20,000 miles from Anchorage, Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, Argentina, making forty stops in between.

It was a nomadic think-tank. A travelling school that practically and symbolically worked as an educational platform in which he would hold informal public meetings social gatherings, workshops, film screenings, and present formal civic ceremonies. By entering into these communities and localising issues of concern, he provoked inquiry and used this tension to enable generative and transformative situations. These were not merely reactionary: they developed as generative processes where discussions activated and empowered its citizens towards change.

Vidokle, Bruguera and Helguera are three artists that temporarily disrupt understandings of structural method-based thinking by rejecting dominant ideologies and to some extent the

⁷⁴ A movement begun in 1822 that politically, economically and culturally encourages relationships, collaboration, and dialogue between the states of America. <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/71085/ezequiel-padilla/the-meaning-of-pan-americanism>

norms of accountability found in most controlled education systems. Their durational and multifaceted undertakings, devised communal spaces of learning, support empowerment by initiating generative and transformative dialogue through active processes and event-based programming. They instigated the production of knowledge through friction and critical exchange, yet they cultivate useful tensions that support symbiotic relations. However, it is difficult to pinpoint the true pedagogical moments in these projects, when much of what we expect from art is derived from things we already know; things that we are sure of and that have been accounted for. Using active processes and multi-functional platforms, these projects unsettle the normative understanding of schools, knowledge production, education, and, for that matter, art.

Despite these projects being hailed as egalitarian with a degree of autonomy and democracy, we tend hear most of the commentary on the experience of the projects from their founders, Vidokle, Helguera and Bruguera, or as a scholarly review. It appears there is with published evidence available on what exactly went on inside some of the projects from the participant's viewpoints. However, one glimpse within *Unitednationsplaza* identified that the idea of a year-long school was not always the orderly mission one would expect of an educational program. The edginess, not to mention the authoritarian sentiment, of this work became apparent at one point by one of the participants, Taraneh Fazeli, who describes an 'archaically dynamic atmosphere' and the participants he refers to as 'hostages,' 'inmates', and the organisers of the event, as 'captors' (2009). Furthermore, he notes that the strategy *UNP* was using to bring about change from within the institution was compromised in the extended version of *UNP* called "Night School," which was actually held in the New Museum in New York. Being held 'within the museum' was problematic because *UNP's* modus operandi was a critique of institutions and claims of being an autonomous project (2009).

1.2 Cognitive forms of aesthetic engagement

It could be said that most contemporary art relies on a certain level of spectacular interest to apprehend its viewer, yet it is hard to find something visually arresting if all we see is a group of people in conversation, a pile of books on a table, or the leftovers of a meal. Modes of social practice, and particularly those relating to pedagogy, are often perplexing to the public and critics alike because they exemplify, to quote the art historian Tom Holert, the movement of art from 'mere retinal to epistemic' (Holert and Wilson 2010, 322).

In this section of the thesis, I will describe the dichotomy between the cognitive and visual phenomenon in art, and the way in which artists and publics have been harnessing an undesirable propensity towards intellectual lethargy and the spectacle in an age of visual and information overload. Most socially engaged artists attempt to reorient art's use-value and gain richer experiences by making better connections between the visual and the cognitive, by drawing on intellectual labour through durational modes of dialogical exchange and process-driven art projects. In doing this, they are calling for a rethinking of how we evaluate social projects that take a broader view of what we are experiencing; in valuing each project on its own merit based on what Claire Doherty calls its 'aesthetic integrity' (Doherty 2014b).

It is this aesthetic integrity to which new forms of social practice aspire and which can distinguish critically successful projects from other cultural activities which offer immediate gratification, but which do not generate new forms of critical dialogue or transformation. It is here that we find our argument for the value of social practice beyond mass spectacle. It is here that we find the argument for investment in durational arts projects, which evolve over time and place to allow for those critical dialogues to emerge (2014b).

The traditional conception of art in our culture has privileged the object or image that is read from a visual perspective, but from the turn of last century, other types of aesthetic theories and missions began to form around groupings of disparate individuals. They formed multidisciplinary movements that tended to prioritised conceptual ideas, changed the face of visual art. Historically, players of these movements were among other things, writers, playwrights, poets—as well as artists. They included Marcel Duchamp and Max Ernst (Dada), Andre Breton, Man Ray and René Magritte (Surrealism), Guy Dubord and the Spur Group (Situationists), Joseph Beuys and Robert Filliou (Fluxus) Richard Long and Hans Haacke (Conceptual art). They denigrated the primacy of visual aesthetics and embraced other means of expression such as performances, lectures, happenings, readings and publications to forward their ideas and issues about the environment, economics, politics, culture and society. This multi-medium approach was also adopted by later groups of creators, such as the Art & Language group, whose journal *Art-Language* was first published in 1969. These modes of production, of which social practice becomes yet another form, further exemplifies the transition of art into the 'epistemic' realm and confronting established canons of art and shifting our primary attention from visual to intellectual.

Pablo Helguera notes that 'Conceptualism introduced the thought process as artwork; the materiality of the artwork is optional' (2011b, 308). It could be said that while the cognitive

component of art traditionally underpins theory and research departments, and thus the curricula of most art schools—also evident in art gallery programmes in their scholarly catalogue essays. Helguera has likewise identified that in recent times conceptual art has been the origin of recent moves into socially engaged art, particularly that which embraces pedagogy (2011b).

The problem that exists however lies in the nature of spectatorial and the participatory engagement; in this instance more aligned to how Debord thinks of the way in which the public engages in the spectacle. In his original idea, the spectacle is a mode of pure consumption in which there is no capacity to genuinely engage and no capacity to question or even properly to respond. It would be fair to say that in an art market dominated by commercial profit, most members of the viewing public have become ill equipped to relate to projects that require reading, listening, writing, conversation and debate—much less to take advantage of the rich fodder that these dialogical modes of art produce. **(Fig 10)** There is a general sense that in an easily accessible, information-rich culture we have become conditioned and thus disinclined to engage in an activity that requires intellectual effort.

Another commentator on the seduction of images and the passivity of the audience is the French philosopher, Jacques Rancière, who suggests that spectatorship equates to submission to the spectacle. He proposes that we engage with art in more active and emancipatory ways. He maintains that ‘what is required is a theatre without spectators, where those in attendance learn from as opposed to being seduced by images; where they become active participants as opposed to passive voyeurs’ (2009, 4). The foregoing discussion may imply that this form of active engagement constitutes a physical ‘doing’; it is necessary to be actively doing something to engage properly with art but in this research the discussion centres on conversation as an authentic mode of active engagement, which involves feelings and other senses—actions that are often seen as passive.



Figure 10. Anton Vidokle et al. *UNP's Martha Rosler's Library*, 2006

Image source:

http://www.on-curating.org/files/oc/dateverwaltung/issue22/Anton_Vidokle_New/1_MRLWEB.jpg

Artists such as Vidokle, Helguera and Bruguera clearly promote the development of a thinking public, not by seeking to overpower the visual aspect in art, rather to bridge the gulf and enhance the experience of art through intellectual models of practice. Gadamer, and his teacher, Martin Heidegger likewise emphasised the importance of listening, thinking and viewing, often regarded as passive, as active modes of engagement. The spectatorial nonetheless is frequently associated with the mass consumerist desire for instant pleasure and Gadamer says of this that:

human culture is greatly endangered by the passivity that is produced when the channels of cultural information are all too instantly available. ...What is demanded is precisely the active application of our own thirst for knowledge, and of our own powers of discrimination (1986, 51).

Forms of cultural information that are too readily accessible tend not to provide a genuine capacity for authentic engagement, which includes some of the passive activities that normally occur in dialogue, such as listening, questioning and analysing as a mode of response.

Similarly, the American artist Martha Rosler advocates activating participants as constituents of a public, rather than as members of an audience. In a discussion with Anton Vidokle, she

describes an increasing absence of *effective* publics to view art, and suggests the need for other forms of engagement rather than the exhibition: According to Vidokle, Rosler:

observed that the public—in the sense of groups of engaged citizen-subjects—was being replaced by audiences. ...audiences are consumers of leisure and spectacle; they have no political agency and no necessary means or particular interest in effecting social change. ...while the audiences for art became enormous, there is no public among them. Consequently, while it is still possible to produce a critical art object, there seems to be no public out there that can complete its transformative function, ...If transformative function is what we are after, an exhibition of art may not be the place to start. Perhaps a much more complex model of art production and circulation is necessary to recuperate the agency of art in the absence of an effective public (Vidokle and Rosler 2008).

Conversely the curator, writer and critic Claire Doherty claims that today's art public has changed over time, and now demand much more from their engagement with art (Doherty 2014a). Among the reason she cites is the virtually unlimited access to information and technology, in what Marxist theorist Franco Berardi calls 'an overwhelming supply of attention demanding goods' (2010). As a result, the modern art audience is generally more astute, seeking more and more from artists, institutions and organisations. Doherty believes they have come to expect more from their art experience. From her experience of producing public art projects over the last ten years for *Situations*, Doherty has concluded that artists, writers, critics and curators need to rise to this new challenge and work harder and produce more engaged works that take the public with them (Doherty 2014a).

Likewise, the Canadian educator Gary Pearson controversially declares that artists should be trained in art departments that are, 'adjusting to the realisation that intellectual tools are more important than material techniques in the education of artists today' (2009, 174). Further to this, the Uruguayan artist, writer and academic Luis Camnitzer, himself an early pioneer of conceptual art in the 60s, argues that the art schools of today, at their most basic level, are 'essentially craft schools'—something that highlights a failure in their responsibility to adequately deal with the cognitive elements in art (2015).

Rosler, Doherty and Pearson's pronouncements beg the question of what these 'intellectual tools' and more 'complex models of art production and circulation' might be, and how they might lead us to use our thinking powers instead of being caught and transfixed by visual spectacle.

The historian Grant Kester confronts the issue of reaching and implicating audiences in his book *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art*, and develops a zone of understanding about the role dialogue and community plays in our appreciation of art. He speaks about dialogical projects as:

[encouraging] their participants to question fixed identities, destroy stereotypical images, and so on, they do so through a cumulative process of exchanges and dialogue rather than a single, instantaneous shock of insight precipitated by an image or object (2004, 12).

Kester argues that a genuinely aesthetically cognitive experience is more likely to be gained by placing more consideration on communication as an aesthetic form. He admits that to do so requires a paradigm shift in our understanding of the work of art, 'a redefinition of aesthetic experience that is durational rather than immediate', and that the evaluative framework resides in the condition and character of the dialogical exchange itself, which he calls an 'aesthetic experience' (2004, 12). I concur with Kester's 'expanded' sense of aesthetics, and have used it as a basis of my own research in 'Rogue Academy'.

I associate a thoughtful aesthetic with Heidegger and Gadamer's hermeneutic approaches. It is implied in their conception of conversation as interactional. The Russian writer, scholar and philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) conceived of beauty similarly, not as visual allure, but as a mode of address and connection, as Deborah Haynes comments,

Beauty may be less visible, or even invisible, in moral and intellectual activity, where cogency and coherence are a priority. These of course have their own inherent beauty, but this is different from beauty that is obvious in one's perception ...Bakhtin focused on the aesthetics of the creative process itself, on the activity of the artist or author who creates (2002, 293).

Dialogue in art has normally been the preserve of the viewer who uses it to make sense of an object on display, whether it is a material object, or a less palpable creation like performance or sound. Social projects tend to cast the viewer in the role of active agent or co-producer, instead of the spectator of a finished product. Kester provides a description of how the simple act of conversation changes, and in my view emancipates, our understanding of art:

[conversational] projects all share a concern with the creative facilitation of dialogue and exchange. While it is common for a work of art to provoke dialogue among viewers, this typically occurs in response to a finished object. In these projects, on the other hand, conversation becomes an integral part of the work itself. It is reframed as an active, generative process that can help us

speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities, official discourse, and the perceived inevitability of partisan political conflict (2004, 8).

Kester's observations bring the notion duration to the fore in social practices. Tania Bruguera, who is interested in the notion of time in her projects contends that she felt she 'needed to change the use of time in [her] work, the time required to experience it. I wanted to situate the thinking process within the work and not outside it' (Finkelppearl 2013, 182). Bruguera's approach to time is instructive because it not only endorses the value of spending time to think more about art as an active part of the artwork but, it addresses the difficult problem of a superficial grasping of art that is mere surface knowledge.

The French cultural theorist and urbanist, Paul Virilio contends that the cult of speed rather than war or politics, shape society. The consequences of such a vision are detailed in much of his writing, including *The Original Accident* (2007) and *Speed and Politics* (2006). In taking on Virilio's ideas he convinces me that the speed and ease through which we gain knowledge in this highly visual and technological age has, as he argues, consequences. It could be said that we have become accustomed to not spending too much effort in order to gain knowledge, and therefore we have been propelled toward a culture of easiness and compliance, that feeds profitable consumerist ideology. Along with 'Google search' we are bombarded with alternatives; flashing advertisements, networking opportunities and endless links to yet further information—all distractions from the principle aim of finding out something. While industries have been spawned to ensure that something more is proffered at a click of a button, we are nonetheless able to access endless information more than ever before. The question remains, however—does the speed and effortlessness at which we pursue information, let alone the distractions encountered on the way, affect our ability to access, retain and recall truth, let alone understand it? A contemporary concern in the art world is that art, in a consumer-driven environment, has become entwined in just this sort of superficiality.

The problem exists of whether or not contemporary consumer capitalism has dulled the essence of struggle, and a habituated form of effortlessness has crept into thinking—where there is no real need for labour to be involved. As Luis Camnitzer argues, despite the institutionalising of education into a competitive market place, it should nonetheless be seen as a 'social service' that properly grasps the shift in the understanding of art from a technical form to 'art thinking'—a 'meta-discipline' that expands art toward better cognitive understanding, along with the teaching of practical skills. He maintains education's only answer to increasing

cognitive thinking at the higher end of the ‘craft school’⁷⁵ is by offering ‘the critique’, however, it is a phenomenon that he argues, more often than not, goes relatively unexamined in terms of critical efficacy. Effort needs to be expended—to enable art thinking of which social service and cognition are part. For some it is something that does not occur regularly in art schools because they are largely institutionally and pedagogically lazy—their focus instead is to work towards quantitative rather than qualitative outcomes (Camnitzer 2015).

This view is counteracted by some of the literature on ‘student centre learning research’ in education design, where they are developing learning outcomes that overcome problems associated with students who use the ‘surface approach’ to learning—a minimal effort, low-cognitive method applied to tasks and course requirements—rather than the ‘deep approach’ with a more meaningful set of objectives toward learning (Biggs and Tang 2007, 23-4).

This concern is not new: Bakhtin too was clearly concerned with the acquisition of superficial knowledge—long before our current age of telecommunication. He like Gadamer was interested in the *process* of learning, which required active participation to deliver a deep level of knowledge, rather than the easy fix that comes with an overly didactic presentation. Bakhtin argues if time is not taken to pay attention and become actively involved, ‘Conceiving understanding [becomes merely] a form of quotation [and that] implies that meaning is always rented’ (Holquist and Liapunov 1990, xliii). Bakhtin thus understood conversation through the Marxist tradition, which emphasises that dialogue should be a form of labour because it takes ‘effort’; if labour, in the form of effort, is not exerted then we do not have a full understanding, and are merely reciting or retaining superficial, rented knowledge. The question remains of whether or not access to instant ‘information’, posing as knowledge, defines a problem of surface knowledge and an inherent apathy for acquiring deep thoughtful knowledge and understanding is, in fact, a form of capitalist oppression.

Slowing down the event of understanding in dialogical processes creates an immersive ‘situated-ness’ where effort and inquiry are foremost. Social modes of art in which dialogical processes occur, enable a fallow period for ruminating that facilitates an intellectually taxing process of knowledge absorption; an extended moment for cognition to unfold. If we look at Gadamer’s festival time, for instance, it is fulfilled time where he describes; ‘the time experience of the festival is rather its celebration, a present time *sui generis* [a class of its own]’ (1975, 121).

⁷⁵ By ‘craft school’, Camnitzer refers to art schools that are primarily teaching technique.

Socially engaged art likewise establishes a unique position in that it is not enough to just be part of something, as in the notion of the festival—one must actually participate for it to occur. Knowledge in this respect is not superficial but rather involves the effort of ‘paying attention to something’ by being deeply embedded in genuine participation which, as Gadamer acknowledges, can be as simple as merely watching (Gadamer 1975, 122).

There are some that argue that ‘the ability to think through problems and produce work independent of media is crucial to most contemporary artists’(Pearson 2009, 174), and the move toward dialogue in this research is significant in its attempt to challenge the orthodoxy of visual-based works in art and redirect it to *thinking along with* the visual. By increasing the duration and effort of engagement through dialogical art forms, the investigation seeks to subvert the hegemony of what we have come to know as ‘instantly visible beauty’—more superficially read as “it looks great and will go with my couch” mentality, so entrenched in the commercialisation of art. Durational processes likewise favour the engaged art collector who attends more deeply with an artwork’s content and context, as opposed to the investment speculator, who might only be after a named artwork for its asset value. The appeal for this type of collector is in the artist’s ‘star’ status, which does not mean that it is a critically sound artwork; rather it merely has a collectible status.

This challenge looks towards creating a more embedded bipartisan move that brings art and thinking together through participatory modes of engagement. In bringing forth the intellectual processes, social practice makes a call for a collective shift in thinking about how we ‘look’ and understand art—it asks for artists and publics to challenge their visual senses by using their intellect to ‘see’—not to replace the visual necessarily, but to augment it.

1.3 Hermeneutic conversation and the use of friendly tension in inquiry

Socially engaged art and philosophical hermeneutics are, at first glance, disparate. What draws them together is that both are criticised for being weak in similar ways. On the one hand, it has been said that socially engaged art is too ameliorative or ‘Christian’ in nature to make it stand up as critical and edgy (Bishop 2006b). On the other hand hermeneutics, particularly from Gadamer, has a reputation as being too ‘ideologically conservative’ (Malpas 2009), seen as lacking critical methodology and bordering on relativism (Ricoeur), too closely aligned to metaphysics and thus non-radical (Derrida) and unable to objectively deal with tradition through reflection (Habermas), all of which are necessary for certainty in method-based

outcomes (Schmidt 2006, 133-4). In this research, I explore the notion of embracing these limitations as positive modes of contestation; by catching situations ‘off guard’ and using them to unsettle fixed positions, which provides an opening for revelation and even transformation. For the sake of discussion I would argue then that by implying these ambiguous ‘weak’ traits are irrelevant, denies the point that these so-called ‘weaknesses’ are in fact ‘quiet’ strengths that can be used as assets in the construction of platforms for knowledge production.

Although no one has ever said so directly, hermeneutics and social practice commonly use tension created through conversation to their advantage, which gives them a certain capacity to undermine dogmatism while at the same time, to retain the ability to uphold criticality around the subject at hand. In this section, I examine some of the ‘weak’ characteristics associated with hermeneutics and social practice, such as openness, vulnerability, ethics, generosity and hosting, in order to identify ways in which they create tension to produce an environment for co-productive learning. In the Introduction, I also mentioned the idea of ‘weakness’ or ‘weak thought’, which is explored by the philosopher Gianni Vattimo who understands modern societies through Nietzsche, and Heidegger’s ‘sign of the times’. He contends that in an age of mass communication, we must now incorporate a ‘plurality of interpretations’ over traditional fixed ideas; the possibility of gaining knowledge produced from a single viewpoint has been effectively weakened. His mode of ‘weak thought’ has also been described as ‘twisting’ tradition, weakening its stranglehold as we know it (Harris 2015), which enables a pathway for the dis-empowered (weak) toward emancipation in the same way an opportunistic disease or pest invades a species, but with beneficial outcomes.

Socially engaged artists often use the contradiction of weak over strong to unsettle fixed operational systems to create tension in order to bring about transformation. These various interpretations and ways in which weakness can be played up to a strength have important consequences for the broader domain of social forms of pedagogy—by weakening the strength of the ruling doctrine, the flow-on implications within the canon of art are profound.

Conversation is the most fundamental form of communication. In social practice, as in other aspects of life, it is through embedding ourselves in the conversational act of inquiry that we discover its transformative effects. These empower and enable us to interpret and understand art and its relationship to the world. Gadamer used the German term *Gespräch*, which is an ambiguous term because it combines dialogue and conversation— but fundamentally it means

being in conversation: the life of language exists in an engagement between speakers and the topic under discussion—language thus exists in this in-between space.⁷⁶ We are equally shaped as human beings by our engagement within this same in-between space.

In Gadamer's view, the significance of conversation is as a process of questioning: understanding arises from critical inquiry through the communal exchanges between interlocutors and subject matter.⁷⁷ He argues that: 'to question means to lay open, to place in the open. As against the fixity of opinions, questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid' (1975, 361). Through a sense of anticipation, a conversation is kept as a question—and retained under pressure by each of the interlocutors who continually massage it by referring back to each other and to the subject under discussion, in a way that Gadamer articulates as 'maieutic productivity'—or 'using words as a midwife' (1975, 361).

Gadamer derives the term 'maieutic' from Socrates who famously described his philosophical practices as like that of an intellectual midwife where truth is formed through the asking and answering of questions to bring about critical thinking and illuminate further understanding. It is used to 'bring out definitions implicit in the interlocutors' beliefs'.⁷⁸ For Gadamer maieutic activity, in its questioning back and forth, is involved in the event of concealing and unconcealing, a twofold criteria taken from Heidegger, where 'unconcealment' (*aletheia*) is not just about uncovering something, it assumes that there is something 'concealed' at the same time (Malpas 2009). Maieutic engagement, also referred to in some cases as the 'Socratic method', interrogates 'general, commonly held truths that shape beliefs, and scrutinizes them to determine their consistency with other beliefs.'⁷⁹

In a similar vein, Paulo Freire observes that the notion of 'inquiry' is fundamental to humanity, 'Knowledge', he says, 'emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world—with the world, and with each other' (1970, 72). More contemporaneously, the writer and artist Susan Kelly elaborates on the way in which questions sets up a 'charged moment' or a situation of

⁷⁶ For more information see Wierciński, Andrzej ed. 2012. *Gadamer's Hermeneutics and the Art of Conversation*. Vol. 2, *International Studies in Hermeneutics and Phenomenology*. Hamburg: Lit Verlag.

⁷⁷ Much of this thought has been grounded in an interpretation of modern philosophical hermeneutics devised by Gadamer, whose was influenced by the phenomenological tradition of aesthetics and existentialism in the work of his teacher Martin Heidegger, in his important essay, *Origin of the Work of Art* (1950). The research broadly draws upon two of his texts, his seminal book, *Truth and Method* (first published in 1960) and a compilation of essays by Gadamer published under the title of one his essays of the same name: *The Relevance of the Beautiful* (1986)

⁷⁸ Wikipedia contributors, 'Socratic method,' *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Socratic_method&oldid=699070023 Accessed 10/1/16.

⁷⁹ *ibid*

disruption that redistributes thinking. She explains that ‘Questions impose. They load the moment after the question is asked with significance. For this moment is almost always regarded as a response regardless of what the respondent says or does’ (2013). The common understanding, between Gadamer, Freire and Kelly seems to be that the value in questioning lies in its ability to challenge preconceived ideas by maintaining tension and never reaching full resolution.

For Gadamer, the qualities of suspension and openness of conversation are in the realm of play, which he sees as an active movement similar to the backward and forward momentum of a pendulum. Ideas and thoughts are tenuous and continually kept in motion through question, answer, concealment and unconcealment. The neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty also understands hermeneutics in this way, saying that hermeneutics is a ‘conversation which presupposes no disciplinary matrix which unites the speakers, but where the hope of agreement is never lost so long as the conversation lasts’ (Rorty 2008, 318). Play maintains uncertainty through the tension generated by its own momentum; it perpetuates infiniteness because it always considers the other in light of new knowledge being shaped.⁸⁰

Gadamer’s hermeneutic understanding of art was the time of the festive and, here again, we may draw a point of connection between Gadamer and Bakhtin. The festival is a special time that is separate from normal everyday work time—and it is communal. As an experience of community, Gadamer suggests that the festival represents community in its perfect form. He argues that ‘It is not simply the fact that we are all in the same place, but rather the intention that unites us and prevents us as individuals from falling into private conversations and private, subjective experiences’. Festival time brings us together, as opposed to work time, which ‘separates and divides us’. The communal festival is where permission for free-play is granted, and ‘it is a community in which we gather together for something, although no one can say exactly what it is we have come together’ (1986, 39-40). It becomes a space where the normal structures that we abide by are released and there is time for openness, contingency and potentiality—with others

Like Gadamer’s ideas about the festival, Bakhtin’s analysis of carnival time depicts it as a socially vital form of collective community engagement, but that, which tends to emphasise the

⁸⁰ Rorty’s idiosyncratic view of hermeneutics was anti-epistemological—as a ‘hope’ for culture to remain unconstrained by the rules of epistemology, and uses conversation to ward off the search for foundational certainty. Rorty, Richard. 2008. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature: Thirtieth-Anniversary Edition*: Princeton University Press. 315

temporary, fleeting nature of carnival's misrule. Carnivals, like festivals, are anti-authorial events that offer potential for true understanding in community. For Bakhtin, however, the carnival is generally loud, noisy, grotesque and sometimes dark—it provides a non-punitive opportunity for discontent to be aired, and thus it has the capacity to allow agency for the promotion of change in systems of control by being 'politically subversive'(Moore 2004, 259).⁸¹ Carnival time is a socially sanctioned form of disruption—one that may enable disturbance or perturbation to be channeled into a particular direction, but may also merely act as a release valve for social unrest, permitting an effective reversion to the status quo, to ultimately preserve established ways of controlling people.

The festival, on the other hand, is a specific point in time that is celebrated as a 'holiday', which Gadamer refers to as being 'enacted' because it opens up the opportunity for people to come together for something. He refers to the nature of the festival as 'proffer[ing] time, arresting it and allowing it to tarry. ...The calculating way in which we normally manage and dispose of our time is, as it were, brought to a standstill' (1986, 42). It is a time that initiates productive play, for guards to be dropped, for license to admit to an unknowing—and all this without the specific aim of achieving a goal.

In regards to the curatorial, in *Politics of Residual Fun*, the author Valeria Graziano argues:

It does not matter if the 'event' to curate is a festival or a programme, an exhibition or a series, a retrospective or a workshop... . It does not matter what the topic, subject [or] trope... . But all of these things can *matter*—meaning they can literally become actualized—because they happen in a degree of autonomy from the habitual patterns of production and social reproduction (2013).

The festival thus becomes a space of work; there is labour involved in the process of concealment/unconcealment where we find out about things; we find out about truth because it is disclosed before us.

Festival times allow particular types of common experiences to play out, two of these were central to Gadamer's thinking and important to the notion of social pedagogy: his concept of 'shared horizons' and the acknowledgment of the unknown. Knowledge is transmitted 'through someone else'. When Gadamer describes the sharing of points of view, his interviewer Carston Dutt notes that 'where two horizons fuse, something arises that did not exist before'—new

⁸¹ To my knowledge, there have been no comparative studies done between Gadamer's *festival* and Bakhtin's *carnival*. It is noted here as a point of interest and any further analysis is outside the scope of this exegesis.

knowledge is born out of the coalescence of two interlocutors, along with their subject at hand (Palmer 2001, 48). In hermeneutical terms, the underlying purpose of the conversational is as an encounter in which actors will be purposefully changed through their relationship with another. It is 'not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were' (Gadamer 1975, 371). On these grounds, we can argue a similar case for Dubord who, as I mentioned earlier, sought transformation through the proffering of new conditions of cultural creation.

An intrinsic part of conversation, and fundamental to all understanding is to be found in Heidegger and Gadamer's notion of the hermeneutic circle. The essence of this circle is related to how we understand the whole only through the parts, and the parts only through the whole. In hermeneutic terms it is the relationship between understanding and pre-understanding—in Gadamer it is captured in the notion of prejudice or pre-judgment, which Gadamer views in a positive light, as Jeff Malpas contends:

Gadamer's positive conception of prejudice as pre-judgment is connected with a number of different ideas in his hermeneutics. The way in which our prejudgments open us up to the matter at issue in such a way that those prejudgments are themselves capable of being revised exhibits the character of the Gadamerian conception of prejudgment, and its role in understanding, as itself constituting a version of the hermeneutic circle (2009).

The disclosure of prejudices is essential in the revelation of what it is we are trying to understand and, in doing so, we thus reveal our own self-understanding, which in a circular fashion in turn sets up further questions.

It has also been applied to art and design by others, as seen in the writing of the thinker Donald Schön, who considers play as crucial to understanding design (and his ideas can be attributed to art). Schön conceives of a hermeneutic circle in terms of a designer's 'conversation with the situation'. 'In this reflective conversation, the practitioner's effort to solve the reframed problem yields new discoveries which call for new reflection-in-action. The process spirals through stages of appreciation, action, and reappreciation' (Schön 1983, 132). But play for Gadamer also enables an element of 'free-impulse' rather than merely an aim toward a specific goal (1986, 22). The back and forth movement of play for Gadamer means for every movement forward there is a movement in opposition. This movement, for the purpose of knowledge production, is especially useful to discover as an open space of *potential*—to operate with and

within the *unknown* without the domination of any particular opposite. Without depreciating the value in the conversational event, there is lightness at *play* where a form of ‘banter’ backwards and forward provokes further possibilities for new understanding. This involves not only thinking in opposition but in reflection—reflecting back on itself in a circular fashion.

Two important conditions must therefore be met when undertaking productive conversations. An important characteristic of hermeneutic conversation is the fact that one must surrender oneself to the unknown. The unknown for Gadamer is to submit to an acknowledgment of our own ignorance, in other words ‘knowing that one does not know’ (Gadamer 1975, 357). In doing this, we open up our minds, which enables us to apply questions to the subject at hand in light of what the other knows. Equally, when a strong opinion is brought to a conversation it can suppress the momentum of play and stifle dialogical exchange; it closes down the process of questioning and the potential for the conversation to reward the interlocutors with new knowledge. Therefore, as Gadamer concludes,

A person skilled in the “art” of questioning is a person who can prevent questions from being suppressed by the dominant opinion. A person who possesses this art will himself search for everything in favor of an opinion. Dialectic consists not in trying to discover the weakness of what is said, but in bringing out its real strength. It is not the art of arguing (which can make a strong case out of a weak one) but the art of thinking (which can strengthen objections by referring to the subject matter) (1975, 359-61).

We also see the value in this type of unknowing in the famous essay by Jacques Rancière’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991) who is regularly cited in the discourse around pedagogical models of socially engaged art. Rancière deploys the concept of knowledge being gained—not through what the schoolmaster knows, rather through what he does not. A relationship emerges in which both student and teacher are able to admit that they don’t know and thus move forward together (Sternfield 2010). Philosopher Jeff Malpas reflects an aspect of this thinking when he refers to Gadamer’s hermeneutics of conversation as:

A conversation [that] involves an exchange between conversational partners that seeks agreement about some matter at issue; consequently, such an exchange is never completely under the control of either conversational partner, but is rather determined by the matter at issue (2009).

The menacing position in which this indeterminacy places the interlocutors aids the ability to open out conversation to find out what the other knows. For Gadamer “The soul of hermeneutics ...consists in the possibility that the other might be right” (Gadamer quoted in Zabala 2012), where an end goal (to win) is not the aim. Rather it seeks to keep in continuation,

the endless momentum of knowing and unknowing, and for him it is this uncertainty, which increases the potential for greater understanding of the matter at hand. This involves not only conceding to not knowing something but to keep our strong fixed opinion from suppressing generative questions.

Unlike an argument that involves conflict and antagonism, I have rarely thought of conversation as political. Naively, for me conversation has generally implied conviviality; some form of consensual and generally friendly exchange, perhaps where information is sought and given and where strategies, ideas and thoughts can be mutually settled. It is not generally seen, despite the common notion of a heated conversation, as oppositional. Until I began this research, I considered conversation fundamentally as a 'soft', relatively uncritical mode of exchange.

This study is an attempt to address the issue of criticality in conversation. It is common to see inequality in the conversational exchange, often manifest through self-interest. This is where a dominant interlocutor takes hold and steers the agenda, or where the foreclosure of genuine discussion occurs by an overpowering opinion, or a subjective or emotional outburst that takes the focus away from the subject at hand. Inequality may be something that is more disturbing; such as imposing a strategic 'consensus' that masks underlying dissent, or even repressed violence.

Given the centrality of dialogue within all the different forms of social practice, it appears that there is very little discourse on the balance of power relations within the dialogical act. The discourse available to date on this is mainly derived from the writings of political theorist Chantal Mouffe's special characteristic of political space, where antagonism can be disarmed without removing its critical edge; it is a space she calls 'agonism', where there are no enemies, just adversaries (Miessen 2011, 109).

To embrace Mouffe's agonism means to consider conversation as public space, and her opinion of this space, is that it is too consensual. This fundamental assumption of Mouffe's is a driving premise of my research whereby we have become accustomed to putting up with things. Mouffe argues that we have taken on a 'rationalist and individualist approach which is unable to adequately grasp the pluralistic nature of the social world'. She sees public space as a predominantly consensual one that is gained through 'uncontested hegemony', because the

modalities of liberalist politics have imposed barriers to antagonism or argument (2006, 154), in other words, we have become weakened through an ingrained lack of argument, which in turn supports the status quo.

While this too is important in Gianni Vattimo's thinking, his interpretation is that a metaphysical understanding, ingrained in Marxist politics, causes problems of authority and control in liberal capitalism. While he, and his co-author Santiago Zabala, conceded that this philosophical mode of thinking cannot be fully overcome, they do contend that it can be twisted—as a form of weakened Marxism, or post-metaphysical 'hermeneutic communism'. They displace this deep-seated socialist ideology from the harsh Soviet era-styled communism by rethinking history as a form post-Marxist thought. Vattimo contends that subjects can be emancipated from controlling forces by engaging a 'weak ontology' that provides an opening for liberation. He argues that 'this aperture enables one to see that truth is not found in 'presence'. ... [instead] it is based in historical events and the consensus formed within cultural horizons' (Harris, 2015). Weakening strong thought by undermining and twisting tradition to gain emancipation from controlling ideologies is agonism at play. With its roots in Nietzsche, it is in this sense linked to Mouffe's 'friendly conflicts', and to Gadamer's solid commitment to truth in hermeneutic conversation.

Mouffe defines two commonly held models of democratic consensus in public space as problematic—the 'aggregative', and the 'deliberative'. She argues that her own views on democratic consensus, as an agonistic model, appear to lie somewhere in between, providing a third model of consensus (Miessen 2011, 106). The 'aggregative' model is represented in the work of Hannah Arendt, who saw consensus as opening up through 'human plurality' and 'a multiplicity of perspectives'—in the act of inter-subjective agreement produced through 'persuasion, not irrefutable proofs'. For Mouffe, this is nothing more than 'agonism without antagonism'. On the other hand, she contends that Jürgen Habermas' 'deliberative' approach to consensus in public space is through a confrontational form of consensus, an antagonistic position fought through logic and rational consensus. Mouffe's idea of *agonistic* consensus comes from neither Habermas nor Arendt's thinking, rather, using a number of terms that appear to be interchangeable. Terms such as 'conflictual consensus' and 'friendly conflict' she fundamentally argues that for genuine democratic processes to occur, the political space for public dialogue needs to 'tame' the more antagonistic element of what she calls a 'we/them' situation; a position that is fundamentally confrontational (Miessen 2011, 109). Likewise, rather

than shutting down the conversation when the ‘enemy wins’, the priority for Mouffe, in her agonistic strategy, is to keep the conversation alive (2006, 157). My view on agonism retains elements from many of the hermeneutic discourses; from Arendt, Gadamer, Mouffe, Vattimo and perhaps Habermas. The fact that agonism calls for respect between opponents, openness, weakness and plurality, it considers a more twisted and destabilising view of things. It is based on the understanding that there may not even be an answer to the encounter at hand, which gives a multiplicity of designations and is duly in line with hermeneutic thought.

The term ‘agonism’ is slippery, however. Many in the field of political theory argue that it denotes a conciliatory form of conflict, but others, such as Deborah Tannen, a professor in linguistics at Georgetown University, contend that agonism is a ‘ritualized’ form of opposition, one she sees particularly in academia and academic criticism. She takes a position from that identified by another linguist, Walter Ong, who uses the term as ‘ceremonial combat’ (Tannen 2010, 214). Tannen’s attitude, however, is one of concern and she contends that agonism is not conducive to a positive educational experience, arguing that it creates too great a division between combatants and causes their alienation, making resolution and understanding difficult to achieve. To my mind, Tannen’s views on agonism seem at odds with Mouffe’s conception of it, which may demonstrate a misunderstanding in Mouffe’s reading of agonism.

This form of agonism is a competition in this instance, which has its foundation in the forceful notion of ‘contest’. We see this combative force in Nietzsche’s idea of agonism when he returns to the Classical Greek notion of the struggle in *Homer’s Contest*, however, his point is still not as combative to the point of annihilation. Rather Nietzsche talks of agonism as a contest driven by such conditions as envy, jealousy, selfishness and ambition, which importantly does not terminate the struggle ‘to the death’, but instead leaves space for a future contest. If this is taken away, as he relates in the Hellenic state, the ‘gruesome savagery of hatred and pleasure of destruction’ takes hold and the force of combat means winning at all costs (Nietzsche 1871-2, 179).

Correspondingly, more in sympathy with Mouffe is the political theorist Samuel Chambers, who provides an interesting link between the idea of Bakhtin’s ‘effort’ that was mentioned earlier, and Gadamer’s consideration for the other. Chambers places great emphasis on the worthiness of the ‘battle’. He writes that agonism:

implies a deep respect and concern for the other; indeed, the Greek *agon* refers most directly to an athletic contest oriented not merely toward victory or defeat, but emphasizing the importance of the struggle itself—a struggle that cannot exist without the opponent. Victory through forfeit or default, or over an unworthy opponent, comes up short compared to a defeat at the hands of a worthy opponent—a defeat that still brings honor. An agonistic discourse will therefore be one marked not merely by conflict but, just as important, by mutual admiration (2011).

In my own view, and based on Gadamer's thinking, agonism is more a form of questioning—a playful back and forth banter involving a vigorous jostle for position, in which interlocutors do not relent fully to the other side, neither do they push their own opinions too hard—just enough to illicit a response from their fellow interlocutor. This route is not always easy; the struggle always takes some effort.

Acknowledging conversational strategies in socially engaged modes of practice in an art world dominated by the vestiges of 'High Modernism' is provocative. The debates are agonistic because social practices are beginning to be embraced by artists and their growing audiences (Marcon 2013, 26). *along with* (not in opposition to) established traditions—where great emphasis is placed on the visual display of a material object

As suggested in the Introduction, we are dealing with two modes of 'weakness'. On the one hand, socially engaged artists often construct 'weak' environments such as cafes, dinners, discos, sleepovers, environmental walks and tea parties etc., to cultivate agonistic situations through hermeneutics conversation. These temporary pop-up situations are intentionally designed to destabilise existing hierarchies by infiltrating the normal 'weak' spaces of social congeniality. On the other, in a sometimes contradictory publication, *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx*—Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala imply that hermeneutics is based on 'weak thought', which is the thought of the weak to disrupt a dominant prevailing system. What is interesting about both these approaches is that they appear to suggest that the shortcomings of what we call 'weak', have in fact the capacity to disarm universalising consensus and homogeneity. By destabilising hegemonic systems of control, the scholars of hermeneutics and communist politics discuss how useful hermeneutics can be for those who are unable to change fixed situations. The authors maintain:

"Weak thought" does not aim at metaphysical systems and global emancipatory programs but rather at weakening these strong structures. This is why hermeneutics is so important for weak thought. As the philosophy of the interpretative character of truth, hermeneutics becomes the resistance to

objective philosophical structures and oppressive political actions. While the dominating classes always work to conserve and leave unquestioned the established order of the world (liberal realism), the weak thought of hermeneutics searches for new goals and ambitions within the possibilities of the “thrown” condition of the human being (2011b, 135-37).

In some capacity, the weak are strengthened by the ability of their weakness to destabilise non-democratic, benign or consensual situations and, by being cunning, weak strategies can be used to strengthen the fragile, the tired and the marginal—those who languish in a weak state.

Social practitioners create these moments of weakness and agonism as a form of festive encounter in which we can communally play, yet still behave adversarially. Durational projects may intentionally use the hospitable nature of conviviality (most involve food, entertainment and good will) and then deliberately undermine it. This draws from the traditions of a gift economy and the notion of ‘potlatch’ in which Lee and Kunda argue that there was ‘something exacted of visitors in precarious moments when the gift of hospitality obliged a return gesture. Sometimes, as Georges Bataille argues, gift giving can up the stakes to a potlatch, an excessive breaking point of sociability’ (Lee and Kunda 2012b).⁸² The Irish artist and educator Mick Wilson has long employed hosting and generosity in his art practice. He says:

“We think most of the time that the rules of guests and hosts are about being nice to each other. And it’s really not about being nice to each other. It’s about being careful, it’s about attending; it’s about listening and looking and following and searching for cues. And the real generosity is to have an argument with somebody. That is generosity: the confidence and trust that emerges between people, so that they would have an argument with each other (2011)”.

What Wilson is claiming, is the fact that these types of ‘weak’ activity, in which the guest and host generally exchange dialogue, can actually herald great strengths. From this perspective, I argue that the weaknesses of what constitutes a hospitality is, in fact, a form of quiet revolution that troubles hegemony and dogmatism, but does not actually go into an unwinnable combat against them. The weaknesses of a dinner party—the conviviality, niceties and thoughtfulness can moreover tilt into a mode of disruption and unease.

The form of generosity that allows for argument in this way has clear connections to Mouffe’s conception of agonism or friendly conflict, and Gadamer’s hermeneutic principles. Part of the

⁸² See also Bataille, Georges. 1991. *The Accursed Share: an Essay on General Economy, Vol. 1: Consumption*. New York: Zone Books.. Bataille was influenced by his contemporary Marcel Mauss’ *Essay on the Gift* that uses the idiom of ‘potlatch’, the American tribal celebration of contention and rivalry, as a critique of capitalist economics.

hermeneutic response to hierarchy is not to break it down altogether and risk making this a friendly convivial space where no real robust discussion takes place; rather, it is to create a mutual space that attends to difference, a space where interlocutors recognise that the other might have something to say that is important. The strength of hermeneutic discourse lies in its commitment to truth, and paramount, to this is the idea of something being at stake—that something matters. A fundamental condition of hermeneutics is its robust concept of truth in addressing what is at stake and it is imperative that conversation does not collapse into violence.

Providing a specific type of platform for enabling hermeneutic conversation lies at the heart of many social practitioners and it is the ‘weaker’ modes of social engagement that sometimes bring the greatest strengths. Along with hermeneutics, it could be implied that there are feminist or perhaps postcolonial references to the notion of the weakness and quietness as a reshaping of power structures within the thesis. The power play of the stronger partner over the weaker in the conversation, and the quiet revolution discussed have some implicit connection, however the discussion will remain within the realm of hermeneutics as an unexplored area of research. Delving into feminist politics and postcolonial theory would go beyond the scope of this part of the research, however these theories are of interest and will be developed further in the future.

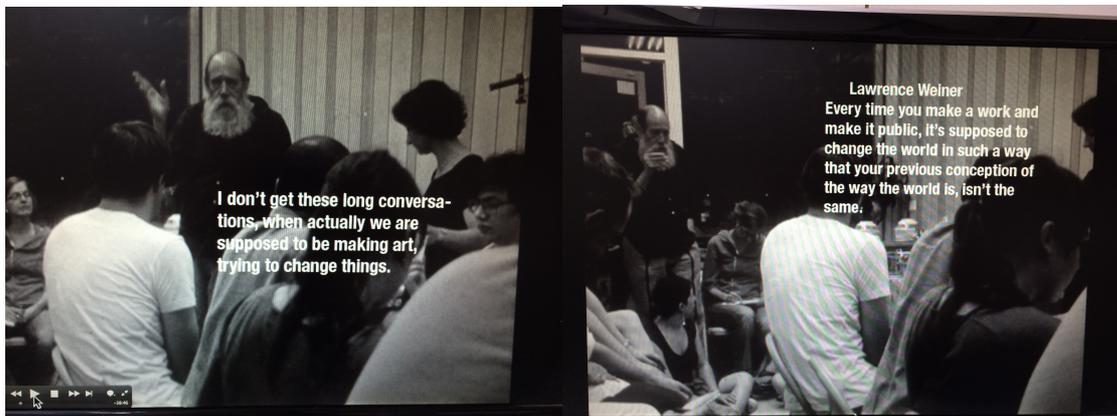


Figure 11. Anton Vidokle, *New York Conversations*. 2010.

Lawrence Weiner's comment

Image source: screenshots of the DVD, *New York Conversations* (2010) USA: Steinberg Press, 2010

By way of example, Anton Vidokle developed a work called *New York Conversations* (2010) where he rented a New York storefront as a temporary drop-in conversation facility in which meals were cooked and served. Over a period of three days, people were invited and members of the public just dropped in to ‘enjoy’ meals and discussions across a number of topics, which took place around a long dining table. (**Fig 11**) The subsequent black and white film of the

projects suggests there were clearly agonistic processes at work. Despite lots of enjoyment and sociability, discussions were not always amicable. Likewise, in the *UNP* project in Berlin, some participants hosted food events, but one in particular set up a specific relationship to the 'kitchen'. According to Media Farzin, the kitchen project was an 'anxious site', particularly in the events hosted by Tirdad Zolghadr. He described the kitchen as a site for hostility, exclusion and argument as much as for generosity, inclusion and conviviality (Farzin 2009, 37).

The repercussions, however, of this type of generosity in terms of the oppressed and the oppressor are dire, and implementing such events can be a fine balancing act. Paulo Freire argues that the only type of power that has any sway in emancipating the oppressed must be spawned from the 'weakness of the oppressed' and that for it to be of great benefit, the end goal must not outweigh the original cause. Arendt too addresses this concern in *On Violence*, where she maintains that violence is in the 'means-end category' where the end may possibly overwhelm, and accordingly justify, the means (Arendt 1970, 4). Freire, therefore, contends that 'the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: [is] to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well' (1970, 44). In essence, this is true of hermeneutic conversation; in implementing generosity through hermeneutics, the fear of violence is assuaged in as much as the oppressed cannot overtake and become the oppressor.

My discussion of weak hermeneutics and agonism is, in fact, addressing the larger matter of curiosity, open-endedness and experimentation, fundamental values in creative practice. In an attempt to integrate the fluidity of artistic practice into more exacting methods of accountability in higher education, is problematic. The difficulty remains then, in how to properly appraise these modes of engagement within quantifiable or method-based evaluations, such as in university degree courses. For Irit Rogoff, the dilemma is that education is continually being asked to deliver concrete outcomes based on predictable neo-liberal growths, expansions and advancements. In her essay 'Academy as Potentiality' (2007), she posits a number of significant conditions that cause us to rethink the quantifiable and tedious characteristics of education. She says that 'One shudders not because this is dull, though it certainly is that, but because the idea of being able to foresee the expected outcome of an investigative process, is completely alien to the very notion of what 'education' is about' (2007). A freer form of education would be one in which knowledge is generated with indifference toward the specific methods set out to attain a certain standard, accomplishment or credential. Rogoff argues that education should be delivered—'in the name of this 'not-yet-known-

knowledge'... . which for [Rogoff] are the building blocks and navigational vectors of a current pedagogy, a pedagogy at peace with its partiality, a pedagogy not preoccupied with succeeding but with trying' (2007).

Further experimentation and research into this area of weaknesses may reveal that attributes of the more freewheeling and democratic enterprise of social and collective engagement accrue to agonistic forms, which are in fact outcomes in themselves. It remains to see how tertiary systems deal with these when historical precedents bind them to method-based accountability.

The way education is evaluated tends to be viewed from a number of different perspectives. The bureaucratic view is determined by the efficiency and economics of its delivery system, whereas some teacher-educators are concerned with imparting knowledge that they have learnt and have experience of. Other viewpoints include artists who use education and the production of knowledge as a platform for social practice. What interests Rogoff, and those involved in social models of practice and its relationship to knowledge production and education, is more about what knowledge production does— not so much what it is (2010b, 36:46). In this respect, Rogoff's approach to the potential inherent in the production of knowledge is much like Gadamer's thinking around finding truth through the 'un-purposefulness' in play. It becomes clear that within wider discussions on the production of knowledge, in terms of its 'potentiality' and the creation of 'unframed knowledge', Rogoff is more interested in the process as an effective agent that yields knowledge, not the formal structures that deliver it (2010c, 2012).

Alternative pedagogies used in social practice are not driven by formal structures but propelled instead by the agency created in ongoing negotiations. The process of unconcealing aspects of experience with in social relations helps to develop layers of meaning that eventually unearth new dialogues. Rather than scripted performances that can be repeated to suit annual curricula and assessment criteria, in the case of traditional pedagogy, these projects reject repetition; they are reliant on the dynamic will and unique contribution of the individuals who are present at the time, and all aspects of the situatedness within which the work finds itself. The potential in projects, events and exhibitions that are a coalescence of people and circumstances, makes them highly unpredictable, unreliable and open-ended which, unlike most scripted performance art (that can be commodified), these serendipitous projects can never be exactly repeated.

Moments of contrariness and perversity are another form of chance encounter that create added layers of meaning to works of social engagement. The fact that they slowly unfold and become identifiable over time as awareness, recognition or consciousness occurs—makes them significant as producers of knowledge. Claire Bishop uses the exhibition project ‘La Monnaie Vivante’ (*The Living Currency*, begun in 2006) at the Tate Modern, by French curator Pierre Bal-Blanc, to provide an example of this type of happenstance. Modeled on the book *The Living Currency* by Pierre Klossowski, the series of restaged performance events recreated perverse moments of human realisation between the separation of domains such as pleasure and economics, the human body and industrialization for instance, as one becomes aware of that subversion. In Tania Bruguera’s *Tatlin’s Whisper # 5* (2008) in the Tate’s large Turbine Hall for example, these moments occurred when audiences, while watching a performance, slowly realized they were becoming part of a crowd-control incident and corralled by two mounted policeman on horseback. Equally the economics of human paid labour in Santiago Sierra’s *Eight People Facing a Wall* (2002), is questioned. These events provided multiple moments of perversity—a slippage slowly bringing an awareness to audiences, not only that the artist is implicated in these odd experiences, but the museum is also complicit in the proceedings (Bishop 2012, 232-35).

These pedagogical projects prompt an awkward moment, when there is an overlay of modes of weak intervention, which are seemingly benign and compliant, with more formal situations—momentarily collapsing the distinction between them. It is argued that this perversity, (similarly described in an earlier account of potlatch) temporarily destabilises (or jolts) the fixity and officialdom of academia that effect change; subverting normative conditions by creating unimagined openings for real experimentation in education.

I concede, however, that the criteria for evaluation for many of the experimental education projects, which embrace indeterminacy, are problematic. In her book *Artificial Hells*, Claire Bishop, as a critic trying to evaluate social modes of practice over the last ten years, has focused a chapter on the aesthetic evaluation of educational projects as artworks. Her summation calls for a ‘double judgment’ where projects, such as Tania Bruguera’s *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* be appraised both as ‘experimental education *and* artistic project’. The durational aspect of most experimental education and the notion that they work as art—hand in hand with a mode of social utility, for her means that the evaluation of outcomes must too, be durational. Bishop

likewise acknowledges that experimental art education highlights a problem for educating artists; socially engaged art, because of standardised art education and the genres of art that are being taught within it, are she notes, ‘incompatible formats’, yet the ‘friction between the two can still be interesting’ (2012, 249). I would posit that while the perversity of social projects, based on incompatibility as friction, is not only what is at stake in terms of criticality in many experimental art education projects, but also make it ideal to take into a standard education system to counter the hegemony of traditional art pedagogy.

Another issue of concern in this research is the point in time at which evaluative judgment of educational art projects takes place; with material and object-based works, this obviously occurs at the time of presentation to the public, in a gallery or site of presentation—with the durational aspect of social projects, this timing is not so clearly set. The curator and author Paul O’Neill contends that ‘what is experienced and written about as the art in such cases is its outcome, as the end of a process, rather than the durational and participatory process through which this outcome is achieved’ (O’Neill 2010). The curator and writer, Tom Finkelpearl, in his publication, *What We Made: Conversations on Social Cooperation*, interviews Bishop—amidst the discussion Bishop asserts that a socially engaged work of art needs to have concluded before an evaluation can take place. In discussing this with Bruguera, Bishop states that “for this to be a work of art, you have to have finished it. It can’t be ongoing. ... you have to think about the form in which it is relayed to a public who are not its participants.” For me [she continues] that’s when the project can become a work of art.’ In the case of Bruguera’s school, according to Finkelpearl, Bishop only relates to the work as ‘art’ when the students display their final artworks in two Biennials (Finkelpearl 2013, 205). Finkelpearl thinks otherwise, reiterating an important point that I consider as hermeneutic within these projects; that they need to be judged on a continuing durational basis, ‘creating [their] own meaning through the ongoing use of tools that have been acquired by the participants. ... there is no final “resulting situation”. Rather the result or residue plays out in a variety of social contexts over a long stretch of time’ (Finkelpearl 2013, 207).

In considering these projects as hermeneutic, and agonistic under Gadamer and Mouffe’s terms of inconclusiveness, then the reading of them must be ongoing, mutable and unfixed, which makes historical, theoretical and critical analyses of such activity as art very difficult. This is not to say agreement about the works cannot be made, discussed and judged at intervals throughout the duration of the works, rather final conclusions cannot be reconciled when the

very essence of the projects means that they are ongoing and to some extent—formless. While often at odds about the variant readings of social and collaborative art, Bishop nonetheless agrees with many other commentators who underscore the lack of critical language within our current history of art for appraising such modes of indeterminacy in pedagogical, dialogical and other social projects (2007, 86).

The foregoing discussion implies that method-based applications currently within tertiary art education are an ill fit for social practice, due to its infinite readings. This indeterminacy is alluded to in Rogoff's suggestion of 'non-doing as doing'—which is in line with Gadamer's notion of anti-method, which he saw as an ill fit for the social sciences. This is not to say that Gadamer does not believe in method at all, rather he gives an undertaking that method will be forthcoming in an 'anticipation of completeness'—it is one that is promissory (Malpas 2009). On these grounds, we can argue that like a conversation, the outcome from an 'anti-method' approach is contingent upon negotiations unfolding as a process; one that enables its conclusions to arise as they occur—in the active process of unconcealment.

This is the reason I have suggested that the ideal of objective knowledge which dominates our concepts of knowledge, science and truth, needs to be supplemented by the ideal of sharing something of participation (see Gadamer interview in Palmer 2001, 40).

It is under these conditions that conversation was so important to Gadamer because good conversation is not just about hearing, but listening to one another—and for him, method 'was not an appropriate way of achieving legitimation in the humanities and social sciences' (Palmer 2001, 40). This was why he 'moved the idea of conversation to the very centre of hermeneutics', to counteract the more scientific methods of understanding—to develop a new humanistic way to understand (ibid 37-9). Used in this manner, hermeneutics becomes a valuable tool for social modes of pedagogy because it balances both rational analysis and possibility by keeping the conversation in play but in anticipation, or promise, of agreement.

1.4 Summary

Over the last fifteen years artists have been unobtrusively developing socially engaged, yet pragmatic solutions for art education that are now beginning to be noticed as rival mechanisms to mainstream tertiary art education. While some art schools are developing postgraduate programmes that look at non-object, non-material art forms, including social practice, these

are in the main directed at graduates, leaving a gap in knowledge at foundation-level art education. Given the resources needed and the difficulties associated with providing a solid grounding in alternative and unconventional practices, it is difficult to estimate whether or not the lack of development in this area of contemporary art is directly attributed to the dilemma faced in general tertiary education. There is some evidence to suggest that tough cost cutting measures by institutional bureaucracy, designed to steer education towards commodification, is increasingly undermining democratic learning. Whatever the case, modes of pedagogical activity now commonly exist outside the art schools, and this questions just how relevant mainstream education practices have become in terms of providing a knowledge base for foundation art studies to undergraduate artists who seek to practice once they leave academia. My interest lies in developing facilitated curatorial platforms as communal modes of inquiry to be brought into mainstream undergraduate education and postgraduate settings, as a tool for helping artists-in-training to develop practices that are more aligned with what is current outside academia.

The theoretical context in which the two platforms for communal inquiry were established as case studies broadly drew from a hermeneutical interpretation of communicating through conversation. Taking their cue from a long history of alternative schooling and the philosophical traditions of ethical education, the approaches to the two projects described in the following chapter, tend to mimic the characteristics of Freirian pedagogy of equality and freedom. It examined the development of social agency, new cognitive forms of conversation known as dialogical aesthetics, and examined how power can be enabled through hermeneutic conversation. These strategies aimed to fill a void in how we understand democratic art practices and provide art institutions with alternative pathways for discovering new social models of art practice. This contextual framework contributes to that debate.

CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY

The practical research comprised two multi-dimensional, conversational art projects as case studies, which were conducted within an established university art school and described over the next three chapters.⁸³ Chapter two outlines the community approach used over these two case studies. The *Our Day Will Come (ODWC)* project (case study one), occurred at the very beginning of the research, and its methodology was relatively emergent though it follows a line of precedents in pedagogical art projects. Through it, I established some key markers for developing the projects that were informed by a Community of Inquiry (CoI) methodology, which was directed toward non-hierarchical modes of social empowerment, reconsidering the value of cognitive thinking in art, and challenging static hierarchies.

The two case studies were at times compromised in their ability to operate outside normative systems of control, whether these are institutional regulations, ethical standards, risk assessments or funding body requirements. This is an indefinable fact of reality working within an institution of this nature. It is difficult to operate as a free agent within this type of structural institution without having identified formal outcomes for any project, course or event and this was the case with the two studies. That being said however, while regarding those formal requirements and outcomes—at the basis of many of the activities and events was a questioning of these structures, which were either accepted, worked around or used as catalyst to completely rethink a situation. A tension always existed when boundaries were tested.

CoI approach used in this research project is an adapted version and not necessarily embedded within the Philosophy for Children movement and its teaching of children per se, rather, as discussed in Chapter one, it has been used by others in some adult learning situations (Garrison and Arbaugh 2007), most commonly associated with online tertiary education. It is also now widely used as a term for any group of people coming together to discuss a subject or topic in a reflexive and critical manner. In essence, it has a generalised set of principles that are being adopted by other fields of learning and creative endeavour, not just for children.

⁸³ The School of Art provided a body of learning-ready, active participants, which helped to locate the work within an educational frame that openly and transparently questioned the processes of pedagogy. Lee, Fiona. 2012. "Conflict and Consensus: Art Dialogues in Rogue Academies." *Region and Isolation: The changing function of art & design education within diasporic cultures and borderless communities*, Central Institute of Technology, Curtin University and Edith Cowan University.

The CoI has a number of attributes that commend it to learning at all age groups. For some younger adults, tertiary education is only one step up from being in a secondary ‘child-based’ education system, and the use of CoI is important could be seen a transitory tool for their ongoing learning experience through undergraduate study. However, the CoI was chosen for the studies as an applicable methodology, not simply as a way to use apply children’s teaching methods to adults, but because of its flexibility and universal mechanisms of common human decency, respect and complex thinking. When the CoI is applied using these principles, it can lead to the production of ‘unknown’ knowledge that sits outside what is ordinarily taught or understood. In this sense, we might say that the production of this type of knowledge is not unique to children, and using the CoI methodology is a course of action that can be applied at any time to *all* levels of education, and ages.

The CoI was a curatorial decision that I went on to apply in the second case study, *The Plimsoll Inquiry (The PI)*. I anticipated that using the CoI approach would put into effect a flexible mode of agency to implicate self-recruited participants in decision-making processes geared towards alternative thinking. In what has primarily been used as an approach to children’s learning, I sought to make the CoI a useful tool to engage undergraduate students, graduate students, teachers, staff, artists and members of the public audiences to the projects.

The first case study, *ODWC* in 2011, was a four-week project by the Irish educator, curator and artist Paul O’Neill, which drew on the principles of free schools. This was followed by an interim reflective period between the two case studies, during which time I examined hermeneutic philosophy and experimental education practices and movements from the 1970s. I further advanced my ideas about conversation as an art event, developing the second case study *The PI*, for which I cultivated a modified form of a CoI approach. Appendix A is an addendum to the present chapter. In it I offer a brief comparison to another form of communal gathering, the Art of Hosting. I argue that the more prescriptive structures of this method were not suitable for the spontaneous dialogues that we hoped to achieve within *ODWC*, and thence *The PI*. In Appendix A, I present the data I collected and other smaller research projects conducted between the two case studies.

As I outlined in Chapter one, there are some reasonably well-known exemplars of pedagogical art projects that embed the discursive within their projects: Pablo Helguera’s travelling schoolhouse, *The School of Panamerican Unrest* (2006), Anton Vidokle’s *Unitednationsplaza*

(2007–8) and *Nightschool* (2008–9), and Tania Bruguera’s *Cátedra Arte de Conducta* (2002–9). The *ODWC* project drew upon, and can be contextualised against these precedents. The artist Liam Gillick writes that:

A discursive model of praxis has developed within a critical art context over the last twenty years. It is the offspring of critical theory and improvised self-organised structures. It is the basis of art that involves the dissemination of information. It plays with social models and presents speculative constructs both within and beyond traditional gallery spaces. It is indebted to the reframing of relationships within conceptual art and required decentred and revised histories in order to evolve (2008, 13).

The part this research plays in the decentering and revising of that history is in the development of the CoI as a methodology to be used as a tool to facilitate such praxis.

Before establishing the CoI as a methodological approach, I looked briefly at a series of other educational methods as comparisons. These included methodologies ranging from the Reggio Emilia method—designed for educating children by providing a democratic and inquisitive space to generate knowledge through critical analysis and reflection, to the more rational and argumentative modes of *Communicative Action* by Jürgen Habermas. Finding a balanced approach to the art of questioning was the main drive, one that was involved in a high level of critical, but playful ‘banter’—but without the corruption of overtly powerful voices; it needed to evoke a deep sense of ‘curiosity’ and co-production.⁸⁴

2.1 *The Community of Inquiry*

The approach I chose to adopt was a thinking strategy informed by the Community of Inquiry (CoI), (Fig 12). The CoI is derived from the Philosophy for Children educational movement from the 70s—a methodology that teaches the fundamental philosophical life-skills of argument and reasoning to children. The Philosophy for Children movement grew out of a tradition of pragmatics, and among the writings of philosophers C.S. Peirce, John Dewey, and Russian psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky (1896 – 1934). It was further developed by Mathew Lipman (1922-2010), as a strategy in educational reform for teaching philosophical thinking through collaborative inquiry in education. In the Philosophy for Children tradition, the emphasis is on democracy in learning, with part of its function to address the inequality

⁸⁴ ‘Curiosity’ is a term the educationalist Tim Sprod uses for the term ‘inquiry’ which he says encapsulates both the ‘irritation [caused by] doubt... [and] the imaginative asking of ‘what if...’, in Sprod, Tim. 2001. *Philosophical Discussion in Moral Education: The Community of Ethical Inquiry*. London: Routledge. 139-40

experienced between the intellectual subordination of children and the power of an adult. On the one hand the teaching of philosophical insight is designed for children to be used in later life, on the other hand, limiting the discussion to children alone appears unreasonable given that complex, or higher order thinking for the production and acquisition of knowledge, is something that we should never finish learning.

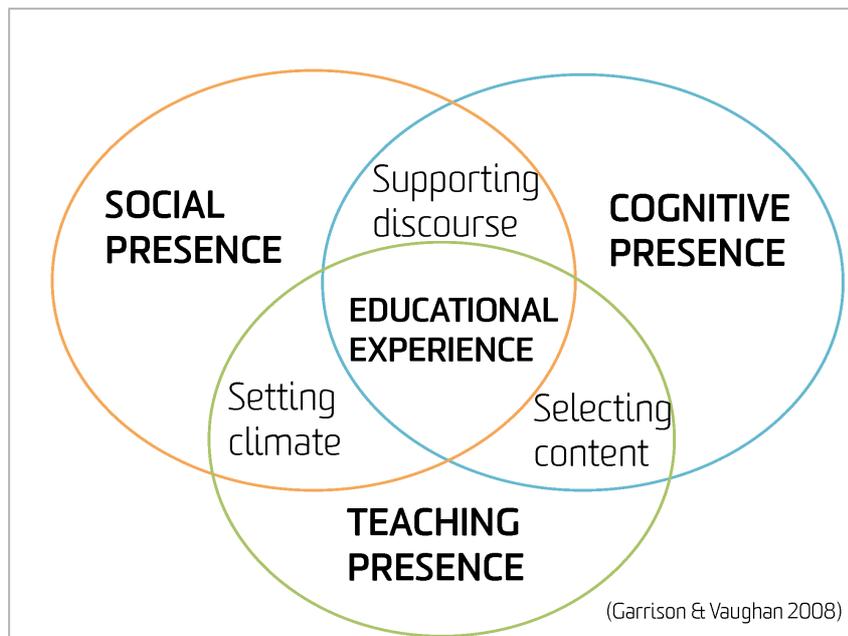


Figure 12. Typical diagram that shows the interconnection of the CoI approach
Image source: <https://www.haikudeck.com/the-connection-between-educational-design-and-digital-literacy-education-presentation-RYYmvBgAKs>. Accessed 12/1/15

A broad understanding of the CoI, now a common term in a variety of fields, encompasses any group coming together in any type of ‘inquiry’, one that ‘emphasizes that knowledge is necessarily embedded within a social context and, thus, requires inter-subjective agreement among those involved in the process of inquiry for legitimacy’.⁸⁵

The educator and philosopher Dr. Tim Sprod, whose PhD thesis research, *Philosophical Discussion in Moral Education: The Community of Ethical Inquiry*, was likewise an adaptation of Mathew Lipman’s earlier CoI approach, which was the ability to:

listen to one another with respect, build on one another’s ideas, challenge one another to supply reasons for otherwise unsupported opinions, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said, and seek to identify one another’s assumption. A community of inquiry attempts to follow the inquiry where it leads rather than being penned in by the boundary lines of disciplines.

⁸⁵ Wikipedia contributors, ‘Community of Inquiry’, *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_of_inquiry. Accessed 12/5/11

A dialogue that tries to conform to logic, it moves forward indirectly like a boat tacking into the wind, but in the process its progress becomes to resemble that of thinking itself. Consequently, when this process is internalized or interjected by the participants, they come to think in *moves* that resemble its *procedures*. They come to think as the process thinks (Lipman 1991, 15-6).

Many elements of hermeneutic conversations appear to align with the ethical mode of Sprod's adaptation of CoI and his references to Lipman's approach to thinking 'as the process thinks'. Sprod contributes to the discourse through his identification of five main factors that he considers are addressed by a 'reasonable thinker' in a CoI: critical, creative, context, committed and embodied. In this manner, if the context of the inquiry is located in a 'everyday lifeworld' of the participants, then it will be more likely to set up its own agenda and set of questions; this makes them more embodied and committed to the process of inquiry. Moreover, Sprod indicates that if the context opens up an authentic interrogation for the participants, then criticality and creativity are likely to be enhanced (2001, 150).

However, while Tim Sprod is largely supportive of 'pedagogic action' a term common to continental literature, and attributed to Habermas in particular, he too expresses concerns over potential abuse. He contends that 'A teacher's power can be used to constrain discussion and achieve aims (such as control and oppression) that are not educational' (2001, 75). My stance likewise echoes these concerns and so is less aligned with Habermas' ideology of communicative action and more associated with Gadamer's sharing of horizons; my focus on adults (who already have a sense of communicative skills) really attends to disabling much of the antagonistic modes of debate, suggested in Habermas.

Good conversation clearly needs morality and respect, but there is a concern that these conditions may run the risk of being seen as too virtuous, so much so, that it may deter potential participants, or hinder the 'friendly conflict' in conversation that is important in good hermeneutic conversation. On the one hand, Sprod clearly puts forward the case for virtuous and ethical behaviours as a necessity in the course of responsible pedagogy. Claire Bishop, in referring to social practice in general on the other hand, sees the good intentions as a 'generalized set of moral precepts' that risk its 'disruptive specificity', and thus by implication, the work's criticality (2006b, 181). Bishop's comments have been condemned for taking a broad sweep at socially engaged works that do not display "difficult—sometimes excruciating—situations", criticising her narrow preference for what appears to be more spectacle-based and antagonistic model of engagement (Jackson 2011, 55). The risk Bishop takes in making such a

distinction is that the smaller nuances found in many of the ‘quieter’ projects are missed in the surprise—lost in the excitement and shock of a spectacle-based work.

I was prepared to look beyond these narrow views and commend the morally right as a form of ‘disruptive niceness’—a model of civility that uses the more productive potential in conflict and hostility in a conversation—to disrupt. Part of the mission I envisage for the type of CoI used in these projects involves trust, generosity and care, but a model of congeniality that does not shy away from conflict or any unsettling aspects that comes into the event. As pointed out in Chapter one, the ‘nice’ gesture of gift-giving can sometimes mean a high stakes ‘potlatch’ in Bataille’s terms, or, as Mick Wilson pointed out in the same chapter—being ‘nice’ to someone is not just about attending to someone and listening. This can also entail a contradictory element—where there is enough ‘confidence and trust that emerges between people, so that they would have an argument with each other’ (Wilson 2011). While Mouffe’s agonistic intentions for the public space of dialogue is as a ‘friendly conflict’, and Wilson’s notions of attending properly to a conversation are similar in nature to the notion the ‘disruptive niceness’ I am trying to embed in the conversational event. It is distinguished, however, through its use of diplomatic means with the intention to keep the conversation in a state of agonistic ‘disruption’ for as long as possible.

The concept of a ‘thinking aesthetic’ as a ‘method’ in which the attributes of morality, thinking and agonism would play out in a circle—a conversation as an art event in the form of a hermeneutic circle would lend itself to the notion of a CoI. The hermeneutic circle, and its significance to conversation as theorised by the philosophers Heidegger and Gadamer, also features in the writing of the social scientist Donald Schön, who characterises design as something similar to the circle that is developed by means of “a conversation with the situation.” His characterisation of process can be extended to art, including social and pedagogical art. Schön describes the creative hermeneutic circle thus:

In this reflective conversation, the practitioner’s effort to solve the reframed problem yields new discoveries which call for new reflection-in-action. The process spirals through stages of appreciation, action, and reappreciation (1983, 132).

Schön involves not only the process of thinking in opposition but in contemplation—a conversation that reflects back on itself in a circular fashion. This is likewise discussed in Sprod’s account of communal inquiry and is the main reason for adopting a CoI approach

because it appeared to echo these foundations of hermeneutic conversational thought through the inherent skill of reflexive ‘inquiry’.

Genuine autonomous inquiry thus entails the disruption of what is commonly known by admitting to ignorance and the suspension of disciplinary frameworks; ‘Partners engaging in a true hermeneutic conversation often change not only their initial position, but fundamentally re-position themselves in the conversational process’ (Wierciński 2011, 24). This self-awareness is also implied in the hermeneutic circle (discussed in Chapter one) where in the event of concealment and unconcealment there is a continual readjustment of positions. The structure of a CoI approach then, would enable participants to assemble for a common cause (an object for discussion) and encourage autonomous participation at a level that was argumentative yet emancipatory, in other words, critical but not condescending.

Critical thinking through group-generated knowledge production, as well as integrated approaches to learning in education, have become dominant themes in pedagogical art, which are most often initially organised by a facilitator artist. Repurposing the CoI as a platform for a critical inquisition into a system of art would be useful as a facilitating tool for applying to an adult learning situation in need of transformation. The self-effacing role of the artist-as-facilitator in pedagogical forms of communal engagement, for instance, is becoming a prominent aspect of much socially engaged art, and in this regard the CoI approach would have application and potentially offer some guidelines for developing this role.

Observations indicate that community engagement, and processes that enact inquiry, appear to be common modalities used in pedagogical art practices—yet there has been a clear absence of literature to directly account for it. In a general sense, variants of the CoI approach may already be used in a number of artist practices and group initiatives (the Slovenian art collective Irwin, formed in 1983, being just one example), yet there appears to be no evidence available to verify this.

Elements of the CoI approach underpin the new wave of pedagogical art practices, for example, through democracy, empowerment, reasoning and argument to name a few. The CoI likewise has the capacity to be a listening platform that could also enable reflexive contributions in mutually symbiotic ways—a give and take situation that would encourage people to want to be

part of the project.⁸⁶ Despite its already somewhat codified form and the relative lack of methodological commentary, I decided to test some aspects of running a facilitated CoI, as an approach, to see if it has a plausible future in pedagogical art.

The facilitator as democratic enabler/provocateur

The role of the facilitator and the amount of power they apply in organising communal conversational events is paramount when creating a democratic platform. It is a balancing act. Often in art projects and exhibitions, there is someone who adopts the power by leading or conceptually driving the project, and that authority is often assumed to be the artist or curator, as the author or organiser of the event. As a way to counteract some of these power-based assumptions, I looked to children's education to see if there were any principles that might be transferable into adult situation whereby this power is ameliorated as much as possible.

Traditionally in this setting, the CoI facilitator is generally a teacher or lecturer who plays an important role setting up the inquiry and engaging participants as such, and this research sought to engage similar principles that are fundamentally egalitarian. The facilitator's role thus becomes paramount to the CoI's success. The hierarchical structure in a CoI is important. Susan Gardner, Director of the Vancouver Institute of Philosophy for Children, BC, Canada, speaks of the power debates that exist within educational discourse over whether or not teaching should be teacher or student centred. She summarises the form of a CoI as 'neither teacher-centred and controlled nor student-centred and controlled, but centred on and controlled by the demands of truth' (Gardner 1995, 38). Taking another view, Tim Sprod warns however, that by taking the power away at either end of the authority scale, either from the teacher or the students—can be 'fatal to a flourishing community of inquiry' because at the end of the day some level of judgment is essential. This however needs to be flexible, because in they organising CoIs, the teacher too should always be learning (Sprod 2001, 174).

The traditional way the CoI is conducted is in a circle. The facilitator's duty is to spark interest or set up the question or object of concern and initially get the discussion under way. The facilitator's role is to enable the community of inquiry, to overcome consensus or 'confirmation bias' by introducing ways to develop a critical analysis of the subject through the circle

⁸⁶ A number of sources indicate this including: Hagaman, Sally. 1990. "The Community of Inquiry: An Approach to Collaborative Learning." *Studies in Art Education* 31 (3), Gardner, Susan T. 1995. "Inquiry is no mere conversation (or discussion or dialogue): facilitation of inquiry is hard work!" *Critical Thinking: the Australasian Journal of Philosophy for Children* 3 (2).

members' own considerations, by respecting and responding to the views of those in the group (Sprod 2001, 192). Each person within the group finds links to the object, text or subject matter that interests them, thus forming a 'zone' of knowledge around the object under discussion.

The initial authoritative position of a facilitator is needed to make these judgments, instigate and guide the project. This person, then ideally steps back from the lead position to become an equal in the conversation, thus theoretically dispersing any preconceptions or power differential of the facilitator that may bias the inquiry. It is a balancing act, but Gardner suggests that if the facilitator can relinquish control, the learning outcomes will be greater.

If the facilitator can remember that progress toward truth is the goal but that it is a goal that can only be reached through the efforts of the participants, she may be able to facilitate the tracking of truth by keeping in mind the former point while allowing the discussion considerable 'slack' by keeping in mind the latter. I suppose the moral of the story is that the facilitator ought to feel a constant source of tension as a result of being continuously pulled between the two ideals of 'truth' and 'participant autonomy' (1995, 46).

As instigator of the two case studies I ultimately assumed an overall responsibility for authorship over the projects, however I wanted to ameliorate my authorial control as much as possible, and by taking the CoI approach I hoped it would weaken my position as artist, curator and author, thus allowing its own tension to drive the communal processes.

There is some slippage, and I concede some contradiction, between what has been traditionally defined as a curator-as-author and this facilitator position I took. As a provocateur and an enabler, I wanted to stimulate strong responses while at the same time mold the framework and direction of the inquiry process. In doing so, I sought to disturb one version of the curatorial role as that of 'supreme' author, to empower the project, the participants and the object under discussion, and to enable the group of participants to take responsibility for authorship. This is hardly a new aspiration. As far back as the late 1960s, a challenge to the curator-as-author model occurred when Harald Szeemann conceived the exhibition *When Attitude Becomes Form*, at the Kunsthalle Bern.⁸⁷ Then, exhibition artists controlled their own set of conditions: for the first time artists trod into the domain of the curator and took part in the devising of the exhibition (Smith 2013, 10:26). Likewise, the best analogy for the type of

⁸⁷ A recently published paper by Elena Filipovic summaries a two-year examination of the fundamental role artists have played as curators and concludes that this has been a highly disregarded form of artistic practice. Beginning with a rogue exhibition set up by Gustave Courbet in 1855, she concedes that the notion of the artist as curator needs to be brought into historical scholarship. Filipovic, Elena 2015. "When Exhibitions Become Form: On the History of the Artist as Curator " *Mousse* 8 (41).

curator is to distinguish its role as ‘curatorial’—distinct from the more disciplined ‘curated’.

Writer, curator and academic, Jean-Paul Martinon describes the curatorial as:

a jailbreak from pre-existing frames, a gift enabling one to see the world differently, a strategy for inventing new points of departure, a practice of creating allegiances against social ills, a way of caring for humanity, a process of renewing one’s own subjectivity, a tactical move for reinventing life, a sensual practice of creating signification, a political tool outside of politics, ... (2013, 4).

Latterly, the Dutch artist and curator, Jeanne van Heeswijk works at the liminal edges of art, curatorship and the function as an enabler/facilitator—blurring and imagining these roles as instruments in her art practice. Her commitment to community and democratic inquiry, particularly through the notion of transgressing the limiting conditions of power and influence, make her durational community projects of particular interest to this research—through their ability to empower the citizen-participants. Two of her most recognised works have been; *The Blue House*, (2005-09) IJburg, Amsterdam, (**Fig 13**) where she raised funds to buy a house in a



Figure 13. Jeanne van Heeswijk, *The Blue House*. 2005-09.
Image source:
http://www.jeanneworks.net/projects/the_blue_house/



Figure 14. Jeanne van Heeswijk, *2Up2Down*. 2010-13.
Image source:
http://www.jeanneworks.net/files/blg/i_0052/2Up_2Down_Homebaked.jpg

new urban housing development—reclaiming its use for local citizens and art researchers. The other was the *2Up2Down* (2010-13) project for the Liverpool Biennial that involved occupying a defunct bakery, and developing it as a co-operative business to reinvigorate a small contested community, at risk of being subsumed within new gentrification plans. (**Fig 14**) The key to these projects has been their function as an empowering agent, modestly working towards enabling communities to take responsibility for their own futures (O’Neill and Doherty 2011a, 17-78). Heeswijk’s modalities, (and, in fact, Szeemann’s as well) suggest two main principles of delivery that the artist/curator can establish, which may potentially diminish hierarchical principles of organisation; the creation of a supportive structure, and grouping people together to harness ideas in collective environments. These principles appear to be paralleled by those inherent in the Philosophy for Children approach—the idea of ‘scaffolding’ as described by

psychologist Jerome Bruner (1985, 28) and the ‘Zone of Proximal Development’ (ZPD), defined by Lev Vygotsky (1978, 86). Scaffolding sometimes referred to as ‘Instructional Scaffolding’, and ZPD have been widely used in children’s education and over the years, in many variants.

Scaffolding to enhance autonomy and responsibility

It was with some artistic license that I sought to apply Bruner’s conception of ‘scaffolding’ in an adult educational setting within a pedagogical artwork, to give structure for discussions and events, and to develop a methodology for the research project as a whole. I was interested in using the idea of scaffolding on a range of processes as a means to impart form upon process—from using established practitioners to support emerging artists, utilising existing school teaching units as a structure to explore extra-curricular student participation, and to bring in ‘outsiders’ to support and generate new ideas.

Scaffolding is employed as part of a learning process, often in conjunction with ZPD, to engender opportunities for deeper learning. According to Tim Sprod, ‘Scaffolding is a crucial part of [the deeper learning] process: without it, communication would remain at the same level’ (2001, 74). I hoped that by emulating this sort of approach, conversations would not only go somewhere but also raise the level of inquiry and engagement to something that could be transformative for the participants; a deeper level of learning was a resonating aspiration and a key aim of the ‘Rogue Academy’.

A part of the construction of deep learning opportunities, as important as constructing scaffolding, is taking it away. A vital function of scaffolding is for it to be sacrificial: to be gradually removed so that participants (and the projects themselves) can stand on their own as individuals and as a collective, without the support of a facilitator, or the mechanisms used in the scaffolding processes. In adapting this principle, I could see its application to the participants’ involvement and to my role as instigator and facilitator. At some point, participants would take ownership of, and responsibility for, the production, and I would relinquish my authorial position and ‘jump in there’—to become just one of the co-producers (Gardner 1995, 44).

Educator and writer, bell hooks, likewise argues that the teacher must engage in self-actualisation as well as authentically demonstrate what it is personally like to be exposed and

vulnerable.⁸⁸ In this way, a student understands empowerment and learns to take real-life risks (1994, 21). In the two case studies, the role of the established artists, existing school infrastructures and interstate interlopers who gave some initial strength to the project would recede, gradually coalescing and camouflaging the role within the overall project.

Zones of close proximity and building a people climate

The zone of close proximity or as Vygotsky calls it the ‘zone of proximal development’, is a way to engender reliance on the proximity of others in the group, and to grow mutual understanding.⁸⁹ In the research projects, dialogue was central to the production of knowledge and collectivity. As a form of co-production, it was a fundamental component. Vygotsky argued that:

an essential feature of learning is that it creates the zone of proximal development; that is, learning awakens a variety of developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers (1978, 90).

Vygotsky believed that the child’s current knowledge should not be what is assessed (as a grading), rather one should look to their potential; what they are capable of (Verenikina 2003). For me, this contention raised an important question: could this be a logic applied to a group of erudite individuals in an art research project? I considered this question in relation to the concept of building a ‘people climate’, which I was first introduced to by Richard Florida’s classic, but controversial book, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002). In this book Florida is predominantly addressing the issue of building communities in cities and towns that would attract creative people, which has some class-based concerns that are beyond this thesis (Richards and Wilson 2007, 15, Daly 2004). His fundamental logic of bringing people together for conversations and the production of knowledge, however, has some merit for building smaller communities—say an arts community—perhaps as a means for developing diverse communal energy around a particular site or idea in order to reimagine it.

Florida suggests that in order to create communal energy—or agency as I was now thinking of, the aim must be to make the climate or environment attractive for people, so that they want to be there, not simply for economic or instrumental benefit, but for something *other*. He

⁸⁸ bel hooks (lower case) is her pen name.

⁸⁹ Piaget conducted experiments in this field however many were based on the individual cognitive development. Vygotsky on the other hand was interested in the way in which children learn in collective, social environments. See Sprod, Tim. 2001. *Philosophical Discussion in Moral Education: The Community of Ethical Inquiry*. London: Routledge. 48

recommends that the way in which you build this climate is to create a general strategy to attract and retain people; to remain open to and cultivate diversity, and to offer amenities that people want and use often, rather than offering financial incentives (2002, 293).

This latter point was an interesting challenge for the project because, from my experience as an artist in the field, many artists make work for anything but financial gain (in itself, this is a complex and contentious issue). It was with some trepidation that I asked artists and students to take part in my projects for something other than financial gain—my quest was to find that other incentive, and I wondered whether simply proclaiming a zone of inquiry would be enough to draw people in.

Ivan Illich recognised that the people with whom we surround ourselves, as we are learning and changing, our fellow travellers, need to be the right people to advance our epistemological experience. He replaces the question ‘What should we learn’ with, ‘what kinds of things and people might learners want to be in contact with in order to learn?’ (1973, 77-8). I see this is a similar matter to Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development, and I reasoned that by adapting Vygotsky’s mission of ‘proximal development’ potentially, an art project could enact a zone of inquiry—in which knowledge could be produced by tensions caused through agonistic questioning, as much as by being close to others. The potential in this, as a sense of social agency, was the essence of what I envisaged as ideal.

The outsider interlocutor as provocateur

For fellow travellers, the *ODWC* presented five international artists whose presence within the small arts community was imbued with an outsider aura; their authority as interlocutors was seen as coming into a community with new, or ‘other’ knowledge. In actuality, their role became provocative as it played out, and the role of the outsider and the visitor was given some intense reflection in the course of the events and discussion, particularly in the aftermath of the project. Elizabeth Grosz provides some insight into the outsider dynamic. She says:

To be outside (something) is to afford oneself the possibility of a perspective, to look upon the inside, which is made difficult, if not impossible, from the inside. This is the rare and unexpected joy of outsideness: to see what cannot be seen from the inside, to be removed from the immediacy of immersion that affords no distance (2001, xv).

Using Grosz's analysis of the outsider, the zone of inquiry becomes more epistemologically robust, I contend, when others come in to create a new form of agency by virtue of their unfamiliarity with entrenched local issues. This proved to be the case in *ODWC*, and by this confirmed logic, an invitation was put to a number of non-affiliated artists and two visiting scholars to come into the school for the second study, *The PI*. At the same time, the research took advantage of the university gallery to work outside the school's curricula, but still operate within it. At the time the Plimsoll Gallery, as described in Chapter four, was in a weakened state of administrative and programming flux, and it opportunistically became a space of occupation.

This tension—and closeness, experienced by the facilitator which was described by Gardiner 'as a result of being continuously pulled between the two ideals of 'truth' and 'participant autonomy', is what I would argue could be felt by all who are in the 'zone' (Gardner 1995, 46).

2.2 Designs for an 'ideal' model for pedagogy

A platform designed for delivering a CoI within an existing art school posed a challenge. The idea of conversational platforms for learning are certainly not new outside the visual arts and formal educational institutions; one only needs to look at two examples in Australia the publication *Dumbo Feather* established in 2004 and *The School of Life*, a platform for learning organised by the British philosopher Alain de Botton in 2014. In Europe and America platforms such as the experimental knowledge lab *The Un-School for Disruptive Design* begun in 2014 in New York City, are becoming increasingly common.⁹⁰ Communal behaviour appears to be fundamentally at the heart of most alternative art projects, particularly the establishment of many artist-run initiatives, however, little evidence is available of any in depth studies directly linking the use of CoI in a social art context or in tertiary art education. Nevertheless, the search for a suitable CoI model that could be incorporated into an existing framework of scholarly activity rested on the study of a number of overseas variants, some of which had different degrees of attachment to universities and formal institutions.⁹¹ While becoming more common, alternative learning platforms within schools have been relatively uncommon in the past. 'Department 21' at the Royal College of the Art in London and 'Future Academy' at the

⁹⁰<http://www.dumbofeather.com/>
<http://www.theschooloflife.com/melbourne/>
<http://www.un-schools.com/>

⁹¹ Again, see the <http://teachablefile.org/>

Edinburgh College of the Arts are a couple of examples in the UK, which were set up as alternative schools. They were instigated as an adjunct to current structures such as university and other courses to tackle what they see as the failure these regulated systems and to offer alternative ways of connecting disciplines and practices. They operate to enhance cognitive capital through social engagement and conversation; to generate and exploit cognitive thinking in community situations, ultimately in the pursuit of knowledge. While there are a number of free schools that are attached in some fashion to the academy in Europe and North America, they are less so in Australia.

Inventing criteria for the ideal

A list of criteria that I considered embodied the ‘ideal’ project was drawn up as a starting point. They included a set of principles that would prioritise the research inquiry. Developing these principles, such as democratic processes, play and open-endedness as a CoI within the projects would not necessarily present a visually pleasing event. It would consequently look messy and indistinct, but I understood that this type of CoI might more broadly incite transformation in art education at a tertiary level, because of this unruliness. The inquiry would aim to be open to:

1. **Being communal:** Developing social opportunities for plural engagement without the loss of the individual voice. Democracy and community are at the core of educational philosophy from which I draw the CoI approach. It has its roots in the pragmatic views of John Dewey, the democracy of Pablo Freire and lies at the heart of Ivan Illich’s concept of deschooling. Gadamer too expresses the notion of a communal conversational approach to hermeneutics where the exchange of knowledge is always concerning the ‘other’—along with the conversation as a whole. The main drive of his argument about hermeneutic conversation is the ‘sharing of horizons’ as a mode of generating new understanding. All the above have a sense of social community as being significant to learning.

Many artists who work in specific mediums and object-based works have individual studio situations where to some degree they learn in isolation. These are quarantining moments and it is imperative to instill the benefits and value of working in communal situations that encourages multi-perspectival viewpoints and establishes crucial access points for critical interaction.

A way in which communal interaction could be instilled is to make these processes part of the event or artwork itself. For instance, this could occur through the development of facilitated conversational avenues for group thinking that are developed from within and during the discussion, rather than outside and separate from it. Miron Kwon speaks of public art projects where it is vital to have the ‘absorption’ of the community into the artistic production itself by. She argues that:

the basic sentiment being that the desires and needs of a particular community cannot be presumed to be so generic, and cannot be declared a priori by an artist or anyone else outside of that community. Therefore, the task of “reassur[ing] the viewer with an easily shared idea or subject” is best accomplished when the idea or subject of the artwork is determined by the community or better et if it is the community itself in some way (Kwon 2004, 96).

In the case of this study, a form of ‘absorption’ transpired by gathering community as curatoriums, reference groups, through social media platforms, blogs and communal publishing—through informal group meetings and events such as potluck dinners, participant-led workshops, classes, performances and festival-style events. The use of facilitation and open engagement in these types of activated and dialogical events, enable a voice to be heard, but not at the expense of others, or the issue of debate.

2. **Multidimensional:** Creating a nucleus of diverse opportunities as a strategy for greater participation. Determining this criteria was mostly through the examination of exhibition strategies by curators that work in a ‘curatorial’ manner. Jean-Paul Martinon provides an example through the writing of Stéphane Mallarmé, whose failed life-long project called *It Is* (1888), was unexpectedly interrupted by his death after twenty-two years in the planning stages. *It Is* divulges a set of strategies that reach across many different approaches that are useful in exposing a multidimensional methodology for project development. These include: ‘*It Is* displays the work of others’; ‘*It Is* has no hero’; ‘*It Is* has no centre of significance’; ‘*It Is* does not pitch an object (artwork) against a subject (viewer), but is viewer-centred: the crowd makes it *experiential and participatory*’; ‘*It Is* exposes language as it exposes itself’; ‘*It Is* has no single viewpoint or perspective: the participants make the perspective’, etc. (Martinon 2013, 2-3). The artist-curator Paul O’Neill likewise works with multilayered methodologies. In his series of multifaceted projects, *Coalesce* (2003) and *Coalesce: Happenstance* (2009), he sees the exhibition as a collaborative structure that facilitates a space of co-habitation, critical responsiveness and of cooperative exchange.

This is where exhibition making becomes a art form and the exhibition itself a work in progress. These methodologies provide a solution to a narrow entry point into understanding—by providing a number of different avenues for engagement, on terms dictated by the participant (in conversation with the work) they increase understanding and enhance the experience of art engagement.

To be as inclusive as possible the ideal would aim to be as inclusive as possible and not frighten off a public that does not seek to actively engage, so while still offering passive forms of engagement there would still be opportunities for active participation.

A number of varied platforms for expression would enable a greater number of participants to engage. For instance offering online participation as well as real time encounters, performance as well as exhibitionary and writing opportunities. Designing a platform for these delivery mechanisms in this way was important because the ‘rogue’ of its operation captures people in unusual ways and stimulates their imagination.

3. **Encourage processes that matter:** Making sure the topic at hand has some relevance to individual participants and their immediate situation, and then relating it back to the larger inquiry. This is a difficult task but, by using the multidimensional operations that have a discursive element (explained in the second strategy), offers a way in—where people can find their own level of engagement by applying an opportunity that suits and fits with what, and how, they want to engage. In educational design, Biggs and Tang suggest that one of the markers of successful engagement is being able to harness motivation through ‘intrinsic’ interest, however they do need to have some prior understanding. Designing a curricula that is going to captivate people is similar to the way in which these projects work, that is, the matter at hand must be important to potential participants and ‘it must have some *value* to the student’ (Biggs and Tang 2007, 32). A strategy for building these conditions are for the projects to build ‘intrinsic’ interest as a process in itself—within the projects and events. In other words, the participant, through discursive, participatory mechanisms, creates and builds the interest (and value) by following their own intrinsic curiosities. The CoI approach encourages intrinsic interest to emerge through a sharing of points of view in relation to the topic at hand.

4. **Becoming transformative:** Enabling potential change through unexpected events such as hosting and generosity, free-play, flexibility, serendipity and prioritising fixed and conclusive outcomes. The first impetus for this strategy, outlined in Chapter one, came from Guy Debord, who posed the statement whether one is ‘capable of doing anything interesting in the context of new conditions of cultural creation’ (Debord 1957, 42-43). In order to do this one must provide opportunities for it to occur. One of the ways in which people engage is by spectacle, but another is by a slow realisation of certain slippages in our expectations to a point where realisation of something new has occurred. In a co-edited anthology of curatorial papers around the notion of education, Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson describe the impetus of many of the writers as ‘valuing the emergent and as yet undisclosed: they speak of potential. Emphatically resisting the pre-determination of outcomes...’(O’Neill and Wilson 2010, 18). The undermining of our customary expectations by scenarios and circumstances—things, events, actions, motivations and feelings, overlapping are realised by our sense of curiosity which, given the right set of circumstances, leads to unsettling fixed positions that provide an opening for revelation—and even transformation.
5. **Generating critical energy:** Provide a more rigorous evaluation platform for practitioners to learn to give and take critique, encouraging risk taking and self-actualisation. My own thoughts on criticality determined that hermeneutics and social practice commonly use tension created through conversation to their advantage, which gives them a certain capacity to undermine dogmatism while at the same time, to retain the ability to uphold criticality around the subject at hand. The ‘conversational contestation’ that I allude to in the Introduction can be enabled within a discursive platform held as a CoI where ‘friendly conflicts’, as Chantal Mouffe describes, have the capacity to engender exploratory and analytical thinking. Other useful tensions for increasing critical energy can be through the use of the outsider as interloper. The notion of bringing in an outsider, when put into practice, was feasible and productive particularly when they disrupt normality through unstructured activities such as hosting, interactive performance, acts of generosity, and serendipity. Interlopers serve as a strategy for triggering tension—outside ideas brought in to unsettle some of the entrenched thinking by opening up oppositional thought processes.
6. **Challenging conventional authorial control:** To enable democratic agency by giving capacity to individuals to autonomously challenge an idea, system or structure. The idea of

hosting appears to be in much discussion in regards to authorship. In reviewing the work of Anton Vidokle, Jan Verwoert poses the questions that if we host something, are we in fact an author (Verwoert 2009, 11)? He argues that Vidokle is ‘dedicated to the spirit of free association, intellectually, socially, emotionally, spiritually, and politically’, where he positions his authorial control in the context of collective subjectivity and displays autonomy in both his roles as host of *e-flux*, and the author of the content of his projects. CoI, as a methodology, acts in a similar way to the host/author dichotomy—where it can be both.

The use of a facilitator (as a form of host) of a CoI is a way in which authorial control can be diffused, or made into a collective activity. In this way the facilitator in a curatorial approach is not understood in the classical sense as the forger of meaning and the creator of projects, rather the approach was that of a concierge or opener of unrestricted inquiry, hosting speculative planes for discrepancy, understanding and reflection. The mitigation of inequality, enhanced critical dialogue, and co-productive endeavours, all markers of hermeneutic activity, would be of interest to those who seek to address political, social and cultural transformation.

The formation of a ‘curatorium’ as a working ‘community’ where ‘we’ shared the authorial positioning of the projects is a potential diffuser of power. This amenable, co-operative style of approach is a strategy that breaks down some of the formal and hegemonic positions normally associated within academia and exhibitionary practice by collapsing the teacher-student hierarchy, taking the emphasis off the dominant visual object and redirecting it to process which emancipates the subjects from the authority of academia and formal exhibitionary practices etc. Consequently, the participants in the projects could demonstrate a temporary, but palpable, disregard for some of these structures—liberating artists to become curators, teachers to become students, and a gallery to become an artist’s studio. This simple democratic re-positioning of hierarchies would level out some of the more oppressive barriers could become valuable tools in education and exhibitionary practice, while at the same time are pluralistic in their delivery.

7. **The recognition of unknown knowledge:** That is ‘uncontained’ knowledge not already found in books and lectures. In research parlance, this is what is simply referred to as ‘new knowledge’, but in this research project, it refers to the idea that the knowledge we are

about to learn is not already known and comes about through the exploration of the formless. A way in which this can be achieved is by creating social events that mimicked the everyday, such as hosted events involving food, which would be active and spontaneous sites where unpredictable social modes of un-purposeful play can occur. Social events encourage conviviality and have the capacity to break down the isolation of individuality and encouraged co sharing ideas rather than plain disagreement.

The rogue nature of opening up a multi-faceted platform for engagement allowed for speculation; for guards to be dropped and opportunity for some of the more nebulous activity that artists generate to be brought to the fore. Formlessness is central to this idea,⁹² which on the one hand offers participants, and the project great dexterity, but also affects a deal of vulnerability on the other. The flexibility is based around the idea of promissory conduct; the project itself and the participant's events are accepted upfront as constituting a 'process unfolding', leading to eventual delivery. The uncontained knowledge is acknowledged and dealt with during this process, as a process.

These principles for an 'ideal' project did raise some important questions that were dealt with by working through them as a communal process. The questions (which will be answered in Chapter five) included how would some of the more formless elements such as open-endedness and play be incorporated into these projects, how can I identify their failures and successes, and more significantly, what measures are there in place to critically evaluate their contribution (or not) to change? In the second study, *The PI*, the method of dealing with questions of this nature was by setting up two distinct communities of inquiry. The first was through the establishment of a large reference group of interested individuals, which included students, commissioned artists, curators and academics, and the second at an institutional level, was a smaller steering group or curatorium of artists, academics and scholars. Both groups would be kept informed through the sharing of information via Dropbox, social media and a dedicated blog, as well as personally through informal dinners and other events, individual and group meetings. At the basis of these meetings was that the two collective

⁹² In other words we do not have a priori knowledge of what it is we are actually looking for, nor of how we might arrive at it. Formlessness has been part of artistic discourse over time with Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Kraus identifying a range of ways in which formlessness can affect the production of physical materials in art by 'liberating our thinking from the semantic' Bois, Yve-Alain, and Rosalind Kraus. 1997. *Formlessness: A Users Guide*. New York Zone Books. 252. However, this research is primarily concerned with the uncontained knowledge of discourse mechanisms, mentioned in Chapter one Rogoff, Irit. 2010c. "Free." *e-flux Journal* 14 (3). and Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1986. "The Relevance of the Beautiful " In *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, edited by Robert Bernasconi. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

agencies had two specific inquisitional functions that coalesced and overlapped in the search for the ‘ideal’—one as an inquiry in art, and one of the academy itself.

Unformed ideas as play and its role in inquiry

From these meetings it was established that providing a collective space for research-based process that enabled play and open-ended, unformed ideas to be brought to the fore without the usual constraints of a polished or conclusive outcome. In this way, it provides new modes of thinking past some of the staid behaviours and practices so entrenched in art, the academy and the gallery sector; it could potentially enact change. The two CoI groups enabled participant artists, curators and others to deliver promissory ideas as described earlier in Chapter one; a fundamental promise of something forthcoming, in which the outcome and its process is not revealed upfront nor not put forward as a conclusion prior to the project. This promissory behaviour is seen in most durational projects, such as those epitomised in *Locating the Producers: Durational Approaches to Public Art*, in particular, the Serpentine Gallery’s *Edgware Road Project* at the Centre for Possible Studies. The curators note that placing:

emphasis on the curatorial as a practice of leaving things open for longer periods of research from which certain unknown possibilities might emerge [is preferable to] situating research in relation to artistic processes as something set out in advance with a linear timeline for prescribed outcomes (O’Neill 2011b, 226).

From my own background as an artist and student, discussing this issue with others in the same situation, both prior to and within this research, indicated that in tertiary institutions the environment for this type of flexibility in creative practice was diminishing, and thus by implication, less opportunity for experimentation and room for failure.

This is not a new phenomenon, historically this reduced space of freedom is also referred to in the literature by educational luminaries such as artists Allan Kaprow and bel hooks, who responded to the critical pedagogy of educationalists John Dewey and Paulo Freire. They developed experimental artworks in the practice of education in what hooks’ would describe as ‘sites of resistance’—creating modes of working for disadvantaged and minority groups that challenged the formality and inflexible educational programmes. [h]ooks, speaks of it in term of freedom from ‘one-dimensional thinking’, Kaprow on the other hand, placed great emphasis on ‘identity ambiguity: the artwork was to remain, as long as possible, unclear in its status’ (hooks 1994, 20, Kaprow 1994, 155-7). Both believed in teaching and art as inseparable to life,

and to some extent I too felt that the open-ended and flexible project I was proposing was similar; it defied much of the logic that had caused failures within standardised education, particularly this distancing between art education and life. With this in mind, and with no real guidelines from previous standards of excellence or traditional modes of behavior or operation to compare, the artistic model I required needed to enact change without succumbing to the problems themselves.

Failure as asset in the inquiry process

In general, the standard way of thinking about failure has it that it is not recognised as an asset—tertiary education success (its polar opposite) is highly regarded in learning experiences, however, failure is seldom celebrated for its inherent potential. For the next project, the aim was to shift our mode of understanding of failure from a negative to a positive where play and failure were to be foregrounded as enlightened and progressive. It is also where failure is able to fuel further investigation and emergent possibility through promissory behavior; a mode of active engagement that would open up potential, not closed it down to a set of pre-ordained conclusions.

Challenging normative processes in art education and exhibition as a failure, opened up the concept of ‘exhibition as inquiry’, however, the notion of the ‘exhibition as proposition’ has become a common strategy and can be problematic. There seems to be a common thematic of always asking questions while not providing answers or solutions—to an extent that it has become almost cliché in the field of curating (Kelly 2013). Contrary to this, the aspiration for these projects was not to always be in a state of not knowing for the sake of it. Rather it was the continual asking of questions to keep the lines of engagement open, in such a way that they shape and build further knowledge through the banter back and forth of the answering and asking of questions that are associated with the experience of failure. This more philosophical approach toward failure was one such mode of inquisition that this project sought to encourage.

The Plimsoll Inquiry could be:

1. An school-exhibition programming structure that operates as a social medium.
2. A dependence on collaborative production and direction, that aims for individual satisfaction.
3. A tendency toward process (versus object) based production, but considers both.
4. An aleatory or open nature, that is as much able to question as to consent.
5. An ongoing and potentially endless temporality.
6. A free space where 'insiders' and 'outsiders' for learning co-productively in play.
7. A post-hierarchical learning environment where there are no ~~teachers-curators~~, just co-participants.
8. A preference for exploratory, experimental, and multi-disciplinary approaches to knowledge production and dissemination.

Figure 15. Exhibition as inquiry. A plan adapted from Kristina Lee Podesva's description of a 'free-school'. (The underlined ~~xt~~ is my insert and ~~cross-outs~~ are deletions from the original.)

For the next case study, *The PI*, I sought to draw out the more unusual or uncontained forms of knowledge, and to encourage the acceptance of play and failure as a given. I did so by adapting Kristina Podesva's list of free-school characteristics, described in Chapter one (**Fig 15**). In using this list, I am acknowledging the source of my ideas, much like I have with the work of Mathew Lipman and others who developed the CoI.

One criteria I challenged early on was in Podesva's essay, "A Pedagogical Turn: Brief Notes on Education as Art." (2007). She suggests there is a clear distinction between artists using education as a medium, and using the academy or institution as a facilitator for a project. From the inception of the investigation I saw my role as an artist and researcher placing me somewhere in between these two analogies, and thus I challenged the definitiveness of this suggestion. I see my position as an artist infiltrating an art school system, using it as a facilitator of my projects, but still using education as a medium.

Nonetheless, I drew from Podesva's criteria of free schools, that she had observed in her research, because they embodied a number of conceptual conditions I wanted to achieve. This writing was the most comprehensive report on educational school projects by artists available in the early stages of this research. As such, it provided a valuable list of criteria that not only pinpointed some of the issues I encountered from the first *Our Day Will Come* project to be avoided, it informed how I could develop the framework for the second case study.

The newly formed wider reference group along with the smaller curatorium, decided that rethinking the agenda of a well-established and revered gallery, and its programme, was to be

the subject matter of the inquiry; what the Gallery had meant to everyone in the past, what it now was and what it could be in the future. The focus of the project was to be the dialogue that enveloped the experimentation and play of communal ideas—and how this dialogue might be of use-value to the art school, and as a way of delivering the results of unbounded experimentation from artists, writers, curators, activists, cooks, performers and academics. The university would benefit by seeking and sourcing some of the hidden or unexplored aspects of assigning the student, teacher (and artist) population to investigate the gallery and its working, thus feeding back into its education programme. For artists, the benefits would be a space where they were able to present unformed processes as projects in experimentation—without such things as the requirements usually attributed to the aesthetics of display. For university research, it would open up a number of potential methods of recruiting research points in new and innovative ways.

The Plimsoll Gallery in the past, been conversationally very static; in addition to its programme of monthly curated exhibitions and research examinations, which were mostly material objects for contemplation, there were a few catalogues produced, and dialogue only really consisted of casual chatter at the exhibition openings once a month. Conversation in the ‘inquiry’ was to be activated in a social context with benefits to;

- research: in the form of new knowledge;
- curricula and exhibition development: in terms of new social modes of presentation and curation
- publishing: generating new material from talks, conversations and participant writing as well as revising archival material
- experimental and social engagement site for students and staff: to rethink what the physical space could be used for and open up new possibilities.

These benefit are for artist and institution—and all those who have an investment in the space as a potential site of transformation, which included members of the wider arts community.

In an academy gallery, rethinking its exhibition practice as an inquiry—disturbs the notion that the academy assigns as ‘studio’ practice. The studio is normally a site where attendant idiosyncrasies associated with the display of studio-based works by artists play out in some degree of privacy. If this functional space is brought into the public realm of a gallery as a site of inquiry, this play is then conducted collectively, co-productively and conversationally as public. In this way this disruption widens the reach of our understanding of art by opening up a normally formal space of knowing (the gallery) to some of the ‘roguish’ elements normally

experienced in the solitude of a studio; publically exposing the failures, the conflicts, the messiness and the play. This public space of studio practice is now shown, spoken about and more importantly critiqued as it is in progress—something that is encouraged through collective discourse. The exhibition as inquiry opens up the potential for the artists to expand their own practice, giving practitioners who are used to ‘making in systems’ (and in solitude) another avenue to work that is collective, critical and generative (Sullivan 2010, 158).

Likewise for the gallery, this new model of design would offer new modes of presentation that had more to do with the collective production of new knowledge, rather than the mere static display of an end product as art, most often determined by a single author, curator or artist. I anticipated that for an art school to have an exhibition held as an explorative laboratory of expanded ideas, would encourage further research into the foundations of what is taught in an art school, opening up and exploring new and innovative co-productive art for public presentation, skewing what had always been seen in a traditional venue. In some ways, Allan Kaprow’s notion of moving the idea of the avant-garde being ‘experimental’ into the realm of ‘developmental’ signifies an added dimension to experimental processes that give them a generative potency and through that—applicability (1993, 68).

Question as the starting point of conversation



Figure 16. Hannah Hurtzig *Mobile Academy: On the concept of Blackmarket for Useful Knowledge and Non-Knowledge. The art of the assembly.*
Published on 17 Nov 2013 Image source: <http://youtu.be/x5Q65QFx22M>

As I have mentioned in Chapter one, conversation in art is not new, the most comprehensive account of dialogue in art is Grant Kester's book, *Conversation Pieces; Community + Communication in Modern Art* (2004), where he brings together some of the early examples of communal dialogue as a mode of social co-production as artworks. Since then many artists have worked in this manner including the Berlin-based dramaturge Hannah Hurtzig and the artist, Anton Vidokle, who were using conversation in communal situations in innovative ways to draw attention to, and explore, discreet topics. While Hurtzig's exploration of 'uncontained' forms of knowledge in her ongoing project *Mobile Academy - Blackmarket for Useful Knowledge and Non-Knowledge*, (2005-) tended to 'always changes location, time and theme' her notion of maintaining a 'consistent intensity and a growing sense of doubt' became an interesting point for an inquiry process.⁹³ **(Fig 16)**

Vidokle's *New York Conversations* (2010) on the other hand, was very much grounded in one location, but likewise enabled intense topic-related dialogues around a table of inquirers; deliberating over a specific topic (that appeared from the film produced to have arisen during the conversation), while at the same time partaking in a meal. (See **Fig 11**) Both artists utilised the 'expert' to scaffold the conversations through which other participant's ideas and comments would coalesce, resulting in the emergence of new knowledge. The mode of topic-specific inquiry was experienced in the *ODWC* project, where four specific questions were put

⁹³ <http://www.mobileacademy-berlin.com/> Accessed 8th September 2014

forward and answered by a community of participants each week (discussed further in Chapter three).

This prompted the idea of a durational inquiry for the second case study, one in which a community of inquirers could draw out the question(s)—allowing to fallow and cultivate as well as gather and nurture the answers, but not shut it down at the end. Focusing on a specific topic by putting it on over seven weeks as an inquisition would be done so with an expectation of generating further exploratory ideas in different phases of the project. In this way, it remains ongoing and open-ended.

Principles of messiness and formlessness as paramount

The hermeneutic nature of the term ‘inquiry’ raised the notion of open-endedness, formlessness and the ‘unknown’ as potential outcomes for many social projects and programmes. The unstructured nature of their production and delivery in getting to this position make them seem messy and disorganized, both visually and conceptually. The appearance of disorder contravenes the visual and procedural cues and conformities we expect in the traditional exhibition of art, where the presentation phase generally comes as the *end* of this nebulous process. Moreover, this ambiguity makes it difficult to critically analyse in terms of academic and historical discourse and thus its place in structured curricula in education systems. In seeking to overcome this breach I put forward the idea of messiness as an end in itself, using it instead as a strategy for questioning fixed positions through a facilitated platform of inquiry.

The artist-educator and participant in the first case study, Mick Wilson, works in ways that seek to collapse the more prescribed processes—through the use of disarray, disruption and disorderliness as a potential ‘deschooling’ strategy that tests stoic and static norms. In a conference summary after the *ODWC* project, he noted that:

“it’s not that we have to be worthy and proper and good. Sometimes... precisely by being a little bit tricky, a little bit messy, a little bit awkward, a little bit bold that actually we manage to flush out or release certain issues into play” (Wilson 2011).

A condition of participatory, communal engagement and inquisitive engagement is that the knowledge we are seeking to grow comes out of the ‘messiness’ of experimentation and failure. It is this ‘[dis]order’ that tends to appeal to anyone who critically inquires into any subject. In

short, it is the basis of any research inquiry. The problem is that these are not populist works, for artists engaging in such works are often seen as inaccessible so their attractiveness to a mass audience is limited.

Populism as a desirable attribute in art is, however, contested. Many artists engaged in non-material modes of production are often less concerned with how popular their works are to a wider audience, but instead value their work in terms of its critical merit and autonomy. However, artists are often hampered by the requirements of funding bodies or institutions that count on popular exhibits and high visitor numbers to boost income or prestige, which can in some cases lead to compromise. Along with others, such as Mick Wilson and the art critic, media theorist Boris Groys, I take the line that mass appeal is not a measure of artistic merit. Artists must argue for autonomy by establishing their own sets of conditions, rather than bowing to history, or conforming to market pressure or mass appeal (Wilson 2011, Groys 2009a, 69). This being said the condition of autonomy must at the same time be open to consideration of the past.

Forming a community of agonistic inquiry would enable a freedom for artists to be 'messy' and openly play with ideas, which supports their autonomy—so often diminished in populist notions of art. This strategy would empower artists and audiences to gradually become less dependent on the visual or spectatorial aspects in art that tend to appease the masses, instead directing engagement to the processes of art and the intellectual concerns that support those processes. However, focusing purely on these intellectual processes is also problematic. It can make artworks too challenging, alienating and often tedious. Consequently focusing on the intellectual aspects of art should not be as a replacement to the visual aesthetic, rather it should stand as an open condition that acknowledges both visual and the more conceptual characteristics of art. In this way, art can be engaged with as a hermeneutic conversation.

The CoI platforms are built to establish and encourage sociable forms of conflict, or (again using a Mouffe term)—zones of 'agonistic' inquiry, to elicit a number of unexpected, but innovative responses. Participants working within these mildly disruptive platforms problematise not only their own work as individuals, and collectively—but temporarily and playfully challenged fixed positions and their wider implications within the canon of art. The artist Suzanne Lacy argues that these contemporary iterations of dematerialised practices fulfill much of what Conceptual art of the 60s and 70s was not able to, because they 'never

thoroughly escaped the power structure of the institutions' (Finkelppearl 2013, 43). It is only by increasing exposure to these modes of practice in a public arena, that institutions, audiences and publics will come to understand new dematerialised modes of production that are not validated by narrow aesthetic concerns. In this way, we can imagine that messiness and formlessness is considered a new aesthetic.

It could be said that fixed positions and defined structures act as parameters and are always in place for a reason, some worthy and some not. Despite the 'democratic' idealism of many of these communal activities as convivial, companionable and unrestricted—one needs to consider parameters and structures to avoid the unruliness of events falling into chaos. This is the arena of production that Gadamer, Rogoff and others call the 'unknown'. It is something that does not align easily with the expectations of 'contained knowledge' that exists in academic or scholarly engagement in a tertiary institution. *In Tactics for Not Knowing: Preparing for the Unexpected*, 2013, the author Emma Cocker contends that:

Schooling emerges as a discipline for increasing the territory of what is known, an accumulative undertaking where knowledge is thought of as information to be taught and duly tested. Here, to not know is treated as a deficiency or failure, as a mark of stupidity, the lack of requisite knowledge...to attach worth to not knowing is something of a challenge then, for culturally it would seem that we are conditioned away from such experiences, encouraged to view them as marginal or meaningless, as somehow lacking in true merit (2013, 126).

On the one hand we do not often place enough value on conditions such as formlessness, the unknown or the process of 'messiness' that brings certain knowledge into being, yet on the other hand there is a risk in believing these projects and programmes will just happen as fully organic processes that meander aimlessly until they find a just cause. The CoI approach appears to be one way to avoid chaos and purposelessness, by structuring the projects through the notion of 'scaffolding' and 'zones of proximal development' while at the same time affording the freedom of exploration of the unknown, serendipity and individual expression through the egalitarian approach of 'sharing horizons'.

The CoI is a practice that has been dispersed widely through several generations of psychology, philosophy and pedagogy: from C.S. Peirce and the Philosophy for Children movement to online teaching platforms in tertiary education. In doing so, it has had many interpretations, and the use of the CoI to inform a curatorial methodology in these case studies is yet another. However, the CoI offers more—it is a tool for addressing the unquantifiable, flexible processes and outcomes that many practicing artists in the field engage in, and for them to be integrated

into undergraduate and graduate teaching learning. This enables art schools to keep abreast of many unconventional contemporary participatory practices, which include open-ended practices that are socially engaged—participatory, process-driven, co-productive, performative and dialogical. Moreover, the CoI enables these practices to coalesce with, rather than stand in opposition to, traditional studio-based models of practice that demand projected and measurable results.

CoI alternatives

By way of a comparison to the CoI, I have briefly examined the Art of Hosting (AoH), and others that have similar operations, such as World Café (WC) and Appreciative Inquiry (AI), mainly because the methods used appear to include similar principles that are aligned with CoI. The difference are that these are commercial applications that are a method-based, highly organised series of techniques to assist businesses and institutions in the collection of information gathered through conversational and convivial formats. They often have a specific agenda of ‘harvesting knowledge’ for the betterment of the enterprise. Alternatively the CoI was developed for children to encourage inquiry *processes* as a life-skill enhancement so that they may become autonomous and independent thinkers through ‘questioning, reasoning, connecting, deliberating, challenging, and developing problem-solving techniques’⁹⁴ The CoI thus is an approach that is flexible, dynamic and highly adaptable to user content and serendipity. Given the diversity of the more formal, method-based approaches such as the Art of Hosting (AoH), this comparison it is not about comparing like for like. Rather I apply an evaluation in order to exemplify the difference in their fundamental and ethical approaches, as well as to justify the decision I made to take the CoI approach, rather than a more outcome focused application.

While I agree the types of social skills taught in AoH methods are very useful in any conversational exchange, CoI focuses on dialogue, reflective action and questioning as a mode of endeavor, which is more in line with this research. Social skills may well be a secondary ability learned (Hagaman 1990, 151), but CoI engenders the idea of disagreement, which I could not find in any of the literature in the AoH.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Wikipedia contributors, ‘Community of Inquiry’, *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_of_inquiry Accessed 20/11/11

⁹⁵ Some academic members of UTAS undertook an AoH programme in 2011 and reported using some of the skills gained in the programme in other areas of life, such as in their schools and professional life, but did not actively pursue the methods in the AoH

The pre-ordained outcomes and the highly organised techniques of the method-based applications are that they preclude liminal and spontaneous conversations that are at the core of true knowledge production. The serendipity of the conversational process was an important aspect that I wanted to promote, rather than exclude, within the second project.

In brief, while I have previously argued that I am in favour of the idea of ‘hosting’—as a convivial and civil process to aid understanding, in summarising the comparison concerning the CoI and the various derivatives of AoH, my view is that the AoH, places too much focus on the conclusion of ideas and prioritisation of preordained outcomes. (A further comparison to the AoH is given in Appendix A)

The second case study, *The Plimsoll Inquiry* in 2013, described in Chapter four, was an exhibition as an inquiry, motivated by some of the preliminary findings from the earlier project, *Our Day Will Come*, which had raised a number of questions around notions of hegemony and compliance in normative art, education and the production of knowledge. The second case study as an ‘inquiry’, sought to bring the processes and working methods of artists to address these questions. As a pedagogical experiment that was ‘made visible’ within the Plimsoll Gallery (the main exhibitionary gallery for the University of Tasmania’s southern art school), the curatorial development of the project was informed by the Community of Inquiry approach.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ The Plimsoll Gallery programme had been, up until 2012, the domain of postgraduate research assessment presentations, formal research curated exhibitions and an occasional touring exhibition.

CHAPTER 3 CASE STUDY NO. 1

Our Day Will Come (ODWC)

3.1 Introduction



Figure 17. *Iteration: Again*, 2011
Publicity flier

Prior to undertaking this research, I was aware of a number of art research platforms affiliated with universities, those that were attached to the academic and administrative mechanisms, but operated as semi-autonomous facilities. Three, in particular, had caught my attention: Situations in Bristol, England, then attached to the University of South West England; Litmus, part of Massey University in Wellington, New Zealand; and Tania Bruguera's *Arte de Conducta* in Cuba.

My initial understanding of Situations' attachment to the University of South West England, was its ability to operate in a symbiotic relationship—exploring and developing innovative public art projects yet remaining grounded within a scholarly space. As a commissioning organisation they seek to reengage a public through

changing expectations and disrupting an audiences understanding of public art. Albeit driven by academic research within Massey University, this was a similar understanding I had with Litmus Research Initiative, which I saw as a parasitic platform for contemporary art research, with one arm reaching out into community while maintaining a reflective research space. The

most notable example exercised was a major project in New Zealand called *One day Sculpture* 2008-09, where artists delivered a range of diverse projects over a twelve month period out in the community, yet remained critically grounded in the integrity of academia. This parasitic tendency was something that I wanted explore during the research.

Tania Bruguera's *Arte de Conducta*, I have discussed in detail in Chapter one however, it too was a model of parasitic behaviour that was an artistic project developed in relationship with an academic institution. The three models have vastly different approaches to a binary art practice/institution model however at the time I felt this form of activity would be useful for rethinking the academy model of pedagogy I was researching.

Coinciding with my entry into the PhD programme, I was asked to curate an artist within a larger programme of public art events called *Iteration Again (I:A)*.⁹⁷ (Fig 17) *Iteration Again* was directed by New Zealand-based curator and academic, David Cross, then the Director of Litmus, who had accepted an invitation to develop a project in Tasmania by the peak organisation, Contemporary Art Spaces Tasmania (CAST). The project had originally been mooted in a programme, *Locate/Situate*, which I had co-written when I worked at CAST several years earlier.⁹⁸ (see Appendix C)

As one of the invited curators for *Iteration Again* I approached an artist whose practice was aligned with my proposed research project, the Irish artist-curator Paul O'Neill. My awareness of Paul O'Neill's work came from reading his numerous contributions to *Situations* and reading about some of his projects that had dealt with the consequences of artistic encroachment into curatorial, educational and other formally structured systems. In response to my research proposal, O'Neill proposed developing an alternative platform for education; we agreed that it could set some questions and propositions to shape my research.

The first case study *ODWC* tested some assumptions I had formed about the hegemonic roles of education in institutions, the lack of dialogues in art by artists and their wider publics, and the absence of institutional recognition about what artists were actually doing in the field. As I

⁹⁷ <http://www.iterationagain.com/pages/projects/paul-oneill>

⁹⁸ In formulating this paper I looked at many organisational models, such the Mountain School of the Arts (affiliated with universities in California but run from a bar in Chinatown LA), Department 21 organised and run by students from the Royal College of the Arts in London. However, Litmus and *Situations* were more allied to locating the practice of local artists and situating their ideas and thoughts within a wider international field. This was something that was commonplace in academic research, but was not fully explored in the real world outside academia. I first met Cross in 2004 in Wellington at the launch of Cross' earlier international project *One Day Sculpture* (2006) and used it, and as an exemplar for CAST's *Locate/Situate* program.

argued in Chapter two, art education in the past did not seem to be engaging with what artists are actually doing and thinking. Until recently, discourse around art education, art history, theory and critique appears to have been generated predominantly by those who are not art practitioners, instead we heard from historians, critics, curators and theorists for instance. While this is a perfectly valid system of evaluation, I wanted to continue to consider the voice of the artist, which has become increasingly more vocal about pedagogy in their field.

All of the artists whose work is described in this exegesis to some degree incorporate into their practices acts of writing, critiquing and establishing projects and programmes that challenge traditional modes of pedagogy, and traditional modes for presenting and producing art. The questions identified in the Introduction came out of this first case study, namely, what ‘other’ modes of artistic production or ‘platforms’ can be explored to create new and expanded forms of dialogue around art? Is there a place for a ‘thinking aesthetic’ in art? How can disruption challenge, dislodge or reinvigorate entrenched positions and hegemony within visual art?

Paul O’Neill and I developed *ODWC* around our respective research interests at the time, and where these intersected. O’Neill had just published his co-edited anthology, *Curating and the Educational Turn* (2010) with Mick Wilson, and he sought to further engage with Wilson and some other practitioners whose work had informed the anthologised writings.⁹⁹ For my part, I wanted to enter into speculative and reflective engagement with generative and transformative effects of socially engaged practice, specifically through dialogical and pedagogical art. I wished to test the extent to which these modes of practice might productively infiltrate a formal educational environment, and the extent to which they might destabilise institutional arrangements and activities—those that relied on defined outcomes and perpetuated the notion of the artist (and the curator) as supreme author of a defined set of objects or practices. Together O’Neill and I decided to develop a four-week alternative art school project that questioned the role of teaching and learning hierarchies in the traditional art academy as well as the authoritarian character of curators and artists as autonomous authors. The concept of the free school was an initial design idea, and it formed the foundation to the ‘Rogue Academy’.

3.2 Description

⁹⁹ These included Liam Gillick, Dave Beech, David Blamey (UK), Annie Fletcher and Sarah Pierce (IRE) who subsequently became part of the *ODWC* project, and others such as the aforementioned Irit Rogoff and Anton Vidokle.

The four-week alternative art school project was christened *Our Day Will Come*, (*ODWC*), which took place in the spring of 2011, and comprised Paul O'Neill along with nine invited international artists and curators of his selection. Their presence was centred within the precinct of the Tasmanian School of Art (TSA), part of the University of Tasmania, at the campus located in the dockside area of Hobart's Hunter Street.



Figure 18. The *ODWC* caravan before and after
Image source: Fiona Lee

O'Neill and I worked collaboratively to develop the project within the curatorial premise of *Iteration Again*, a programme of thirteen parallel public art projects across Tasmania. Each was conducted sequentially over a four-week period. Like the other twelve sub-projects, *ODWC* was developed to include four iterations or chapters over the four weeks, and this scheme lent itself to developing a curriculum. It was envisaged that students, local artists, members of the general public and academics would make up the participating student body and audience, to be led by a group of invited international cultural producers ranging from artists, performers, curators, writers, designers, students, researchers and academics.



Figure 19. Workmen constructing the verandah of the school

O'Neill developed series of four topics, posed as questions. We sought to create a community of inquiry by broadcasting the questions to the invited participants, artists, and the wider community. They were; *What is a school?*, *What is remoteness?*, *What is autonomy?*, and *What is Usefulness?* From these weekly questions, O'Neill devised a loose schedule of activities to unfold as the artwork itself. The questions were to be offered up for discussion at the beginning of each week, the ensuing conversations to be

hosted by one of the four international guests.

O'Neill and I applied to various funding sources for support for *ODWC*. We were successful in gaining grants from Culture Ireland and the University of Tasmania's Visiting Scholar

Programme. Apart from the economic benefits, these sources of support invested the project's visiting participants with particular formalised official visitor and a sort of 'cultural ambassador' status. The University of Tasmania uses the Visiting Scholars programme to bring in outside knowledge; the Irish funding body supports its artists being abroad. Visiting Scholar status made Wilson and O'Neill official guests of the TSA, and as such, they participated in the weekly Art Forum programme, and met with various staff members about research matters and had practice-based critiques with students at the school.

Some formal components of the *ODWC* school had visual impact, but they presented a mystery at first glance. We borrowed a portable 1950s workers' tearoom from the Hobart City Council and relocated from its resting place in bush land to the forecourt of the TSA. (**Fig 18**)



Figure 20. The 'conversation table' by Gareth Long (US)

The repurposed caravan was completed with a porch: a rough timber deck with a white awning held aloft by the trunks of two salvaged 'Hills Hoist' clotheslines¹⁰⁰. We repainted the caravan Pantone 222C, the burgundy colour of a European passport.

Astute observers, or those who were in the vicinity the week before, would have noticed the gradual transformation of the small caravan, from a graffiti-ridden relic to a curious purple 'hub'. It looked more like a beachside shack, awkwardly out of place in a hard surfaced yard. (**Fig 19**) Its visual presence created



Figure 21. The T-shirt designs were by Paul O'Neill himself (L) and by British artists Liam Gillick, David Blamey. Image source: Fiona Lee

¹⁰⁰ A quintessential Australian icon the 'Hills Hoist' was a five- pronged rotating, height adjustable clothesline set in nearly every back yard from the mid 40s until today.

absurdity that seemed to momentarily replace its meaning as a school.

A central visual feature of the school was the unique table on the front porch which was the designed 'conversation table' by Gareth Long, a New York-based Canadian artist. (Fig 20) He constructed the two-seated table to which O'Neill invited participants to book in for a one-on-one conversation with a visiting artist from 2 and 4 pm each day. The topics they discussed included references to the week's topic but focused the questions in relation to their own practice.



Paul O'Neill (UK)
Mick Wilson (IRE)
Rhona Byrne (IRE)
Annie Fletcher (NL)
Jem Noble (UK)

with works from: Sarah Pierce (IRE), Garrett Phelan (IRE),
Gareth Long (USA), Liam Gillick (UK). David Blamey (UK)



**ALTERNATIVE ART
SCHOOL**

week one (Sept 17-24)
What is a School?

week two (Sept 24-Oct 1)
What is Remoteness?

week three (Oct 1-8th)
What is Autonomy?

week four (Oct 8-15th)
What is Usefulness?

TSA CENTRE FOR THE ARTS
COURTYARD
WEEKDAYS

Figure 22. *Our Day Will Come*, 2011
email flier

It was not clear at first glance that O'Neill was deliberately driving this project as a structured entity that would look, sound and feel like a school; the name alone was odd, and there were no mandatory terms used such as 'classes', 'students', 'teachers' or 'assessable outcomes'.¹⁰¹

The schedule of semi-planned events provided some structure to the school, but this was continually challenged when conditions changed and flexed to the needs and availability of the participants. The schedule ended up being more akin to a list of things to do, not so much a formal curriculum, and a series of T-shirts, (**Fig 21**) designed to be seen as 'uniforms' were instead given away as a means of enticing participants.

Participants were invited to join the school by word of mouth and through the limited channel of *Iteration Again's* web-based communications. The formal promotion, disseminated as mail outs, brochures and regular advertisements, were addressed through CAST's network and general email fliers. (**Fig 22**) Once having signed up to the project, participants were kept informed of events via a weekly *ODWC* email bulletin.

Initially, the project drew few participants. CAST's promotions led very few members of the wider public to the school, and as *Iteration Again* took place towards the end of the academic year, the pressure of work precluded full-scale commitment by all those except the most genuinely curious students and staff at the School of Art. Despite the friendly, haphazard ensemble that greeted people in the courtyard, it did not immediately look like an artwork, lacking recognisable tropes. However, once passers-by engaged with the caravan, or were drawn to accept a free T-shirt, they entered the fray, and the elements of the artwork became clearer. The language, the topics, the references to international artists, writers, philosophers and thinkers all pointed to this not being just about a visual disruption in the shape of a purple caravan in a school yard, but an experiential undertaking.

The weekly programme proceeded with a series of events including films, lectures, performances, discussions, readings, dinners, dances, installations, open radio broadcasts, and other performative events. These were presented by the guest visitors: Mick Wilson, Irish educator, writer and artist – who stayed for the entire month long duration; Annie Fletcher, curator at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven Netherlands; Rhona Byrne, Irish artist; and Jem Noble, a UK-based artist. O'Neill also remotely included in the schedule, the work of 5 other

¹⁰¹ *Our Day Will Come* is a term appropriated by O'Neill from the Irish Republican brotherhood. It is used as a depoliticised, hollow tool to be populated by his various projects such as conferences, publications etc. In this instance, it was used as a name for a school. The logo font and design references a combined Guttenberg Gothic /Fratur font used by the Nazi party—it was designed by Tom Williams commissioned and is likewise considered empty and universal, ready for appropriation. O'Neill, Paul. 2011a. "Curating as Research Practice: Practice as Curatorial Research." *Art Forum*, <http://www.utas.edu.au/art-viscom/events/2011/september/art-forum-paul-oneill>.

artists: Gareth Long, New York-based, Canadian artist; Garrett Phelan and Sarah Pierce, Irish artists, and David Blamey and Liam Gillick, UK artists. They worked remotely by sending Skype and email instructions, material designs and writings.

The main regular features of the schedule were the workshops to introduce the weekly questions, which were organised and run by one of the visiting international artists first thing on Monday mornings. The participants acted as provocateurs. Flip charts were produced



Figure 23. Mick Wilson, *School Dinners*. 2011 held at The Writers Cottage in Battery Point, Hobart, where the artists were staying. Image source: Fiona Lee



Figure 24. Mick Wilson, *School Dinners*. 2011. A film screening at The Writers Cottage in Battery Point, Hobart. Image source: Fiona Lee

during the sessions to record keywords developed by the participants. These then gave the groups assembled something to work in and around the week's question.

Four weekly *School Dinners* (**Fig 23**), hosted by Mick Wilson included presentations of works by local artist and designers, as well as visiting artists in Tasmanian as part of the broader *Iteration:Again* programme. The *School Dinners* were loosely themed around the week's topic and presenters gave illustrated talks about their art practice, followed by a discussion and critique, all accompanied by a home cooked meal (predominantly Irish fare prepared by Wilson, and potluck contributions from locals). About thirty people came and went during each of the evenings at which a few participants would volunteer to present an aspect of their art practice in a PowerPoint presentation to all the guests. (**Fig 24**) They were offered in return the opportunity for critical engagement and reflection. There were a series of film screenings and in the week of *What is remoteness?*, the *School Dinner* hosted a Skype discussion with the organisers of *Tranzit.hu*, a free school in Budapest Hungary.



Figure 25. ODWC 'zine' launch every Friday evening.
Image source: Fiona Lee

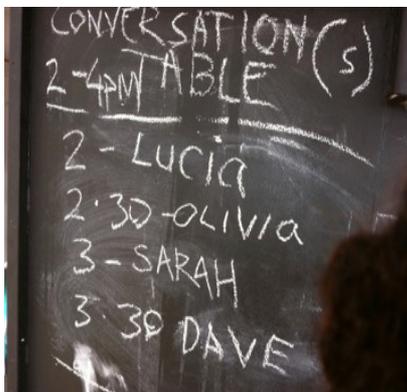


Figure 26. ODWC Sign up board for the 'conversation table'.
Image source: Fiona Lee

The atmosphere and particular stakes of the brand of hospitality at play at the *School Dinners* are the subjects of a co-authored published research paper, 'The (Neo) Avant-Garde and (Their) Kitchen(s): Potluck and Participation' (Lee and Kunda 2012b) (see Appendix B).

Each week, material gathered from the events was incorporated into a publication, a 'zine' or magazine, one launched on each of the four Fridays from the verandah of the caravan.¹⁰² (Fig 25) Along with local participants, artists, writers and theorists from across the world contributed input, generated from the week's question, into the zines. After the conclusion of the project, these publications remained as a tangible trace of proceedings. The first issue had thirty pages, which increased incrementally over the four weeks to eighty-eight pages in week four.

¹⁰² A 'zine is a term for a small magazine or publication that O'Neill uses as a way to record and distribute text and visual material generated through his dialogical projects.



Figure 27. *ODWC*, Autonomy lecture by Annie Fletcher
Image source: Fiona Lee

Five artists in the *ODWC* project delivered work remotely: Liam Gillick, Garrett Phelan, David Blamey, Gareth Long and Sarah Pierce. At the ‘conversation table’ by New York-based artist Gareth Long, between 2 and 4 pm participants could book a half hour conversation each with one of the visiting international artists. As word got around this became one of the most popular elements of *ODWC*, and connected about 30 local artists with the visitors. **(Fig 26)**

The ‘conversation table’, used by O’Neill for recorded discussions, gave an outlet for those wanting to question or challenge his project. The conversation table came to be recognised in the wider *Iteration Again* community as a place where you could (along with someone else) test theories, play with ideas and question your own practice. By discussing their work in a one-on-one encounter with the international visitors, the event set up an opportunity for university students and local artists to situate their own practice within a different context. The chance for a conversation about one’s own personal practice with someone from somewhere else did not occur very often. While artists in Tasmania were not extremely isolated in this regard, opportunities for cross mingling with international curators and artists who were coming to the state to see MONA, had not presented itself to the local community at the time of this project. Shortly before MONA had opened the founding purpose of the program of public events that culminated in the *Iteration;Again* programme was developed, which sought to *locate* and *situate* local artists within a realm of international dialogue. (see Appendix C)

During the week of *What is Autonomy?*, curator Annie Fletcher came from the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, Netherlands. She gave a public lecture on autonomy in art production and consumption, a subject that the Van Abbemuseum had been considering for some time. **(Fig 27)** She also led a workshop and discussion around issues such as ‘independence’, ‘emancipation’ and ‘freedom’ in art. Participants produced the weekly zine that momentarily placed the project into international territory when it was presented at a major

conference in the Netherlands the following week.¹⁰³ In addition, that week, local arts writer, Michael Denholm gave a public talk on the story of the Progressive Art Movement in Adelaide founded in 1974; Professor of Philosophy, Jeff Malpas, presented a Philosophy Café. Throughout the four weeks, there were a number of public screenings of films loaned from the collection of the Van Abbemuseum.

Towards the fourth week, British artist Jem Noble produced *The Matter Of Self-Improvement*, a workshop and performance that appropriated found footage of self-improvement material from



Figure 28. ODWC, performance by Jem Noble called *The Matter Of Self-Improvement*.
Image source: Fiona Lee

old technologies (predominantly of fitness exercises from the seventies on VHS and cassette tapes), collected by participants in the weeks leading up to the project from Hobart charity shops. (Fig 28)

During the week, we addressed the question, *What is usefulness?* Irish artist Rhona Byrne conducted three events that addressed humour and its use in society. She held a humour workshop led by ‘Joyologist’ Annette Psereckis (Fig 29). A workshop was set up to build a black balloon cloud, which was paraded on market day through the Salamanca precinct, to St David’s

¹⁰³ Professor Nikos Papastergiadis, who subsequently joined the next case study in 2013, recalled hearing about the ODWC project, and the zine publication when he was taking part in the Van Abbemuseum’s *The Autonomy Project* symposium several days after the it was produced and sent to the Netherlands in 2011.

Park, where a public laughter workshop was conducted with members of the Hobart Laughter Club. Byrne also conducted an artist talk on her work at the *School Dinners*. During the week of *What is remoteness?*, Bryony Nainby, a curator from the local Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, gave a presentation on the remote art organisation in Western Australia called IASKA.¹⁰⁴ That same week a local scientist/participant, Tisham Dhar, from the CSIRO (Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation), gave a lecture on remote sensing in orbit.



Figure 29. *ODWC* humour workshop by Rhona Byrne
Image source: Fiona Lee

Over the last two weeks of the project, Irish-based artist Sarah Pierce produced the performance work, *Exaggerate! Strengthen! Simplify!...* a work that infiltrated (and disrupted) the School's hallways, library, café and entrance area, unannounced. Pierce produced the work remotely, with five local participants, over series of workshops run via Skype from Dublin.

In general, protest and demonstration about the environment has been the focus within Australian unrest, perhaps until the recent Indigenous stolen generation rallies or activities around the lesser 'occupy movement'. Disturbances are relatively uncommon and are generally contained to fringe and marginalised groups or to small pockets of isolated discontent against

¹⁰⁴ IASKA= International Art Space Kelleberrin, a Western Australian art organisation formed in 1998 by farmers and art professionals interested in exploring cultural identity through art. It was remotely located in the small town of Kelleberrin, 210 kilometres east of Perth until 2008.

government changes or inadequacies. Some of the artists in *ODWC* touched on protest, and dissent and at times encouraged participants to move out of their area of comfort to debate, critique and write about issues pertaining to education, autonomy, geographical location,



Figure 30. *ODWC Sarah Pierce performance, Exaggerate! Strengthen! Simplify!...2011*
Image source: Courtesy of CAST

isolation and functionality in art, among others.

In a series of three short performances within the TSA, Pierce's work was an attempt to disrupt the status quo—as much as it was a critique of dominant power and authority. (Fig 30) She worked remotely from the UK, with five members of the *ODWC* student group via Skype from Dublin, where she coached them to produce a performative work that randomly infiltrated the School of Art. The performances were developed as subtle versions of protest, which the artists designed to 'interrupt' as much as 'disrupt' the everyday workings of the school.

Pierce's work was a formal instructive protest, one that she likened to Berthold Brecht's choruses. She also employed dialogue from the repertoire of terminology regularly used in a typical 3D studio sculpture class. The performances aimed to create a 'temporary diversion' for onlookers and everyday users of the TSA, by repeating instructive elements in short bursts of formal chanting-as-instruction. Accompanied by a series of props they were performed in the

Café, outside the Library and in the hallway by the five performers to a bemused, nonchalant audience of students in the laid-back atmosphere of an indifferent art school.

In an environment that completely lacked interest in dissent, it nonetheless both mocked and highlighted the apathy or stereotypical ‘she’ll be right’ Australian attitude of the ‘non-oppressed’ student body—and Australian society in general. Rather than cause anarchy and disorder, Pierce merely sought to break peoples’ train of thought by disturbing the regular routine of a normal working art school.



Figure 31. ODWC Garrett Phelan performance *one truth teaches another/common sense...* 2011
Image source: Fiona Lee

Irish artist Garrett Phelan ran a series of seven hour-long broadcasts transmitted live on Edge Radio, a local radio station located on the University’s Sandy Bay campus. Transmissions occurred between 3 and 4 pm each day and were relayed over loudspeakers at the ODWC van at the School of Art in Hunter St. Ironically, dialogue within this format was predominantly a monologue; it challenged the idea of the free and

democratic space of discourse.

The work involved participants from the group of regular followers to broadcast a live dialogue called *one truth teaches another/common sense...* It was a tense work where the contributor had to speak *on his* (Phelan’s) *behalf* for an hour on a topic of Phelan’s choice (such as the colour black or common sense). No notes or readings were provided to aid their dialogue. It was probably one of the most significant in terms of politics in conversation. The contributor spoke *for* Phelan continuously on air for exactly one hour—in what was often a self-consciously humiliating performance. (**Fig 31**) Struggling to maintain concentration, while at the same time battling off Phelan’s intrusions via Skype from Dublin, the participants’ voice vacillated.

Edge Radio listeners would have no understanding that this was a highly anxious situation in the broadcasting room; sweat would often pour from the speaker’s forehead as they struggled to keep the flow of information alive and continuous for the listeners. Participants (who were all highly confident, erudite individuals), reflected that there were times when the seeping



Figure 32. ODWC zines. Available at the conclusion of each week.
Image source: Paul O'Neill

agony of self-doubt and embarrassment arose—of not knowing their topic in front of an anonymous audience—of ‘lacking in intellectual capacity’ to talk continuously about something as simple as ‘the colour black’ or ‘breathing’ for instance. The discomfort was etched across their faces as they avoided the radio technician’s face; he sat there bemused at their pain. The dreaded moments were—being chastised by a sometimes disinterested, sometimes angry Phelan, who at 4 am in the Irish morning—was clearly in no mood to let them be errant with *his* words. Not one of the contributors enjoyed the experience, and all were highly relieved when the ordeal was over, yet it was probably the most commanding work.

On the last night of the project, to round up the school ‘term’, Paul O’Neill and a group of the participants presented *Death of a Discourse Dancer* at the Halo nightclub in Hobart. The celebratory proceedings included a series of art lectures in one room that intermingled with DJ-ing and dancing in the adjoining space, and participants were given the opportunity to learn how to DJ by Jem Noble and Paul O’Neill.

Tangible and lasting sets of outputs from the lengthy scheduled series of questions were the weekly publication, the four *Our Day Will Come* zines. O’Neill employed generative strategies to capture and spawn material to supply content for the zines (**Fig 32**), and set a demanding production schedule. Contributors had little time in which to edit and review their material, which left some question over the quality of the content, but to some extent, the grittiness was in the spirit of the event. As hard copy discourse, the zines provided an avenue for participants to produce their own individual act of public dialogue within a collective environment. The zines, along with the ‘conversation table’, now exist as lasting mementos of the ephemeral project *Our Day Will Come*, archived within the Library at what is now the Tasmanian College of the Arts.

3.3 Interpretation

In the immediate aftermath of the *ODWC* project, my supervisor and I developed and taught a pioneering unit devoted to dialogical and social forms of artistic practice in the immediate wake of *ODWC*.

In it we did two things, first we tried to give a form of critical space to scrutinise a large project that had just happened—thereby capitalising on the immediacy and momentum set up by the project. Second, we attempted to teach and assess the more unorthodox and unaccountable modalities – such as generosity, conviviality, spontaneity and community, conditions needed to conduct socially engaged art practice. It was difficult because these elements of ‘unruliness’ collided with the rigid structures of formal institutional learning, made it difficult to fit some of the activities (which the students designed) within the assessment guidelines. Fortunately, few of the students were enrolled in undergraduate degrees; most took the unit in a genuinely ‘complementary’ way to learn about collaboration and curatorial practice. Two published research papers *Conflict and Consensus: Art Dialogues in Rogue Academies*, and *Collaborative Practice and the Academy* in Appendix B, give an account of the success and failures of the pedagogical experiment, and the heightened level engagement experienced—as well as the ramifications that came about in the community afterwards.

Dialogue and dissent – a ‘thinking’ aesthetic as counter thinking.

As I alluded to in Chapter two, in my view, counter-thinking, or thinking from the outside, is often driven out of the very institutions that are charged with exploration and innovation, perpetuating a traditional view of public art that is resistant to forging new associations. The *ODWC* project demonstrated that open-ended exploration could be allowed to run in relatively unstructured, free, playful and even at times quite anarchic—but nonetheless productive and energetic—ways. Dialogical, conversational, educational and performative modes of practice require audiences to be fostered through a new set of rules of engagement; the audience for this cannot be expected to already exist; thus they need cultivating.

In my initial projection of the project, I had foreseen *ODWC* as a primarily dialogical, performative and conceptual art work as a mode of ‘thinking’ aesthetic that would unsettle some of the entrenched ideas we have about education and art. After the fact, I reappraised this position, as I realised that the visual elements played a significant part in the way the project

operated. The magenta-coloured van in the courtyard became iconic. It was highly memorable as a visual element of the project, a visual trope that stood for non-conformity, alterity, and emergent knowledge. On the one hand, it appeared to be a rather humble and frivolous trope, but, on the other hand, it stood for a kernel of rebellion. Soon after the completion of *ODWC*, in a 2012 ACUADS (Australian Council for University Art and Design Schools) conference paper, I reflected on the aesthetic aspects of the project and its ‘rogue’ relation to formal arts education:

ODWC, in a sense, represented the ‘carnavalesque’; there was no doubt that the magenta caravan appearing the school courtyard, and the *mêlée* surrounding the daily events, evoked the impression of a carnival-type event. This ran the risk of it being seen purely as entertainment, however, there have been ongoing ripples of restlessness within the arts community experienced in the year since, which have created small changes in the way art is viewed in terms of education, process and display. Of course the desire to be educated by difference, rather than mainstream, may well have played a part (2012).

Far from being mere entertainment, in the wake of *ODWC*, some participants have maintained valuable connections with the international visitors; in the wider community, members of a small local artist-run-initiative, *Inflight ARI*, were reinvigorated by *ODWC* model—enough to change their programming to include dialogical and pedagogical forms of art. The writing group *Nuclei* formed from these early influences. While these ripple effects were not extensive, they nonetheless provide some encouragement for the more ‘bookish’ modes of public engagement. In light of this, one has to imagine that the value lies not in the number of public who engage with the work, rather the quality of engagement of those who see beyond the spectacle and make an effort to take part.



Figure 33. *ODWC*- Monday morning workshop
Image source: Fiona Lee

I observed that *ODWC* drew a number of participants who I would describe as marginal, disaffected or troubled members of the local arts community, found some place for their voice in the dialogical and performative characteristics of the project. I surmise that these people found a place in the project because it offered a *proximate alternative* to the formal assessable structures of a normal art school environment, in which they felt excluded or uncomfortable. Along with this, there was also the fact that the visiting *ODWC* artists did not know their histories

and thus were open and unprejudiced by histories and their alternative views. The transient nature of the project and the siting of it as ‘not quite attached’ to the big school offered a temporary point of acceptance and sense of fleeting community for alienated members of a small-town arts community. (Fig 33) The international visitors listened neutrally to these participants’ sometimes-oblique views of life and art, and the co-productive conversations were non-judgmental. They also found a way to contribute with several of these ‘outsider’ perspectives forming the content of broadcasts and zines. (Fig 32)

ODWC, as a facilitatory platform for generative discourse, was a mode of production that was entirely contingent on the collaboration and co-production of others. Using the concept of Socratic dialogue—based upon the asking and answering of questions, was a strategic move used by O’Neill to drive discourse and thus its potentiality for the production of knowledge.¹⁰⁵ The participatory work drove much discussion amongst the local art fraternity and in its wake, created a significant shift in thinking about the ways in which art could be encountered and disseminated through dialogue.

Co-dependence/parasitic relations as hermeneutic

Perhaps the co-option of the marginalised peoples into the school melee provides some insight into how we employ and engage parasitic behaviour that is mutually beneficial to both participant and institution. In considering the ‘rogue’ status of the project – specifically, the relationship of parasitism and subsequent mutualism that characterised the connection between the *ODWC* ‘free school’ and the Tasmanian School of Art. I wrote,

The School of Art provided a body of learning-ready, and active participants, which helped to locate the work within an educational frame openly and transparently questioning the processes of pedagogy. The projects were in the end to be viewed as a sort of mutually symbiotic relationship, and perhaps something like a friendly cancer; word of their existence spread throughout the institution and the arts community.

While *ODWC* was not formally part of the TSA however, the School did agree to host the project. In this way, the alternative school contributed to the TSA, but nevertheless remained *outside* its formal system of operation. Rather than this oppositional situation being potentially confrontational or antagonistic, it fashioned a form of symbiotic affiliation—where the big school fed off the little school and vice versa (2012).

¹⁰⁵ This description made up my curatorial statement in the subsequent publication, Cross, David, ed. 2013a. *Iteration: Again/ 13 Public Arts Project Across Tasmania*. Hobart Tasmania: Punctum Books in collaboration with Contemporary Arts Spaces Tasmania. 134

This mode of parasitic or mutually supportive attachment operated according to similar logic to the conduct of research by the Litmus and Situations organisations, which employ methods of creating conversations between ‘knowledges’ (plural)—dialogue between what Irit Rogoff might describe as framed and contained knowledge, and unframed and uncontained knowledge (2010c). These entities, by being semi-attached and research oriented, also court experimental and pioneering endeavours and position themselves as pluralistic alternatives to formal research institutions. To some degree *ODWC* echoed this ideal however it was far more liberated by its ability to side-step many of the formalities; its public accountability and responsibility to formal teaching schedules, expected outcomes, student and visitor numbers—and other conditions that normally tie it to its host institution. The Situations and Litmus precedents were built upon in the *ODWC* project by enabling a freer mode of knowledge production through the disabling of traditional expectations of an art school; drawing on the tension of serendipity and the use of flexible and elastic structures that accompany most social and dialogical processes. By engaging the participants as producers of knowledge, *ODWC* engaged one step further removed from the more formal research alternatives, which no matter how hard they try to escape, must abide by bureaucratic ties. In this respect, *ODWC* was a rogue operator.

What is Remoteness?
 Physical Connection/ Isolation/ Individualism/ Secrets/ Rest of the world away from us/ Space and Time Displacement/ Relationship/ Past in Time/ Remote as connectivity/ Networks and Nodes/ Self-organisation/ Catchment Care/ Communities/ Groups of Concern/ Reconnecting with one’s own environment/ Daunting/ On your own/ Alone/ Helpless/ Withdrawal/ Pioneering Possibilities/ Darkness/ Self-sufficiency/ Strength/ Self-reliance/ Freedom/ Centredness/ Being/ Separation/ School of the air/ “Centre”/ Disconnection/ Multiple-centres/ Remote-individuality/ Subjective-remoteness/ Remote from the self/ Death/ Condition/ Distance Learning/ Connecting from afar/ Byproduct of technology/ Remapping of social relations, and effect/ Lack of group beliefs/ Unhooked from commonality/ Network of atoms/ Bonds and disconnection binary/ Tribalism/ Closeness and distance binary/ Elective affinities/ Reductive experience/ Synthesis/ Accumulation/ Self-as-project/ Overcoming/ Remote from self to be a self/ Close-to-far away binary/ Multiples classes/ Perception/ Geographical locatedness/ Subjective locatedness/ Connectedness=Remoteness/ Effect of Technology/ Tension between technology and Alienation/ Lack of physical connection/ Negative impact of telecommunications/ Satallites and Suburbs/ Globalisa-

Figure 34. *ODWC* Week 2. Generation of terms by attendees of *Our Day Will Come* Workshop 26th September 2011 Published in the weekly zine *What is Remoteness?*

Framed (or contained) knowledge, in the form of reading lists of published academic writing, talks and lectures, films and performances was thus provided to participants, and from this they were able to attend the weekly events and proffer, as a collaboration, their own specific views and ideas. Essays, poetry, musings, photographs and other publishable material were

then collated and collectively presented at the end of the week in the published zines. Unlike formal writing, authorship was discretionary; participants could choose to have their work attributed to their name, remain anonymous or invent a pseudonym. (Fig. 34) This provided a sense of freedom from persecution and judgment that some in a small community often avoided. More overtly, some participants added to this collective knowledge by producing performances, artist talks, lectures and film screenings to demonstrate their own individual contribution to the collective body of knowledge.

ODWC was able to draw on this ‘rogue-ness’; its informality and open-ended processes to enable new sets of knowledge, derived from unexpected and unforced modes of behaviour, to emerge—however, this provided mixed results. In a reflexive appraisal, on the one hand, I identified a significant value in listening to the more marginal voices; alternative ideas and views of the world that are clearly not from the institution, but that could well feed into its wealth of knowledge. It was evident that providing non-conformist platforms; conversational, publishing, hosting, and other social platforms, opened up unusual channels of negotiation and inclusion; social exchange that enabled mutuality and community inclusion as valuable educative processes. On the other hand, the community inclusion that appeared to be forthcoming in the immediacy of the project was later revealed as being exclusion and elitism.

Members of a wider community, who were members of an ordinary public that did not have some affiliation with the art school, or art community were not present. Those with a pre-interest in these sorts of projects, which included the more ‘bookish’ events were the majority of participants, for the others there was a degree of community exclusion which subsequently challenged the democratic values in this project. This may well have occurred because of the choice of promotional marketing, the fact that *ODWC* contained scholarly material that is not as popular and so has limited audiences. The fact that the work was actually sited in the art school may have been enough to turn people away—despite its good intentions of mutually contributing to a wider knowledge base.

Cultivating new audience participation for challenging public art projects

In reflection, it was interesting to observe the recognition and popularity of the *ODWC* school for its intended audience and the process in which those that chose to become ‘participants’ adopted their level and type of engagement from what was on offer in the school. Some turned

up to the more scholarly events, such as the Monday morning workshops having done the required readings, others preferred the more convivial social events, the *School Dinners* and the zine launches on Fridays. Others sought out the one-on-one ‘conversation table’ to connect with the international guests at a more intimate level.

The fact remains, however, that this project did not appeal to a wider audience nor was promoted in a manner as to garner mass support. There is some commentary to suggest that these projects automatically self-select their audiences (Fletcher and Pierce 2010, 196), which I found to be true in this respect. This is not uncommon for socially-engaged projects, as Grant Kester and Boris Groys argue, mainly because they buck populist trends as well as struggle to find audience/participants who have the time or inclination to commit to their demanding programmes (Kester 2004, 12, Groys 2009a, 79). From the experiences in *ODWC*, it was deemed a success on the one hand because the small number of individuals became highly engaged, in part due to the intimacy of knowing all the participants. On the other there was a separation noted for the above reasons. One wonders if this would have been the case had the numbers had been larger or more diverse. In the end a balance needs to be met where the artists do not feel compromised by ‘dumbing’ down their projects to appeal to a wider populist audience, while at the same time promoting the projects in a manner that entices potential audience/participants to put in the required ‘effort’ to engage in something outside their realm of understanding.



Figure 35. Council workers removing the van after the *ODWC* event.

Image source: Fiona Lee

From my own observations, participants for social art projects, or any artworks for that matter, are seldom restricted to the intended or predicted audiences; it is often difficult to pinpoint exactly where audience ‘appreciation’ begins. Often social artworks attract co-producers, collaborators or witnesses who add a surprising and valuable twist to the way the meaning of the work is constructed.¹⁰⁶ In the case of *ODWC*, the Hobart City Council

¹⁰⁶ The official opening is the traditional ‘presentation’ of the work, however in the paper below, I argue that there is a valuable experience to be had in the lead up to the opening of many of these works, in particular the installation of a work I did at Port Arthur Historic site during 2006, where the cruise ship passengers and other visitors to the site were intrigued with the concept of the work even in its incomplete state and offered advice, alternatives and opinion. These ideas were treated with respect and gratitude, other artists working on other project alongside, however, felt them an intrusion. Lee, Fiona. 2006. "Outside History: Inside Site." *Revelation: installation art and its capacity to interpret and elaborate places of historical significance.*, Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania.

employees who delivered the van became attracted to the artwork as it unfolded. I spent a considerable amount of time in correspondence with them before, during and after the project, responding to their questions about the formation of free schools, education systems and the idea of portability in education, as well as sending photographs. (Fig 35)

Perhaps it was the novelty of a break from the drudgery of everyday council labour, or the odd appearance of their van as it became adorned with paint, flags and a verandah. But their fascination and overwhelmingly kind assistance made me consider them to be my true audience because they had no expectations nor pre-history of this form of art, yet they co-produced the art project—by taking part in its construction and its conceptual relevance, through the asking questions, formulating ideas and analysing facts. These were not premeditated subjects that would normally offer subsequent theoretical observation or analysis, but people implicated in the event. The same could be said of the other fabricators and passersby who observed and questioned the intricacies of the artwork.

This is nothing new, the Curatorial Director of *Iteration:Again*, David Cross, speaks about inadvertently capturing secondary associations with fabricators, contractors and other allied members of local communities, providing a deeper and richer audience for these types projects (Cross 2013b, 15). The inaugural issue of *The Field A Journal of Socially-engaged Art Criticism*, was launch as this research is coming to an end. In it the artist Krzysztof Wodiczko describes this audience as the ‘Inner Public’ as opposed to the ‘Outer Public’ of the viewer, that ‘function as the projects’ first audience and interlocutor’ (2015). From this, I wondered how to become more attentive to evaluating the inputs of these “collateral audiences”: How do we recognise this happy fall-out from projects such as these? Is it possible to calculate or even guess at participants’ level of cognitive thought in this engagement? I resolved to be more alert to unanticipated participation in my next project, to respectfully elicit input from those who became implicated, deliberately or otherwise, and strategic about galvanising their participation: people like security guards, cleaners, library and administrative staff.

In the immediate aftermath of *Iteration:Again*, a one-day intensive symposium was held to provide a reflective analysis of the project by the remaining artists, curators and writers, and to invite other speakers to respond to the project’s place within a public art context. The curator and writer Marco Marcon who responded to the project, both at the symposium and in the subsequent publication, questions the appropriateness our traditional notion of an art

‘audience’ when applied to these types of projects (2013, 28). Another focus was the project’s iterative structure and the way in which the open-endedness challenged audiences to return to the events repeatedly over the four weeks; a fact that in Cross’ own words, ‘asked an awful lot of people’. The scarcity of traditional marketing and promotion for the *Iteration:Again* events in the reflective responses was at issue, with Cross taking responsibility by submitting a genuine desire to grow audiences rather than rely on the ‘readymade audience’ for public art. This he acknowledged, however, was too much to ask of some people (2013b, 15).

In retrospect, the structure and timing of the symposium event, in terms of it contributing to a critical analysis on the *Iteration:Again* project and the benefits (if any) that were achieved, were perhaps hurried for some—simply because of the rawness of the project, however there was value to be gained in the urgent response to the thirteen public projects. On the one hand the euphoria of just finishing the marathon project perhaps compromised evaluation, which requires a reflective distance from the events; on reflection it did not enable some of the more interesting nuances and consequences of audience engagement to be fully explored—particularly in relation to *Iteration:Again’s* breadth and diversity of its appeal to a mass audience as a public art project. On the other hand, with the heightened enthusiasm of the contributors amidst the assembled curators, writers and academics, it is difficult to negate the dynamic of an initial communal reaction. From this I concluded that while many durational, open-ended and social projects and events need time for proper reflection and evaluation, an immediate and critical response is a vital part of their approach. To fully understand the social processes where artists and publics are asked to rethink stereotypical approaches to communal public art, as a reflexive evaluation and process-in-action, is fundamental to their existence.

It was with this in mind that questions about audiences and publics were further pursued with energy in the immediate aftermath of *Iteration:Again’s* sub-project, *Our Day Will Come*; when a follow-up assignment was undertaken. This was in the form of a more formalised ‘unit’ (short course component), devised to be countable towards tertiary degree credits, and entitled: ‘*Our Day Will Come: Discursive Practice and the Artist-Curator*’. All bar one of the students in the group had been participants in *Our Day Will Come*, and for most of these students, a mix of undergraduates and postgraduates, their prior experience of participatory or socially engaged artwork was minimal or negligible. Some of these students were unabashed in declaring that they had found participation in *Our Day Will Come*, at least initially, to be confusing, confronting or intimidating. In their evaluative essays all call for the need for public

accessibility to demanding participatory art projects—naming as a responsibility of artists the need to break down elitist barriers so that contemporary art can be comprehensible and palatable.

Hospitality: hosting and difference/courting strangeness. Hermeneutics

Contrary to these students' observations, though, there were those that fully immersed themselves within the melee of *ODWC* events, however these were not large in number. Those willing participants who committed to the weekly workshops, dinners and talks and film screenings, did so with a quasi-expectation of repayment; they received knowledge, understanding, skills and inclusion in return for giving something of themselves—in the conversations, publication or presentations at the dinners. This inescapably draws on the notion of 'potlatch', described in Marcel Mauss' 'The Gift' where he presents a mutual condition to repay. These are among some significant preliminary conclusions drawn about the way in which hospitable behaviour creates a power for brokering dissent, and which was highlighted in a co-published paper 'The (Neo) Avant-Garde and (Their) Kitchen(s): Potluck and Participation', located in Appendix B.

Mick Wilson, an artist, educator, writer, and then head of the multi-college art and design research school GradCam in Dublin, has a long-standing interest in hospitality as a means to transcend the sterility of academic research practice.¹⁰⁷ In conversations, which were part of Wilson's *School Dinners*, for instance, there was a general understanding that these acts of hospitality were set up as genuine interrogations that did so in hermeneutic style, that is, 'without surrendering to the possible politics of domination and silencing anything which is disquieting' (Wierciński 2011, 23).

He argues that rather than cordial relations expected of hospitality—where the play of guest/host is more often than not on agreeable terms, hospitality is fraught with risk. Wilson sees 'hospitality as a problem, rather than a mutual, nice thing; hospitality as a complex negotiation and a troubled unstable space' (quoted in O'Neill and Doherty 201b, 335). Just as Gadamer looks to the more convivial forms of conversation and generosity and respect for ourselves and the other, Wilson also argues that hospitable acts are responsible acts, saying that hospitality is "about taking oneself serious[ly], taking one's host or guest serious[ly], and

¹⁰⁷ Wilson was the former the Head of GradCam, which is a postgraduate research school in Dublin. He runs *The Food Thing*, http://www.gradcam.ie/food_thing.php

working out how this relationship [will] work for the time that it needs to work” (Wilson 2011). This seriousness is necessary in the art of questioning, he argued. Serious interaction requires respect; it also requires a certain attentiveness that deepens the interactive dialogical experience – it is through this heightened act of generosity that greater understanding is afforded.

In this respect if we look to what Chairman Mao once said:

A revolution is not a dinner party, or writing an essay, or painting a picture, or doing embroidery; it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another.¹⁰⁸

The *ODWC School Dinners*, however, became so lively that they teetered on the verge of rebellion and disintegration. It was a stoic effort on the behalf of Wilson to maintain the group enough to garner the ‘knowledge experience’ for the participants. This challenges the view put forward by Chairman Mao, that dinner parties are not revolutions; on the one hand the *School Dinners* were convivial, generous and fun while on the other hand they entertained volatility and friction. The pedagogical content as a consequence was oblique; the dinners courted strangeness, generating a space for disagreement through communal gathering and food. To quote the curatorial director of *Iteration:Again*, David Cross:

Mick Wilson’s notoriously engaging, boozy and boisterous Tuesday night dinners, a part of the curriculum of the *Our Day Will Come* school, live on only in a few grainy and haphazard pictures that capture too many people slumped in too few chairs arguing and postulating as if their lives depended on it. They are only fragments now but I distinctly remember the sentiment expressed that ‘we never usually talk like this, about art, locality, each others work’ (2013b, 23).

Along the ‘conversation table’, the *School Dinners* were the most popular unceremonious, yet determined, and engaging aspects of *ODWC*; hosted events that were produced with the utmost care and respect for participants, yet executed in a manner that was at times awkward and prickly. O’Neill exemplified generosity and communication in *ODWC* which, from what I was observing, were two of the essential ingredients for successful and generative collaborative projects.

¹⁰⁸ "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan" (March 1927), Selected Works, Vol. I, p. 28.

*<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/cho2.htm> Retrieved 16 November 2013. Also quoted in Vattimo, Gianni, and Santiago Zabala. 2011a. *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx*. New York: Columbia University Press. p 136

Communal belonging with an individual voice

A sense of community was clearly an objective in setting up the *ODWC* school, however as is often the case, whether a true sense of community was achieved is arguable. On the one hand, those who managed to fathom what *ODWC* was and how they could participate, to some degree connected with the notion of being within a community, however on the other, there were others who could not (or did not want to) grasp its measure and felt excluded. This drove two important observations which were to inform the next case study; providing an augmented public programme of process-driven/performative/non-object–or encounter-based art that offered a range of entry points was an important factor in assembling community, and making these encounters relevant to the people concerned so that they felt able to contribute. Much like the idea of a ‘Tardis’ or time machine—when it arrives at a destination, it accepts and deals with what it finds; it responds to local matters at hand. I felt at the end of the *ODWC* project that if whatever was on offer to participants did matter to them, and then they were more likely to make it matter to others, such as a public audience. This I was proposing would contribute significantly to the projects’ generative and transformative capacity.

Community was tested in the immediate aftermath by students in the *Our Day Will Come – Discursive Art Practice and the Artist-Curator*, where participant-students were encouraged to work, write and develop the curricula around collaboration and community building. Among their assessments was an obligation to produce a group ‘zine’ together and to engage in a documented group project. There is a small body of commentary about the teaching of group work and collaboration in general higher education, but so far little descriptive treatment or concrete practical advice on how to effectively teach collaborative art practice, let alone building community art projects, so it was not possible to take a textbook approach to teaching. We noted later in a paper for ACUADS that:

In terms of outcomes, the most striking aspect of our summer school unit was the fact that a tight community of practice arose very quickly from a group of students who, at first blush, seemed to have few common interests, skills, or even values. Moreover, their camaraderie had no homogenising effect over the development of their final assignments: written individually, these were lively, novel and diverse in concept and expression. The students entered and left the unit with different skill sets, ideas and orientations in studio-based and dialogical art making, but operated as a highly productive working group. Importantly too, they achieved different personal goals through their participation in the group process. (Lee and Kunda 2012a)

Another important point from this was that while working in communal groups is important for a shared voice, there still needs to be room for individuals to be recognised.

Some ideas for communal inquiry

Following *ODWC* I sought to establish some requirements needed for building a community for inquiry, these included;

- making it easy for a participant to enter into a community through a multitude of avenues;
- increasing the likelihood of finding a way for them to engage in the first place and commit to staying for the duration of the project;
- offering meaningful inquiry platforms by suggesting relevant processes, topics, questions that *matter* to the individuals concerned;
- attracts participants and increases personal engagement;
- facilitating respectful but agonistic engagement for participants, particularly for those who already considered themselves marginalised in regular conversations and forums;
- enabling individuals to retain their own voice within a community while contributing to and sharing communal issues and concerns;
- keeping fluid, allowing a community to always be *in* development;
- responsive to its changing place in time and able to adapt and move to the vagaries of its members;
- inspiring a culture of ‘free giving’– as a mutual agreement in taking up the role of participant;
- there is a ‘promissory’ expectation of playing along and giving something of yourself to the project in return.

The problem remains however that fixing specific rules for engagement in these works are counter to the ‘Rogue Academy’s’ ambitions, which styles itself on anti-method, disruption, open-endedness and the potentiality of what could happen, not what is predicted. Still feeling my way into some of the more scholarly aspects of the research, which was anything but clear from the literature I had at the time, I submitted a paper for the 2012 ACUADS conference. In it, I attempted an interpretation of this issue in *ODWC* project by noting that:

It may be safe to say that emerging theoretical frameworks developing within current literature will help to place socially engaged practice more within mainstream practice; it will then be rewarded with a suitable language within which to evaluate its potency as art (2012).

While I still agree that socially engaged practice needs critique and rigorous evaluation processes, I am not so determined to have it *fit* into a category that is aligned to ‘mainstream’ practice. I go on to say:

In the midst of these vagaries however, my understanding of *ODWC* in terms of overall affect on a small community, was that it resembled something similar to Pierce’s subtle protest. It interrupted rather than disrupted and caused a few to stop and think for a while (2012).

The strategy behind both *ODWC* and the notion of a ‘Rogue Academy’ was communal conversation as an advantageous interrupter; facilitating flash-points that enable disturbance as a ‘revolution’. Not dissimilar to the notion of ‘détournement’ from the Letterist International of the 1950s, it likewise sought to ‘reroute’ thinking as a way to activate the potential for change. It framed social agency as a tool for opening up ongoing dialogue, not shutting it down to a final set of goals. The worth of O’Neill’s strategy of proffering broad overarching questions that drew in and accounted for a sense of generic universality alongside the local, and providing multidimensional opportunities for participant to rethink their own situations, interests and practices, was that it offered wider more flexible conditions for understanding.

In conclusion the *ODWC* was a durational project that used a pedagogical framework to facilitate a democratic stage for generative discourse; a mode of production that was entirely contingent on the collaboration of others. While I had not identified the CoI approach at that stage, it nonetheless gathered a communal inquiry mechanism through Paul O’Neill’s questions. Addressing these questions provided potential for audiences to engage in the project through a multitude of events and happenings that afforded numerous points of entry in order to tackle these questions. This was strategy O’Neill used to not only engage those who were well-versed in the arts, but to attract new prospective audiences, which was a model I would echo in the next case study.

O’Neill’s *ODWC* school formed a particular style of community; an inquisitive, generative and open-ended community that was driven by the power of not knowing, something that led the research in the direction of hermeneutics. It is with these philosophical issues in mind that suppositions formed in the wake of the *ODWC* free school. These were primarily concerned with facilitating a similar type of community; a collective entity that is co-dependent and parasitic, one that courts respect through dialogue, hospitality and dissent and needful of

promissory commitment from audiences and publics. Importantly this community needed to be identified as contingent, cumulative and un-fixed.

CHAPTER 4 CASE STUDY NO. 2

The Plimsoll Inquiry (The PI)

Chapter four deals with the second case study, *The Plimsoll Inquiry (The PI)*, an event that took place over seven weeks beginning in September 2013. It occurred as a result of, and in response to, an accumulation of research data derived from my previous experiences as an artist working in relational and social forms of art making, and ideas and experiences from the first case study *Our Day Will Come*. It also employed some of the interim research material set out in the Other Research section of Appendix A. The *ODWC* project influenced my decision to be as organic as possible in my planning of this next project, which in part was directed by the changing cultural ecology; to some degree by the situation the research opportunistically found itself in during the lead up to, and presentation of, *The PI* event.

In this study, I explored elements of the expanded Community of Inquiry (CoI) approach; outlined in Chapter two, along with a genuine attempt to build what Richard Florida has termed a ‘people climate’, or agency among people. As a working approach, these were modes of operation I used in a very broad sense; a strategy common to those involved in socially engaged art practice.

4.1 Background

The Gallery and its programme

The Plimsoll Gallery, at the Hunter St campus of the University of Tasmania, has had a remarkable life and over its twenty-six-year presence, it has exhibited some of Australia’s most experimental and dynamic artists and performed a major role in launching the careers of a number of Tasmanian artists, curators, educators and writers. Until recently, it has been one of the few venues in the state to show international artists alongside local artists, and its research programme and publications have been recognised as nationally significant. Up until the end of 2012, it was run by a part-time coordinator – a position long held by the renowned artist Patricia Brassington, and a committee of volunteers were charged with its administration and

programming. Core funding was provided through the state government arts body, Arts Tasmania, and support came through the art school's own in-kind resources and the University's cultural funding.



Figure 36. An external view of the Plimsoll Gallery windows and the neglected garden beyond; the site that hosted several events.
Image source: Fiona Lee

An element of the Plimsoll Gallery programme has been the presentation of postgraduate research assessments, along with curated group exhibitions and occasional touring exhibitions. In general, the work of undergraduate students has not been exhibited in the Gallery nor have members of the public been invited to be involved in the gallery business or programming – other than as traditional ‘viewers’.

Over its twenty-six year history, the Gallery's conjoined exhibition spaces, referred to as ‘the tall gallery’ and ‘the long gallery’, have been employed predominantly as a ‘white-cube’ environment. Both display spaces have demountable walls that offer a good deal of flexibility in the floor plan. As exceptions to the ‘white-cube’ rule, there have been some notable performances, minimal installation works and soundscapes occupying the spaces from time to time. A former industrial space, the long gallery has two once-magnificent paneled windows at one end, which operate on a pulley-system. (Fig 36) In keeping with the white cube ethos, and for most exhibitions it was customary to use temporary panels to block out the light and use the artificial lighting system. In living memory, the windows had reportedly been opened only once for an artist in the Gallery's history.¹⁰⁹

Universally unstable ground for cultural activities

By the second half of 2012, however, the Plimsoll Gallery was experiencing major operational difficulties. In a climate of cutbacks to funding, it failed to secure ongoing triennial programme funding from the Arts Ministry of the Tasmanian State Government. At the same time, due to rationalisations within the University, it suffered a substantial cut in staffing and the diminution of funding and in-kind support from University and the College of the Arts

¹⁰⁹ Former Chair of the Plimsoll Gallery Committee, Paul Zika, revealed that one of the windows was opened 1993 for the work of Fiona Gunn in the ‘Installx4’ exhibition -

budgets.¹⁰⁰ The loss of vital funding, and the cutting of the coordinator position, diminished in-kind and volunteer support, and the dissolution of the gallery committee, as well as a lack of recognition of the Gallery's strategic role by the University bureaucrats, significantly eroded the quality and substance of the Gallery's programme.

The Plimsoll Gallery, it seemed, was in an almost untenable position. In essence, there were not enough time or resources allocated to engage any form of existing programming apart from the postgraduate examinations, let alone any innovative curated or touring programming. Many of the values and principles that had held the Gallery in high esteem for many years began to collapse into precarity. Moreover, in my own perspective, and that of some staff and students, irrespective of these environmental and circumstantial threats, the Plimsoll's programme was lodged in a passé formalist ethos. Some of us thought it was due for some reflection and review, from both managerial and artistic perspectives.

Generally, over the past few years, there has been an air of instability in the School of Art. Over 2012 to 2013 as part of a rationalisation of the Faculty of Arts, it underwent an amalgamation with two other schools in the University: the former School of Visual and Performing Arts in Launceston, and the Conservatorium of Music in Hobart, the totality of which began operating as the 'College of the Arts' in 2013. Moreover, with a wave of retirements and voluntary redundancies, an old guard has moved on and a new generation of more junior academics has replaced it. In an unsettling time, a new Head of School took office, and a year later moved on to an appointment at another University. Overall, the staff profile, teaching programmes and management structures have undergone a rolling wave of change and readjustment in recent years. The fact that the members of our *PI* community of inquiry were caught up in these time-consuming change processes in some respects made it difficult to find time to gather as a galvanised group. I seriously deliberated over suspending my research until circumstances settled. On the other hand, in the midst of shifting sands, some opportunities arose, and staff especially bore a sense of urgency, which may have actually garnered particular interest and investment in *The PI*; it seemed appropriate to exploit the agency expressed by a community of stoic individuals who cared very much for the Gallery and what it stood for. Despite diminishing amounts of time and increasing workloads, they nonetheless collectively harnessed

¹⁰⁰ This government funding was for publications, artist fees, freight and supported local and interstate curated exhibitions. In addition to this, after the retirement of the gallery co-ordinator of 26 years, the university chose not to replace the position to the same capacity and there was the unforeseen dismissal of the Plimsoll Gallery Committee of volunteers who assisted with the selection of exhibitions, installation and general administration of the Gallery. Academic staff, who in the past curated research exhibitions, were now needing to prioritise teaching and research time to more outcome oriented and administrative duties.

a fatalistic humour that questioned the structured management of both the Gallery and its governing institution—inventing strategies, events and functions through a sense of play.

Sharing new horizons and potentiality for change

In the early days of the unsettling times I have just described, I was invited to produce an exhibit in the Plimsoll Gallery. I recognised an opportunity to exploit the Gallery space as a venue for an uncharacteristic dialogical rather than exhibition or spectacle-based event, and to inhabit the space differently in a questioning, reflexive exploratory manner, rather than according to a standard curatorial premise. I wanted to test whether I could take the opportunity to question the Gallery's position in relation to contemporary practices, as well as in relation to its own institutional context.

In discussion with my supervisors, I began to formulate a sequel to *Our Day Will Come*, as an 'inquiry' that would be an open-ended, collaborative, process-driven series of events. *The Plimsoll Inquiry*, as we christened it, was to offer some 'free-space' for artists, students, academics and the public to rethink the Gallery's situation. It was envisaged as a loose programme that was not predicated on delivery of projected outcomes, rather as fertile ground to open up future potential. We began to deliberately conceive of the Gallery as being in a state of transition, and as a site for engendering transition, rather than being potentially earmarked for closure.¹¹¹

The primary stated purpose of *The PI* then was to situate the work of artists at the juncture of speculative and cultural formations across a broad range of critical and aesthetic contexts within a designated period. This would then be set up for examination and evaluation in a second phase, which would include several artists-in-residences and a 'Plimsoll Report' contributed to by the participants themselves.

¹¹¹ Closure of the Gallery was never mentioned, however it is a known observation within the University that unused and ineffectual spaces often are designated for purposes that are more useful. We speculated this might be an outcome of its problems.

4.2 Prelude

Here I wish to give a more detailed account of the critical situation for the Plimsoll gallery I alluded to above, and the way circumstances shaped what was to become *The Plimsoll Inquiry*. In early 2012, not long after *ODWC*, I was approached by the Gallery's then Coordinator, Pat Brassington, to co-curate what she had termed a 'handsome' exhibition, with distinguished university academic and curator, Emeritus Professor Jonathan Holmes. If I was reading Pat's request correctly, I understood the 'handsome' exhibition to be Jonathan's oeuvre—as having a highly good-looking visual aesthetic, be polished, professional and a well-rounded finish; a traditional exhibition with a regular format opening night and catalogue—something that I was questioning in my research at the time. A collegial banter between the three of us ensued over the coming months, which formed the basis of *the Plimsoll Inquiry* and the establishment of *The PI* curatorium. The invitation was thus not initially prompted by my PhD research, rather it parasitically took advantage of a looming situation bearing down on the Gallery and its programme. Professor Holmes had been a long time curator, writer and supporter of the Plimsoll Gallery, which, at the time was continuing in its customary role of presenting a regular exhibition programme, with its established resources still largely intact. The Gallery, under Pat's coordination had previously run a programme of nationally and internationally recognised curated exhibitions over the previous 28 years, however this was coming under threat as university and state funding cutbacks were looming. I had also served alongside Pat and Jonathan for nine years on the Plimsoll committee that oversaw the programme of curated exhibitions.

The 'handsome' exhibition as a cornerstone for change

In light of my research into pedagogy, conversation and the social forms of art, I countered the invitation, and the idea of a 'handsome' exhibition, by suggesting to both Pat and Jonathon a project that involves a communal approach from staff and students in the school. Both enthusiastically, but tentatively accepted my challenge to work on a different kind of event, and a new way of working; one that was plural and ran counter to the mode of exhibition production that had characterised the Gallery's programming over many years. We agreed to take up a seven-week time slot for late 2013, and scheduled an exploratory project that was NOT to be a 'handsome exhibition'. -.¹¹²

¹¹² Professor Holmes and I decided to break with the traditional monthly exhibition and asked for a seven-week slot instead.

In keeping with the idea of social forms of pedagogy, initially *The PI* was formed by a group of interested individuals who were invited to entertain the notion of challenging the ‘handsome’ exhibition. The idea of using the gallery to stage an ‘inquiry’, not an ‘exhibition’ took hold. At about this stage, in the context of the various institutional and funding changes described, the Gallery’s difficulties began to manifest, and so the seven-week event came to be understood as a way to rethink the static programming of the Gallery, by reactivating the space. The word ‘inquiry’ was chosen to denote the idea of ‘potentiality’, to use a term from Rogoff.

The Plimsoll Inquiry was broadly aimed at questioning the Gallery on a number of levels; traditional modes of thinking and operating within the arts community, its institutions, and pedagogies and to rethink modes of exhibition and dissemination in the light of new and expanding practices of art and research. Unlike *ODWC* school, where specific terms such as ‘autonomy’ or ‘remoteness’ were put forward as objects for questioning, more specifically, *The PI* was geared to reflecting on the Gallery’s own role and function. In other words, the objective was to put the Gallery itself forward as an object for investigation – as an exhibition programme and physical space and all its ancillary operational procedures and ‘outcomes’, including teaching. We set out to interrogate what the gallery was, what it is now and what it could be in the future.

The Plimsoll Inquiry was initially designed to attract participants predominantly from a pool of artist-researchers at the then Tasmanian School of Art (TSA), These participants, and the research interests that they brought into the fray, represented the ‘core-economy’ of related knowledge that would drive the search for new knowledge about the social process, presentation and pedagogy of art.¹³ Irit Rogoff describes education as a “series of micro-political states”, and I envisaged a series of processes being trialed as ‘micro-political states’ or specimen cases for future development within art practice, exhibition programming, publishing, research and pedagogy.¹⁴

The struggle as catalyst for change; inviting outsider as co-productive agent

¹³ My interpretation of a ‘core economy’ here is all the material thoughts, ideas relationships and resources that can be gathered in a space in time.

¹⁴ Rogoff, Irit. 2010b. "Deschooling Society panel discussion." Conference paper Deschooling Society, Hayward Gallery, London.



Figure 37. A meeting of the Curatorium and the Wider Reference Group
Image source: Film still of meeting proceedings by Nancy Mauro-Flude

The PI project was developed over eighteen months and was inevitably entwined in the Gallery's immediate struggles. Initially, it involved a core group of about thirty people, which we termed the 'Wider Reference Group', and nine of them formed a steering group we called a 'Curatorium', which was responsible for directing and administration.

The initial *PI* Curatorium was predominantly formed of people with a particular stake in the project for its research potential, but also had the time and the opportunity to help develop its course. (Fig 37) The remainder Wider Reference Group were involved in a less formal and regular way, offering opinions and ideas to help run the two phases of the project. These participants had less of a stake in the importance or viability of university galleries, or the foreclosure of new ideas and practices in pedagogy and research—their interest, in the main, was giving practical input and being part of the action. In general, the Wider Reference Group of about thirty or so members, were participants who undertook to present 'works' or events for the *Inquiry*.

Two distinguished external scholars, Professors Nikos Papastergiadis and Ross Gibson, were chosen by the group to attend an early meeting, and they agreed to become part of the Curatorium.¹¹⁵ The Curatorium and the Wider Reference Group met at regular intervals, and these were formally minuted meetings. The meetings focused on the vulnerability of the Gallery and immediate risks to its status as a research-based facility, on the one hand, and more positively, on future possibilities for the Gallery. Participants were asked to tentatively think how their work/practice and thinking might benefit both themselves and the Gallery.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ The Curatorium consisted of SOA staff and myself (as a postgraduate researcher): Paul Zika, Dr Mary Scott, John Vella, Dr Maria Kunda, Lucy Bleach, Professor Jonathan Holmes Fiona Lee, and external academics, Professor Nikos Papastergiadis from the University of Melbourne and, Professor Ross Gibson from University of Sydney. All the formative meetings and activities during Phase 1 of *The PI* were documented with audio and /or video recordings.

¹¹⁶ Professors Papastergiadis and Gibson were brought in to deflect the notion of self-reflection. They attended committee meetings and assisted with the development of the structure of the committee over several visits. With extensive international knowledge in art collaboration and publishing, particularly within university and research settings, we were interested in them assisting us in rethinking the Gallery's *modus operandi* and assist in the development of future networking opportunities to raised the profile of the Gallery, particularly in relation to recent changes to the cultural ecology in Tasmania.

By mid-2013, the Tasmanian College of Arts had by this time secured an academic staff member to act as Director of the Plimsoll Gallery – but only at an allocation of three hours a week. No formal administrative or technical assistance was approved for the Gallery. With my experience in arts administration, I could see that this was clearly not enough time for a rigorous gallery programme to be structured and delivered. It seemed to me that this allocation illustrated the University’s disregard for the value inherent in a Gallery, one that had been judiciously built up over the twenty-six years. This sense of neglect was also evident from the fact that audiences had begun to drop away and the Gallery was visibly poorly maintained.

The PI Curatorium and Wider Reference Group, by this stage, actually referring to itself as a ‘community of inquiry’, collectively decided that the situation offered us a certain amount of license for free-play and plain speech. In this atmosphere, we threw all the cards on the table and began to rethink and develop some speculative ideas about what the Gallery had been, how it was in the present, and, more importantly, how it *could be*. Some participants, who had a long association with the Gallery, were keen to share and dwell on the Gallery’s past, offering information and archival material that vacillated between nostalgia and resistance—but with a realisation that the situation needed to be changed. Generational difference pointed to the impossibility of carrying out ‘business as usual’, and this at times caused an undercurrent of tension between those who were more urgently seeking a way forward, and those who wanted to keep faith with the Gallery’s former status.

Framing new possibilities for the future gave us some success in an application for the Visiting Scholars Award from the University; Professors Papastergiadis and Gibson, both of whom had extensive experience in community and collaborative art, were invited to Hobart to meet with us in October 2012, and by this stage the Gallery’s tenuous position was becoming known.¹¹⁷ The scholars suggested several key initiatives that sought to connect *The PI*, and to examine ways in which the Gallery could offer something alternative to the wider local cultural ecology. Some key points to take into consideration were:

- repurposing the gallery by not thinking of it as a space of static display, thereby opening up the potential for unexpected experiences for the Plimsoll Gallery audiences and publics,
- exploring new innovative ways in which the Gallery can broadcast material, perhaps thinking of it as ‘radio Plimsoll’,
- seeking new energy and thinking by bringing ‘outsiders’ into the community,

¹¹⁷ Professor Nikos Papastergiadis is a writer and Professor at the School of Culture and Communication at the University of Melbourne; Professor Ross Gibson is an artist and Professor of Contemporary Arts at the University of Sydney

- rethinking what the archive can offer under new social conditions of production and,
- encouraging and welcoming critics of the Gallery, and its governing institution, to join in and be responsible for its change.¹¹⁸

Facilitator as gatherer

Initially I saw myself as a facilitator, administrator, negotiator and general ‘ringmaster’, assisting the willing group of artists, curators, academics, students and writers and helped steer the course we were to take. Having earlier worked with Paul O’Neill and Mick Wilson in the *ODWC* school, I had acquired some intelligence on the facilitatory roles of community building including. The importance of being very flexible with ideas and programming, offering a number of multi-dimensional opportunities to attract potential participants and a list of general diplomatic skills needed to draw on large groups of people with multiple perspectives and objectives were important. I was also aware of my developing interest in creating a collective ‘thinking aesthetic’, a idea driven by the success of the co-produced *ODWC* zines, and how I could build on these more cognitive events in O’Neill’s earlier programme. My role was essentially as a gatherer of people to glean ideas and thinking in such a manner as to evoke generative and transformative conditions through creative practice.

With my encouragement and facilitation *The PI* project drew to itself a group of cultural producers and members of the wider cultural ‘scene’ very early on who, despite the openness and ambiguity of the programme nonetheless became intrigued with the project because of these very uncertainties. My role in brokering this was challenging; it took many hours of negotiations for me to explain that unlike the typical curated project, there would be a specific type of freedom allowed that could not only benefit the future of the Gallery (and the school), but their own practice. An important strategy for my research, was to test if artists could keep their decisions open for as long as possible so that their works or events didn’t become prescriptive or over endowed with methodology or structure. In some respects it was a form of reverse scaffolding alluded to in Chapter two. This contingency also meant that they could feed off others who were developing projects and events, but still have the reassurance of a loose ‘exhibition’ framework. In essence, I was asking them to think more laterally and in promissory and contingent ways by not providing a sound proposal before the *Inquiry*, rather to watch and respond to the events as they unfolded. The shaky ground of this uncertainty provided a *license*

¹¹⁸ For a full description of the points that came from this meeting, see the Plimsoll Inquiry Bulletin No 4 October 16th on <http://pibulletin.blogspot.com.au/>

for ‘free-play’, which created intrigue and captured the attentiveness of most participants who took part.

Structuring the framework for a multi-dimensional social project



Figure 38. Sir James Plimsoll, one of the elite group of intellectuals in the short lived DORCA.

Image source: <http://nla.gov.au/nla.pic-an22043697-v>

A large solid bronze bust of Plimsoll, commissioned by the university by Tasmanian Sculptor Stephen Walker

Image source: Fiona Lee

To animate initial energies of the project, we appropriated the bronze figure of Sir James Plimsoll, the diplomat after whom the Gallery was named. (Sir James was the Tasmanian Governor from 1982 until his sudden death in 1987). (Fig 38) Apart from his august public face, Plimsoll is also identified as having had a colourful second life.

During WWII, he was a member of the Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs (DORCA), which, according to Wikipedia, was a ‘difficult to categorise think tank, possibly an intelligence organisation that has been described as mysterious, odd ball and bohemian’.¹¹⁹ As an embodiment of diplomacy and bohemia, and given the fact that as the majority of us were concerned about the future of the Gallery in an increasingly draconian climate, we took the opportunity to reinvent Sir James as a mascot to ‘head’ the *Inquiry*, and to formulate a ‘think tank’ or ‘inquiry’ in the spirit of DORCA.¹²⁰

Unlike the liberal structure afforded to the participants in the *Inquiry*, on the one hand, the Curatorium on the other had to construct a formal descriptive rationale for the project in order

¹¹⁹ Wikipedia contributors, ‘Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs’, *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Directorate_of_Research_and_Civil_Affairs. The bronze bust (Fig 30) has stood at the entry of the gallery since 1986 and, after acquiring some wheels underneath to make him portable, he was used extensively in one of the artist’s works.

¹²⁰ The inquiry logic was taken from the idea of a legislative ‘inquiry’ and in the shortened version, short for private investigator. Formal legally binding ‘inquiries’ are commonly set up by governments or public bodies to interrogate a dire problem or situation in need of independent review or analysis, and are somewhat similar to a CoI, where both call for a grouping of specialists to laboriously investigate issues. However, unlike official inquiries the CoIs are not compelled or bound neither by strict legislation nor to recommend mandatory outcomes. This then limits the analogy to the name, ‘inquiry’, and the intention of rigorous questioning as process. In spite of this however, the PI has given a ‘report’ at the conclusion of the inquiry. This was in the form of a symposium, a performance, a written report and an online blog.

to apply for funding. We set up a four-pronged approach to provide the conceptual scaffolding, yet enable enough leeway for contingent activity; we developed a series of categories for the project that were loosely aligned to those of the Russian Constructivists, which were effectively four types of ‘agencies’: the Bureau, the Critique Space, the Archive and the Kiosk. (Fig 39)

Funding ambiguous projects that court change

Due to the amount of interest and the potential it could offer, the Curatorium decided that a seven-week event would not do the project justice, and that this could be seen as an exploratory phase, with an evaluative and reporting phase to be published later on. *The PI*, therefore, evolved as a two-phase project: Phase One was a seven-week exploratory phase that gained project funding from Arts Tasmania and the University’s Visiting Scholar fund. Phase Two would be an ongoing series of artist-in-residencies, funded by the now Tasmanian College

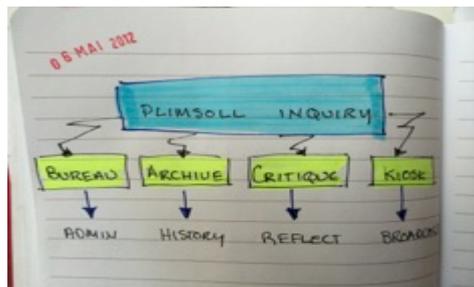


Figure 39. Working diagram of the four aspects framing the *Inquiry*.

Image source: Fiona Lee

of the Arts (formally SOA) over 2014–15, and still underway as this exegesis is written. Due to its ongoing nature, Phase Two will not be analysed in this exegesis, apart from some discussion of its rationale within the study’s original proposal, and the inclusion in the Appendix D of *The PI* draft ‘report’.¹²¹

Sourcing funds for *The PI* was fraught with difficulty and compromise. This highlighted the challenges faced by artists engaged in social practice. In terms of our national arts funding body, The Australia Council, we found that our project did not fit the traditional ‘visual arts’ category despite some movement toward new and social engagement in the arts. The main problem for us was that the funding bodies, Federal and State, prescribe the inclusion of artists of national and international standing, which effectively means that many of the local artists and researchers interested in being involved in the inquiry did not rate as having sufficient ‘calibre’ to be paid from these sources. In considering this, the Curatorium felt pressured to change the natural inclination of the project, and to include three artists from interstate, despite the risk that this could derail the project’s intention to be an ‘inquiry’. Likewise, the rush to meet funding deadlines meant that the Curatorium alone undertook selection, without sufficient time for wider consultation and suggestions from the Wider Reference Group: another compromise.

¹²¹ The conference paper ‘Shared Horizons: Beyond the Outermost Limits of and Art School’ in Appendix B and the PowerPoint film in Appendix E are example of Phase 2 events that occurred as this research was coming to an end.

In the wake of several funding knock-backs, the project floundered momentarily, and the group lost its momentum and continuity. We had submitted six funding applications over 2012 and 2013, to university, private philanthropic, state and national arts funding bodies, only two of which were successful at first; the UTAS Visiting Scholar Award and one from Arts Tasmania. Finally, after the success of Phase One, in late 2013, the College of the Arts gave us support for Phase Two for the three artists in residencies and an e-publication in 2015.

Curiously by early 2013, the UTAS funding that had been successfully acquired for the visit of the two key thinkers to assist with the Gallery's future looked to be in jeopardy, as we were unclear what the Gallery's future actually was, and we could not seem to mount a credible bid for any other funding. I was unsure how to read this situation—was it a reflection of a poorly conceived idea, a weakly described project, a gallery not worth saving, or as an idea ahead of its time? By mid-2013, immediately before the project was to begin, we were ultimately successful in our application for 'one-off' project funding from Arts Tasmania to pay fees for a number of artists practicing in the local community. This was the funding agency from, which the Gallery had recently lost its regular support.

The success in reclaiming some funds from this agency may have been partly to do with our modest short-term request, our promise to 'engage community' (which was not a key focus of the Gallery's programme in the past), and even a hiatus in State Government policy changes. From what we could decipher, it appeared that state organisations in the main were genuinely driving their agendas around change in the arts after a reduction in federal support post GFC. Arts Tasmania was midpoint in refashioning their own categories of financial assistance to arts organisations. This was specifically through new and innovative projects (rather than lengthy triennial organisational funding for longer-term programming).

These projects instead would seek a quick and immediate effect on the community, and were more successful if they could demonstrate an attempt towards long-term institutional change. In the absence of clear government guidelines at that point in time, the models of arts funding appeared to be influenced toward transformation by the innovation of the applicants themselves, rather than clear government policy.¹²²

¹²² This was discussed in the pre-application meetings with Arts Tasmania

4.3 Description

Assembling social energy through Communities of Inquiry

Having familiarised myself with the Community of Inquiry (CoI) approach after the *ODWC* school, I was keen to apply the concept of a 'zone of proximal development' referred to in Chapter two where the facilitator provokes the reliance on a proximity of others in the group to grow mutual understanding and develop knowledge. The loose conceptual base and flexible proposal applications designed to encourage lateral thinking for potential participants gave a sense of the project errant, so the development of these zones provided a framework that acted as a 'scaffolding', to shore up the abstract nature of the undertaking.

In creating the 'zone', I constructed a 'Plimsoll Inquiry Dropbox' account, an online cloud-based storage facility. I invited all the participants to join so that they could upload material, read each other's proposals and either work together on projects or use other participant's ideas to fuel, respond or value-add to their own presentations. The Dropbox account, to which all participants were invited, enabled a running tally of projects under construction, however, it was not taken up and used as enthusiastically as I would have liked. In addition to the cloud storage account, I reported *The PI's* progress in *The PI* blog (or 'bulletin') as it unfolded, outlining the project's development, progress, reflection, analysis and actions, and this took the form of a weekly narrative.¹²³

The PI Bulletin or blog was developed as a way to keep the participants inform, which became instrumental in gathering and making them feel part of the development and construction of the project. Without it, the authorship (and a degree of ownership over the project) quickly becomes aligned to just one or two people, something I wanted to avoid. The use of the bulletin for information and updates, along with a Facebook page, Twitter and Instagram account, were in contrast to the primary email contact method in the *ODWC* project. In the years between the projects, I had become more aware of social media as a distribution point for information and social connection, which was aligned to the notion of community building. On the one hand, it became obvious that because people were using email less, it was becoming unreliable as an information portal for reaching participants, and was less likely to distribute news to wider, non-targeted groupings of people. On the other hand, the relentless checking of

¹²³ <http://pibulletin.blogspot.com.au/>

Facebook, Twitter and Instagram by potential audiences on the immediacy of their phones, appeared to offer greater accessibility suited to the flexible dates and times for events.

Informality and conviviality as a strategic tension

The value in conducting *The PI* within TCotA, was my close connections with the academic, administrative staff and many of the postgraduate students, as well as some understanding and intelligence into how the school functioned. My facilitator role was augmented because I had been a student, teacher and worked in administration as well as being a member on the Plimsoll Gallery Committee for over nine years. The worth of these connections and experiences, were that they enabled me to reach many participants through the informality I was seeking in this *Inquiry*. Over the preceding twelve months, I spent considerable time meeting potential participants in one-on-one casual morning teas and exploring some of the possibilities for the *Inquiry* in a relatively relaxed and convivial manner. In this way I sought to induce a feeling of belonging to the CoI.

These informalities similarly became important to the way in which the project developed its more ‘unsettling’ aspects; it enabled participants to play with the promissory and durational aspects of the *Inquiry*, which to some was confronting because it was outside their realm of experience.



Figure 40. Opening the Gallery windows broke the seal for environmental control over the space
Image source: Fiona Lee

Using this enabling position, the usual tension normally attributed to declaring and presenting artworks for display upfront was, for some participants, ameliorated, and I was able to encourage them to work beyond their areas of familiarity and comfort. I encouraged artists to keep their ideas open for as long as possible, so that their works or events did not become prescriptive or over-endowed with methodology or structure. In some respects, I applied a form of reverse scaffolding. This meant their ideas could

feed off others who were developing projects and events.

In general, initially, most of *The PI* group were interested in working with their familiar artworks as static objects in the gallery, and only a few initially took the opportunity to use this as a new and exploratory mechanism, that had as its core the idea of rethinking and action. This changed as *The PI* evolved—only one or two artists eventually produced single, object-based works: most engaged in evolutionary, temporal, collaborative or participatory events instead. Many participants took the project as a challenge and became fully immersed in its contingencies, while others stayed on the sidelines or withdrew from the project altogether.

The motivation for this informality as a strategy was that it enabled the practical and artistic process to ‘teeter on the edge’; to be as flexible as possible up until the point where things had to be tied down; aspects such as risk assessments, security, materials and promotion for instance. This kept the possibility for contingency open and alive.

The Gallery space as an activator of ideas and agencies



Figure 41. Entry to the Gallery's loading bay, normally used as a garage and storage.
Image source: Fiona Lee

During *The PI*, the rubber seals that provided environmental climate control (something that had not been working for years) on the two large paneled windows in the Gallery were removed, and the doors were opened as a symbolic act. This was to encourage the idea of hidden opportunity and possibility, particularly the potential in the ‘other’ spaces not formerly considered part of the regular Gallery space, such as the neglected garden for instance. (Fig 40) This brought the small garden beyond the windows into a new light, and several artists in the project used this outdoor space. While we were unable to fully use the gardens proximity and open-air features due to the inclement weather, in the course of the project the garden became significantly less unkempt and took on a brighter aspect.

The Gallery does not have street frontage, a source of concern to some commentators while others positively embrace the potential in its rather cloistered atmosphere. To offer better access, *The PI* liberated—or colonised the old, heritage loading bay which opens directly onto Hunter Street and adjoins the galleries proper via the Storeroom, a quite expansive area, at the time choked with clutter. The old loading bay was a long dark, dank space with industrial

residues such as rusted metal doors and curious protruding structures, and it houses what is reportedly one of the oldest goods lifts (industrial elevators) in Australia, a legacy of the IXL Jam Factory of yesteryear. The loading bay normally used to garage the school's utility vehicle and for temporary storage, is not a public or student area, and it had never been used as a site for projects. (Fig 41)

Phase One of *The PI* not only occupied the space of the gallery but also took in its Foyer, Courtyard, Storeroom, Loading Bay and Garden – all these spaces' names seemed to gain



Figure 42. A mobile desk set up in the Foyer was the Bureau, a multi-purpose area for the dissemination and organisation of events. The large windows in the Gallery provided a backdrop for the Critique Space. Image source: Lucia Usmiani and Fiona Lee

capital letters as they became occupied and spoken about. In a similar manner, *The PI* exceeded the monthly exhibition programme of the Gallery that customarily presented exhibitions of high quality; these had been traditionally curated, formal and orderly in format, and of one-month duration; in this case *The PI* would take a seven-week slot. Typically, a formal publication with a scholarly essay accompanied the curated exhibitions, and promotion was by print media, regular invitation mail outs and email lists. The idea for *The PI* was not to break with these traditions for the sake of it; rather, to test other ways that might spark new energy and different expectations for the Gallery.

The 'Bureau' was to be a type of office that occupied a space in the gallery and its environs, such as the Storeroom. It ended up being part performance, part operating nerve-centre and part think tank, where all the information was to be collected, sorted and disseminated. An informal sitting area and reading room were set up and archival material and information on the artists exhibiting was made available. It also became a welcoming area for sitting, eating and talking. (Fig 42) 'The Critique Space, was developed as a space for dialogue and collaboration, hosting and argument. (Fig 42) Originally thought of as a space where artists

could shed new light or reflect on their practice in collaboration with others. Events such as artist talks, debates, lectures and symposia were envisaged. It was located in the Gallery proper, in front of the large windows overlooking the garden, and consisted of a number of large leather couches, a large low round pouf, some gallery benches and numerous chairs and stools. This arrangement altered the habitual appearance of the gallery and imbued it with a lounge atmosphere that suggested conversation rather than spectatorship.



Figure 43. The Gallery Storeroom as Archive, it became a publically accessible archive as participants collated the material for uploading onto the University's library database.
Image Source: Fiona Lee

The Archive was where artists would get free access to some of the published archival material collected over the twenty-six year history of the Gallery's programming, in order to rethink the Gallery's historic knowledge, either in a retrospective way or, it was hoped, to spark future projects or events. (Fig 43)

The material generated through the various projects was to be disseminated or broadcast to a wider audience through the Kiosk, which was to be a vehicle for the dispersal for information. Originally it was planned as a physical object, based on the Russian Constructivist idea of selling propaganda and ideas to the greater public, however the broadcasting was done

in a number of other ways, such as through the specially designated Wednesday evening events, social media and eventually in the forthcoming e-publication Plimsoll Report, to be published in 2015¹²⁴

Spontaneous timetabling to create zones of inquiry and structural support

The first, seven-week phase of *The PI* involved over eighty artists, academics, students, writers, curators and other people who already had some association with the school. Later, undergraduate students became involved predominantly through the Gallery Practices unit being taught by the former Head of School, Professor Noel Frankham. Through word of mouth and social media, the energy surrounding the project started to rise and people started to trickle down into the Bureau to see what was afoot and how they could contribute.

¹²⁴ See Appendix A for a draft version



Figure 44. The schedule of events left on the Bureau table for participants to negotiate their events.

Image source: Fiona Lee

The project's timetable was held together by two main weekly scheduled events. The first was the Wednesday Night Fiascos (WNF), to be held Wednesday nights between 6 and 9 pm and organised by Sculpture lecturer, Lucy Bleach and some of her student team. These were to be used as a way to 'broadcast' material generated through the week, or as one-off events or happenings on the night, and the intention was to have an open-invitation celebratory or party atmosphere, rather like traditional art openings, only without formal invitations. The second types of structured events were a series of fourteen commissioned artists' showings by established practitioners, predominantly those who were not formerly connected to the School. These provided a lynchpin (or scaffolding) around which other artists, curators, performers and writers could work to evolve at often-spontaneous times over the seven-week period.¹²⁵ These likewise created a 'zone of proximity' or an atmosphere through which other artists and students would create their own satellite events.



Figure 45. *The PI* promotion: the Facebook page and notice blackboard located upstairs in the school foyer—designed by undergraduates Phoebe Adams and Tanya Maxwell to direct visitors down to the Gallery. Based on the silhouette of Sir James Plimsoll's bronze bust.

Image source: Fiona Lee

At the beginning of the seven weeks, we started with a welcome potluck dinner. Some of the students became interested in the idea of hosting, as a curatorial strategy, and we worked as a

¹²⁵ *The PI* received one-off project funding by the state government's Art Tasmania for the fourteen artists, who were all professionals and whose work was not University staff or postgraduate research.

group to enliven and welcome people to the space. We held several of these potluck meals during the seven weeks.

In the first week, participants would come down to the Bureau and select a time and a space to present their event by registering it on a long timeline chart that I constructed. This was left on display throughout the project for participants to use and visitors to see. At first, I brokered and administered this system, but in a short time people used it unaided, or with little encouragement, and many used it to negotiate with other participants. (Fig 44) Many signatories had no idea of what they were going to do at the point of signing up. The emphasis for *The PI* was on contingency, process and flexibility—so the project offered a range of entry points for interested individuals who welcomed an opportunity to approach and test their work differently.

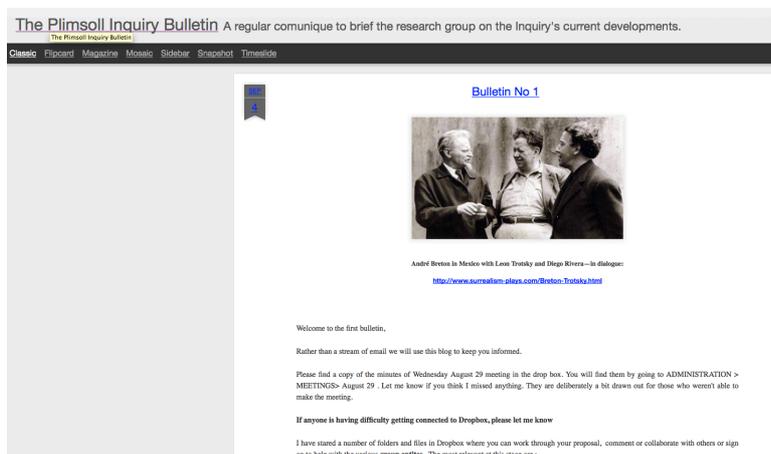


Figure 46. *The PI* bulletin began very soon after the first meeting of the Curatorium, and entries became more frequent as the project drew near.

The events by artists were to include a stream of dialogical events in the Critique Space, in the form of talks, gatherings, performances, cooking, eating, sewing etc., as accompaniments to their physical works (almost all of the participants primarily identified as object makers of some kind). However, this did not happen as expected. Curiously, instead of producing artworks for contemplation and then convivial discussion, some of the participants organised stand-alone round table discussions around a specific issue of urgency, mostly with wider implications than just their own work. This was most unusual for these artists and certainly for the Gallery

Promotion of the events went out sporadically and mainly through social media, (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) and by subscribing to an email invitation list. (Fig 45) *The PI* blog bulletin describing the forthcoming events also promoted proceedings. (Fig 46) An

undergraduate student chose to paint up an old display panel as a chalkboard and pinup board, and this provided a promotional space for printed information in the top foyer of the school and directed people downstairs to the gallery (Fig 45). In general, promotion and interpretation were by word of mouth.



Figure 47. Participants negotiating the various under-used spaces on the day of the WNF
Image source: Fiona Lee

The gallery was open to the public from 12 to 5 pm weekdays during the seven weeks, unless otherwise notified. No formal branding, specific font, logo or colour palette was developed for promotional purposes, and there were no formal posters or invitations printed. Likewise, the participants were not encouraged to labour over titles, labels or other formal details about their works.

We wanted to see what would happen in the absence of these regular tropes of exhibition practice and to engage visitors in conversation by way of explication.

The PI was driven as a question in and of itself; it was set up not as an exhibition but an inquiry and the artists, participants and students were often left to explain this to members of the public that came through the Gallery door, which was a process that in itself became an act or performance. For the hapless visitor who stumbled upon *The PI*—and for him or her to see what could only be described as its shambolic aesthetic, we made every opportunity to welcome each visitor with a statement ‘this is not an exhibition, but an inquiry’. The imperative was to make sure that we caught as many people as possible, greeting them at the door so that they could understand the project. To that end, we could then gauge how to proceed with an explanation, or not. Usually, the visitor would then ask, *what is the inquiry about?* This then left the door open for engagement. To my knowledge, only two viewers were irritated enough to say to us that they would come back when there was a ‘proper’ exhibition. A remarkable aspect of the proceedings was the way that participants undertook to speak to visitors to the Gallery, and the clarity and skill with which they described the works to often quite perplexed members of the public.

Wednesday Night Fiascos as ‘Radio Plimsoll’

The Wednesday Night Fiascos (WNF) were spontaneous, energetic and rowdy, however, due to their haphazard nature, there were a number of aspects that were failures—people didn’t show up, some participants didn’t account for inclement weather, and some abandoned plans to present their artworks, while other had to be discarded altogether due to lack of risk assessments and permission.

The WNFs began in the second week and became the provocation around which *The PI* began to revolve. Over the five WNF events, thirty-odd events occupied the entire Gallery space, its Garden, Foyer, Courtyard, Storeroom and Loading Bay each Wednesday night. The participants tended to self-organise, determining where and when their works would be shown, without the intervention of a curator, staff member or exhibition organiser. Decisions were arrived at through negotiation with each other. (Fig 47) Moreover, the works were rarely planned, rather the artists tended to turn up on the Wednesday and work through the negotiating processes with those around them to prepare for the night’s Fiasco. Lucy Bleach and a number of the undergraduates were unable to fully realised their works outside the Gallery in the Garden and Courtyard because it rained every Wednesday night for the entire programme; one just had to be flexible.

The WNFs had been intended to link the gallery to the streetscape and we wanted to involve local food vans and performers, none of which eventuated due to imposing bureaucracy and fees from the Hobart City Council, who required us to barricade revelers behind a high fence erected on the street. As expected the chaos caused by the lack of formal planning inevitably drove some of the participants not to partake, most however joined in as spectators. Initially, the WNFs were quiet, but as time passed and they became known, the energy began to build. It took a lot of organising to build the groundswell which was initially contingent to the charisma of one or two key participants, so much so that when they were absent, the WNFs lacked a certain vigor and became vulnerable. The lesson here is that to avoid this kind of vulnerability, there needs to be time for settling in to happen before a group dynamic can occur. Building confidence and playfulness cannot be instantaneous and we found that taking time makes this form of engagement more likely to emerge. This aspect was one we did not heed from the experiences of *ODWC*.

Despite these failings, however, the response from visitors and participants to the WNFs was that they reported enjoying the new experiences in the gallery traditionally cocooned in a familiar programming structure. Due to the works and events being dispersed throughout the galleries and adjoining spaces—the viewers needed to negotiate the whole of the ground floor space to witness the works. This mobile audience created a distinctly different sense of traffic and energy within a space that most people were used to experiencing as passive spectators. This new model of presentation built viewer knowledge and increased the capacity for new engagement for the Gallery from the community.

A list of other events include:

The Critique Space held an evening soirée hosted by recent MFA graduate artist Rae Marr, who is a member of a Sydney critique group that had been operating for seven years.¹²⁶ Around fifteen people attended the *Artist Conversations*, which was enabled through Skype, and presented as a critique of a works by well-known Tasmanian landscape painter, Stephen Lees. Three Sydney artists, Sue Rawlingson, Liz Shreeve and Annie Kennedy, spread their presentations among the critique.

A positive effect of this event occurred in conversation afterwards, with some of the participants feeling more comfortable coming back into the Gallery after a prolonged absence. Most of those who attended were former students who had established their careers around traditional mediums and content, which left them feeling excluded from the more ‘contemporary nature’ of the school, and its gallery programme. Their inclusion, along with Stephen Lees (a much-admired local painter) in such a conversational event, left some surprised to find that a contemporary event as *The PI* would include them. Because the emphasis was on inclusion, a number of them felt they could return for other events.

Some urgent rumblings in the arts community regarding recent cutbacks in arts funding, and the threat of more, became the topic for a ‘round table’ discussion, instigated by sessional Art Theory lecturer and writer Dr Lucy Hawthorne. The Plimsoll itself, as noted above, had fallen victim to slashes in State funding to small organisations, as had other visual art spaces, and the local arts ecology had also been affected by cultural policy changes at the Local Government level. Via Facebook, Hawthorne invited members of the local art community to join her in

¹²⁶ This group hosted regular monthly meetings in the home of one of the members in Sydney. They invited a curator and taking it in turns discussing and critiquing a member’s work.

conversation in the Critique Space to respond to three questions regarding diminished funding support for artists and artist-run initiatives in the local area. The turnout was much larger than expected and ended up not being so intimate, with about fifty people in attendance. Lucy also presented the ‘Speakers Corner’ at the WNF, as a traditional style of a soapbox event where individual art opinions on a variety of art issues could be broadcast to a wider public.

More specific to the Plimsoll Gallery itself, were the two three-hour master classes conducted by Professors Nikos Papastergiadis titled, *On Friendship* and, Professor Ross Gibson’s titled *Curating Process*. About eighteen people attended in the Critique Space and transcripts of the event were edited by the group’s participants and are now the subject of the ‘Plimsoll Report’ (See Appendix D), an ongoing participatory work will culminate in the publication of an e-book as part of the final Phase Two.

Over the duration, the Critique Space hosted sculpture, theory and studio talks, which were given periodically by lecturers; the use of the gallery space for standard undergraduate teaching was reasonably novel, and it familiarised undergraduate students with the gallery in an inclusive way, and connected their learning to non-standard modes of practice. An overview



and

Figure 48. Meg Walch’s ‘Conversations on the Couch’ with immanent philosopher Professor Wayne Hudson.
Image source: Gus McKay

progress report of *The PI* was given to the postgraduate group during the seven weeks, and several undergraduate students also held their own studio critiques, while PhD candidate, Neil Holstrum, offered to ‘test’ the gallery space as a place for his research report. During this event, in particular, members of the public arrived, as did a number of undergraduate students not normally present for these forums, which are held in a traditional lecture format in the Dechaineaux Lecture Theatre. Around sixty-five people attended, which was a much larger audience than usual. Later that day the Launceston ARI *Sawtooth*, hosted a discussion about architecture and gallery spaces.



Figure 49. Wendy Morrow, Three-day dance residency, workshop and performance
Image source: Fiona Lee

A number of roundtable discussions and conversations were held in the Critique Space, however due to generally good attendance numbers, they could not be described as an intimate, roundtable event. Artist, PhD student and lecturer Meg Walch invited the philosopher and writer Professor Wayne Hudson, for a *Conversation on the Couch*. Around seventy people attended over the two-day conversations, which were on the topics of ‘pedagogy’ and ‘plasticity’ in the arts, something that was of interest to Walch’s practice, which assured her practice and her theoretical considerations were synthesised and reflected upon. (Fig 48) The significance of this event was most evident in the dialogue between two such different practitioners; it was animated by Walch’s ability at interlocution of the philosopher’s freewheeling ideas. Equally the event had no timeframe or structure; the sessions were not of a standard length, no one needed to sign up; people were free to sidle out; most people stayed for the duration. On the one hand, the discussion was sober, while on the other Professor Hudson claimed the informality of the event also permitted him to voice some opinions that he doubted he would have voiced in a more formal setting. His provocations about Aboriginality would have been incendiary in a teaching context, however, despite these tense moments, there seemed to be no audience members visibly affronted by his remarks. Walch’s other contribution was to the *WNF* where she conducted a very popular dumpling workshop in the Gallery.



Figure 50. Tricky Walch and Matt Warren,
Radio 28:1
Image source: Fiona Lee



Figure 51. Annie Geard,
The Analyst's Couch
Image source: Fiona Lee

Academic, artist and traveller, Dr Brigita Ozolins presented *On the Road: An evening with Brigita*. It was a presentation and talk based around her extensive travel blog and included a small meal and refreshments to around fifteen people. In her presentation, Ozolins successfully showed how her artwork as an artist and conversationalist, ties into, and feeds upon her day job as a pedagogue. Ozolins also presented her *Bibliomancy Readings* in this space at several of the WNFs.

Exploring the gallery space was the main driver for many artists. Many expressed to me that they were very attracted to being offered the space virtually *unencumbered* for the first time. For those artists who booked an early slot in *The PI*, they could use the emptiness of the space before it filled with other artworks. Equally, they did not have the weight of writing detailed proposals common for the Gallery; they did not need to foreshadow outcomes, prefigure funding support or predict the demographics of their audiences or meet specific criteria—instead they were allowed to provide promissory results, which enabled them to develop their ‘project’ as they went.

Over the first weekend, the artist and dance performer Wendy Morrow took advantage of the expansive gallery space and the unusual access to light from the uncovered windows. She used the time as a self-organised residency, to develop a series of three performance works, which

included a collaboration with Matt Warren and Leigh Hobba, a workshop, artist talk and a public presentation. (Fig 49)

In the first few weeks *The PI* partnered with the Art school library to open a working public archive in the storeroom, called The Archive. Copy tables, three computers, and large working spaces were erected between art crates and numerous archival files and exhibition paraphernalia. The Internet and library database access was installed and the public was free to go down into the storeroom (normally out of bounds) and discuss and watch. Librarians, Sam Rowlands and Juliet Beale from the Art Library managed the process and enlisted a group of interested gallery practice students who documented, photographed, catalogued, attached meta-data and uploaded it onto the university library database. The Plimsoll database has now been launched and is available, accessible to the wider university, and public.

Local artist Matt Warren commissioned five artists to conduct research in the gallery space for the first three weeks of *The PI*. Warren had organised for a small cordoned-off section of the gallery to be put under scrutiny by the artists who spent the time taking sound recordings and time-lapse videos of the empty space. The resulting curated exhibition, *Ghost Hunters*, opened in week three and ran for the rest of *The PI*. Warren also delivered a public Art Forum in the lead up to *The PI*.

Initially, the wider reference group was discussing the idea of broadcasting and Tricky Walsh and Matt Warren erected their sound transmission *Radio 28:1* tower in the Gallery's garden and installed five receivers around the gallery café upstairs and storeroom. Responding to this idea of broadcasting out from the Gallery, (Fig 50) Walsh and Warren recorded a code that played from a radio station every hour on the hour through the small transistor radios, but it was back into the Gallery. This ritual, which went for seven weeks, was chimed in hourly by a fanfare (a sound not dissimilar to the heralding in of a news broadcast or the chimes of an ice cream van). The odd sound announced a code that audiences were asked to decipher.

Several postgraduate students used the gallery Archive to develop works, with David Bluhdorn being one of the only artists who used the exhibition archive as a catalyst for a work – as we had originally planned (the others being the Christine Scott and Jan Hogan collaboration). He produced a video work in response to the 1993 exhibition catalogue, *To the Surface*, in which he developed using the light entering the gallery space through the large uncovered windows.

The old goods lift was also used for an improvised performance by the Hobart Improv Collective, which played a one-night, one-hour performance of a live soundtrack to the silent film, *The Student Of Prague* (1913) and an impromptu performance in the old lift by an undergraduate Georgia Lucy.

PhD student Annie Geard presented a series of five sittings of *The Analyst's Couch*, where she held one-on-one 'therapy' sessions with students, artists and members of staff on the large leather sofa in the gallery, to an audience. During the session, she drew images related to the discussion and took notes in a journal, which is now part of the Archive. (Fig 51)

The Tasmanian College of the Arts regularly hosts an Art Forum in the main lecture theatre on Fridays during the semester; however, there is rarely time to continue discussions after the presentation. In order for the audience members to follow up with the speaker, *The PI* trialed an *Extended Discussion* to see if this had potential as a future event. On one of the Fridays after the regular event upstairs, the speaker Claire Lambe was invited down to the Gallery to further discuss her work in the Critique Space. About twelve people from the general audience joined Claire for tea and a more intimate conversation on the couch about her work.



Figure 52. Gus McKay (an undergraduate who normally assist the Gallery staff with the plinths) built a temporary structure before putting the plinths away.
Image source: Gus McKay

Lucia Usmiani began her seating project that involved intermittent sewing sessions in the Gallery over the seven weeks. She began by appropriating and repurposing a large round foam seat, or pouf, used in a previous exhibition by artist Lucy Bleach, and then proceeded to cover the other chairs and couches in the Critique Space with large

bold coloured fabrics, disrupting the predominantly remaining black, somber seating.

Undergraduates felt for the first time that they were ‘allowed’ into the Gallery, which was normally categorised and designated for formal presentation and notably for the work of well-established artists or staff. Students played with the Gallery’s furniture, fittings, lighting and walls as well as with the natural light emitted through the window. (Fig 52) They produced a series of uninvited quick turn-around responses, something that would have never been tolerable in the Gallery’s previous history. Artist Jack Robbins’ work *Relative humidity and temperature of the Plimsoll Gallery during the course of the exhibition Plimsoll Inquiry*, was installed and monitored daily by one of the undergraduate students. A printout of the daily readings from the hygrometer was pinned to the wall.



Figure 53. Sally Rees, the third in a trilogy of works that incorporated the Gallery’s bronze bust of Sir James Plimsoll.
Image source: Fiona Lee

Artist and PhD student Steven Carson took up a research ‘residency’ within the tall gallery, working on his current research and testing ideas, which included occasionally having to conduct impromptu artist discussions with gallery visitors. Using materials that are used in packaging, plus the Gallery’s wall moving trolley and some lighting, Carson worked to resolve several works, which were then appropriated by other artists who came into the space to work. Initially, Carson was unsure how to become involved, not knowing how he could contribute. In the end, he ‘occupied’ the tall gallery by bringing his studio into the Gallery—and just started making. Something about the new zone of making enabled him to rethink his own practice, play with some of the Gallery furniture and interact with the gallery visitor as they came through and watched him work. Carson, a teacher, interacted with the younger undergraduate students who were increasingly finding the Gallery an interesting place to hang out. They tested his resolve by cheekily engaging their own works in a playful interaction with his work—something that at times he found difficult as an artist who normally was more at home in the solitude of his own private studio space, but nonetheless generously embraced it as part of the project.

And as a social experiment, artist and Head of the Printmaking studio Dr Jan Hogan, set up a participatory wall work that require audience members to rub charcoal onto their fingers and make marks across the wall. She called it *The Plimsoll Line*. Hogan would come down to the Gallery at regular intervals and erase, smudge and re-image the work. It spread over an unused

part of the wall that housed the fire extinguisher, gallery hazard signage and security key code panel. Hogan also collaborated with local curator, Christine Scott, to set up a trade table, where they printed a Plimsoll currency for the exchange of goods and other things; the imagery on the notes was taken from the Plimsoll Gallery catalogue *Atelier: Australian Artists in Paris 1980-2000*, (2003) and *The ID Show* (1983) sourced in the newly activated Plimsoll Archive.

Sally Rees developed a series of three works that created new conditions of cultural creation for the bronze bust of Sir James Plimsoll by prolific local sculptor, Stephen Walker. After attaching wheels to the plinth of the bust, and thus emancipating Sir James from his fixed solitary corner of the Gallery's foyer where he had been for twenty-six years, Sally Rees showed him some art, films, good times and permitted him some reflective moments in the actual Gallery. The first was when he was wheeled into the gallery and shown a series of film clips; the second was a

karaoke 'party' in the tall gallery (this work was in conjunction with Steven Carson's studio work). The third and final act was a recording of his opening speech at the art school, playing from inside the bust while he looked out over the gallery's garden in contemplative silence. (Fig 53)



Figure 54. Yvette Watt, *Brightside Farm Sanctuary Animal Drawing Day*, participant Margaret Cairnduff
Image source: Fiona Lee

Postgraduate student Eliza Burke interviewed New Zealand artist David Clegg and developed a projection of the thematic text, which was about space and thresholds. Clegg had an ongoing association with Bourke since the *Iteration:Again* project two years earlier. Artist Raef Sawford worked on video documentation and research with student Gus McKay to realise a site-specific installation defiantly tackling some of the difficulties he had with the concrete pillars in a previous installation of his work in the Gallery.

Towards the end of *The PI*, Dr Yvette Watt, an artist, animal activist and lecturer at the art school, developed the Brightside Farm Sanctuary Drawing Day. Ten drawing donkeys were constructed specifically for the day, and Watt colluded with friends and fellow activist artists to bring a van-load of farm animals to the school for a two-session drawing class in the Loading Bay. Two turkeys, two lambs, some chickens, a calf and a pig were delivered into the loading bay and participants mingled, fed and drew the animals. Vegan morning and afternoon tea were prepared and recipes offered, and the small fee for the class was donated to the sanctuary. (Fig 54)

Rather than taking the easier option of driving participants to the Brightside Farm Sanctuary, Watt was more interested in testing what happens when animals and participants are implicated together in art making as an event within a gallery context. Resourcefully using the impetus of the drawing day, Watt also managed to have ten drawing donkeys constructed for the school's drawing department.

The permissions needed to bring animals onto the University property had never been tested, and as we pursued the risk assessment procedure, the seemingly innocent exploit assumed the status of high risk, requiring approval from on high. There were moments in the proceedings when we were unsure if we were in breach of the rules, as chickens strode into the gallery and strutted around the artworks. The sense of daring was not overt, and we drew little attention to what occurred, lest we had to deal with difficult consequences, nonetheless those in attendance captured the moment of obscurity.

The local artist group, CWA, CBD, who founded their branch of the long-established Country Womens' Association (The CWA, which started serving the nation in 1922), presented a screening of the local film *When Mary met Mohamad*, about the local community and the newly established refugee asylum centre that had opened in a small semi-rural town, just north of Hobart. They offered tea and refreshments, as is the strong custom of the CWA, and about 70 people attended this event.

Amanda Shone and Rebecca Stevens collaborated to produce series of installation works, by consulting with the architect Gary Forward (who was responsible for the design of the refurbishing of the Henry Jones and Co building as an art school), and Fung Shui practitioner, Vicki Savage. Shone and Stevens sought to envisage three new thresholds or entrances for the

Gallery. Their works quietly disrupted the established modes of entry into the gallery from the street, and the visitor flow through the galleries. With their architect and Fung Shui as advisors, they carefully observed patterns of approach to, and traversals of, the Gallery, only completing their works in the last three weeks of the *Inquiry*.

First, they created a different path of approach to the gallery by shutting off the front door and opening the garden gates. (Fig 55) This created a pleasant meandering walkway that prolonged the experience of entry and require the visitor to search for the admission area.



Figure 55. Rebecca Stevens and Amanda Shone
Proposal for Plimsoll garden entry
Image source: Fiona Lee

Wind gusts have always been the bane of the Gallery foyer, so Shone and Stevens simulated a glass portal entry with coloured string lines, as a proposition for future building plans to provide an air-locked entry into the gallery. Stevens and Shone also covered over one of the two doors into the Gallery from the foyer and repositioned some potted plants to hide a steel pillar, which in Fung Shui terms blocked the energy of the entryway. Finally, in discussion with the architect, they disclosed the existence of a hidden doorway that previously linked the tall gallery to a teaching area that faces Hunter Street. By photographing the doorway from the other side of the wall where it remains intact, they represented it as a projection inside the gallery, onto the exact place where the door is currently masked by plasterboard. The symbolic nature of Shone and Stevens' works expresses disapproval as much as it suggests a possibility. They did not permanently change anything, and they did not verbally argue a case. Rather their dialogue with the invited experts they consulted with, as well as observations and opinions they elicited from the wider participant group, was offered as a series of interventionist object lessons through the visual language of sculpture and installation, as powerful practical suggestions for ways in which the Gallery might be improved physically in a future renovation.

From the onset, *The PI* sought to place more priority on *process* than *display* to see what, if any, models of practice could be used in the future, particularly with an emphasis on rethinking, not necessarily replacing the past.¹²⁷ Historically, the Plimsoll Gallery produced expensive high-

¹²⁷ For a specific outline see <http://pibulletin.blogspot.com.au/> Bulletin No 6 July 27th 2012

quality print exhibition catalogues. Many boxes of unsold copies have accumulated in the Gallery storeroom over the years, attesting to the low general demand for these publications by the visiting public, very few of whom purchased catalogues. Nonetheless, as archival documentation, the catalogues have historical value and the essays within these add up to a chronicle of exegetical scholarship about decades of Australian visual arts practice.

Some participants, especially the art theorists, voiced their desire to try to reconceive of a 'Plimsoll Publishing House', and to try, in the first instance the idea of producing low cost electronic material in a pilot online delivery system. This could later widened into the 'broadcasting' of online material from the Gallery, Art Forum programme and as a portal for other research material such as essays conference papers, gallery installing, curator talks etc. This idea took shape as an e-publication that would be developed collaboratively, as a writing opportunity and through the camaraderie of the group.

A final symposium run by the two visiting scholars and a final thank you BBQ was held over the last weekend. This summarised the proceedings and introduced the project to a number of external visitors from the local community. It was at the symposium that the suggestion of a collaborative writing project is offered to all the participants who were involved in *The PI*. As a result through promotional email and Facebook notices we subsequently secured around thirty participants to submit a piece of writing to accompany one of the images in a large image bank of *The PI* documentation (around 500 images), which was set up for the purpose. This will accompany other writing, transcripts and documentation in a final 'Plimsoll Report'. A draft copy of this document is provided in Appendix A.

In the last section of the chapter, I will interpret and analyse some of the observations from the material collected during *The PI*. In particular, I will draw some preliminary findings in relation to three main lines of questioning about the Gallery and its operations:

- first, social agency that can intentionally generate new modes of cultural creation,
- second, forms of 'thinking' production that can disrupt but symbiotically work with visual forms of art,
- and third, the role hermeneutic forms of conversation can play in providing 'useful tensions' to empowered participants to openly question established procedures and processes for disseminating art and connecting with audiences.

4.4 Interpretation

Organising a community of inquiring adults

Different sets of issues related to establishing a CoI arose for me in *The PI*, mostly because I was seeking to involve a community of erudite individuals in the actual development of the project as an ‘inquiry’—which was part of the actual school’s exhibitionary and educational programming—that I had considered problematic. As a facilitator of this project, at issue was that I was corralling a ‘curatorium’ of learned scholars as well as research peers, that in most cases were far above my level of experience, not only in curatorial and exhibitionary practice, but in pedagogy itself. As a postgraduate student, who was I to say this was not functioning properly? How would I captivate and maintain the attention of these scholarly participants as co-producers in not just the rethinking of education, and exhibitionary practice, but in the deeper implications of knowledge production—while not appearing to be presumptuous?

The common bond that struck up between all parties within the inquiry and that which drew everyone together, was the sole issue of a failing gallery. The consequences of this one dilemma alone broke down any issues of disrespect and audaciousness that might have been obvious, with participants generously agreeing to be part of the project to work toward a greater good.

Wednesday Night Fiasco and a Critique Space for social dialogue

Following *ODWC* knowledge production, particularly in the context of social agency, had been



Figure 56. Meg Walch *Dumpling Workshop* at the Wednesday Night Fiasco.
Image source: Fiona Lee

one of the areas I wanted to build upon in the development of *The PI*; the Community of Inquiry as I mentioned in Chapter two, is how I attempted to create social agency amongst members of *The PI* community. In my own definition, I use the term ‘social agency’ to not just include a feeling of sociability, but it also describes a particular form of energy; the power emanating from a communal gathering of interested people around a common interest,

within which they take a stake. *The PI* sought to use this energy as an agent for change.¹²⁸

In my view, the most significant elements of social agency in *The PI* were generated through the development and presentation of the WNF and the events and happenings that took place in and around the Critique Space. (Fig 56) These two events provided new and interesting ways in which interlopers in conversation could negotiate in a manner that they 'buy into' an issue with each other in relationship to the Gallery itself (as the object under discussion). The dialogue in these cases did not just revolve around their own singular view or work for display, rather there was a sharing of horizons which brought people together in a mutual and sometimes parasitic way that brought latent ideas into focus. Gadamer uses the term the 'maieutic productivity' of dialogue as a type of 'midwifery' that yields fruitful outputs.¹²⁹

To enable maieutic outputs, *The PI* sought to foster anti-hierarchical events that represented a leveling of authority. They were developed and presented in keeping with principles of alternative education; the WNF, in particular, yielded ways of thinking and making that was free of the heavy-duty formality of authority and top-down pedagogy. For example the weight of a set curriculum, the authority of the curator-organiser as a controller, or the standard hierarchical division between a student and a teacher, for instance, was discouraged so that interlopers became equal.

Again, the Gallery itself was inherently perceived as authoritarian and elitist. From observations and field notes, the discussions held in the lead-up to *The PI* with students in particular, indicated that there were barriers in place that thwarted a close encounter with the gallery as an inviting space of productive enjoyment and purpose; these impediments appeared to be physical, political and cultural. It was seen as an elitist space mainly occupied by established artists or postgraduate students; the domain of curators and academics and more senior practitioners, not a space where the public can engage or participate in any meaningful way. Lacking most was engagement through social modes of communal behavior. Likewise, the physical positioning of the Gallery in the university and its location off the street was identified in these meetings as problematic, which made entry to the Gallery awkward and uninviting.

¹²⁸ I am aware that there are common definitions of 'social' and 'agency' used in the social sciences, politics and a number of other fields of study, however to probe into this in any depth is beyond the scope of this research.

¹²⁹ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. 1975. *Truth and Method*. 3rd ed. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group. 361

This led me to question in what way could *The PI* emancipate disenfranchised individuals who felt that the Plimsoll Gallery was not a place for them. Admittedly, the Gallery hosted monthly openings to which everyone was invited, however, most undergraduate students who participated in *The PI*, and other potential guests conceded that they never felt welcome in the Gallery for this event; they expressed a feeling of exclusion. In part, it was this intangible void within the structure of the Gallery's programme, along with a collective desire for change that presented a significant opportunity to build a 'social climate' around the Gallery itself.

As a way to overcome this, *The PI* employed multiple entry points for participants and viewers, mainly demonstrated through the development of the WNFs, which effectively meant breaking down some of these barriers and opening up the event for undergraduates—dissolving the white cube gallery and its formal programming. The structure of the programming meant that the works were scattered throughout the designated ground floor of the Inquiry 'expanding' the footprint to exceed the galleries proper. This included the Loading Bay, Gallery Storeroom, Garden, Entry Foyer and Goods Lift. In this way, a series of what seemed like micro political discourses were observed; where during conversations, embryonic concepts were voiced and events and projects ensued from this.¹³⁰ For example an undergraduate discovered her latent comedic talent through dialogue with another, a trained clown doctor; together they teamed up to perform a series of black comedy happenings in reaction to the arduous procedures around the risk assessments *The PI* was required to undertake.¹³¹

(Fig 59)

Some participants used acts of cunning as the impetus for artworks. Artist Sally Rees had always harboured a suppressed 'adoration' for the bronze bust of Sir James Plimsoll. Having no real idea of what she was going to produce over the seven weeks, she came down into the foyer of the Gallery, lovingly washed, and cared for Sir James over several days. At some point, discussions were had about the poor state of his plinth, which had seriously deteriorated from water damage. The Gallery had to replace the base, but a decision to add wheels was part of Rees' plan and was fully justified to administrative staff by making it 'easier to clean', and subsequently passing scrutiny on those grounds. Rees used Sir James' newfound mobility to liberate him from his dusty corner of twenty-six years and, as previously mentioned, gave him a good time.

¹³⁰ As mentioned above this term is associated with the writings of Irit Rogoff, but it is also used in discourse analysis and the work of Sociologist Harold Garfinkel. For *The PI* I am only using the term within the hermeneutic sense; as a means to describe the state of play between two conversationalists.

¹³¹ In Australia the Clown Doctors form part of a charity, The Humour Foundation, bringing humour children's sickbeds

The micro political discourse was, for the most part, respectful, but it was not always successful in its maieutic capacity for output—there were some discussions that did not lead to an event being presented, while other events that might have originally been a strong idea, were an underwhelming presented. Most, however, applied a model of polite diplomacy. This was through negotiating between each other to secure the optimal staging of their events. Brigita Ozolins eventually needed to quarantine her quiet, thoughtful bibliomancy readings, for instance, from Lucy Hawthorne’s loud, theatrical speakers corner. *The PI* was set up to account for such negotiations, and failures, by not attempting to lock participants into fixed ideas, or interfere with these mediations. The consequence of this is that it did take an effort on behalf of the participants who needed to be fully responsible for their own success (or failure): there was no curator to arbitrate or negotiate.

Tania Bruguera sought to empower the students in Cuba as a way to inspire a younger generation of artists to bring about change in their political system. In a similar manner, *The PI* sought to initiate change to the governance of an art system (typified by the Plimsoll Gallery programme and the university’s teaching and learning structures)—a system that had become entrenched in bureaucracy and outmoded methodologies. While disrupting the Plimsoll Gallery programme may not be viewed with the same sense of urgency as Bruguera’s aim for political disruption in Cuba, there are some relative analogies that can be taken into account; those that fostered political criticality and social agency as urgent, palpable and something that was clearly identified as a project aim.

The capacity of this agency was identified by the manner in which the students became actively involved over the seven weeks, through invitation, serendipity or opportunity. Most notably, this was demonstrated by the way in which students used subversion when developing works in restricted areas of the Gallery itself and its affiliated service areas (such as the storeroom and loading bay). Likewise, the inclusion of these students into the two professional master classes demonstrated a democratic model, where they were considered not just observers and learners, but active participants and teachers. This contributed to a wider debate on equality in university structures and the presentation of works in professional spaces of display. The sense of urgency, bustle and excitement that was palpable prior and during the WNFs, in particular, infected the undergraduate student participants who were generally not permitted to display work in the Gallery. (Fig 57)

Given the timing of the project toward the end of semester and assessment time, the students were able to transfer their work directly from the classroom that day, where it had just been assessed, down into the gallery and install it in any space they wished—to give it a ‘second airing’ that night. This sudden displacement of their work from student assessment to party (fiasco) mode not only put the work before a different audience; it generated the energy or agency that the *PI* was seeking to create. Their work in this setting became about celebration and contemplation rather than credentialing. The agency created a quiet revolution that had significant impact on the way in which these ‘professional’ activities and spaces were normally viewed as hierarchical and restricted.



Figure 57. Student talking to visitors viewing her examination work in the Gallery’s storeroom at the WNF.
Image source: Fiona Lee

The second major form of social agency created was through developing events in the Critique Space. A high proportion of the participants I spoke to observed that there had been no avenues for discussion, debate, contemplation or critique of art and the systems of art; the goal of the Critique Space was to activate these dialogical engagements to enrich some of the activities that were occurring.

The serendipitous element of dialogue brought humor and a sense of fun which created its own agency, but there were genuine moments of critical analysis occurring in this designated space, mostly demonstrated in the master classes, symposium, Wayne Hudson’s talks and Lucy Hawthorne’s round table discussion on the problems associated with the art scene.

In terms of agency, on the one hand, Bruguera tended to incite a younger generation, empowering them to make a political transformation in the future, *The PI’s* aim on the other hand was less activist, but more immediate. It was directed at temporarily equalising hierarchies, enabling participants to rethink fixed ideas and structures in dialogue with others. This leveling of authority prompted and encouraged a certain freedom to enact ideas and practical experiments, where participants who were mainly student, developed their own particular capacity for learning as a social and collective engagement. This was a form of agency that stood in contrast to the systems of teaching and learning they were experiencing in their

regular courses. At stake then was the development of a condition where more value was placed on the self-teaching of art as a process in action, rather than as fixed content. There was a distinct shift in understanding of the role of the artist presenting individually authored works, to an artist as part of a community – art process became an act of sharing and co-production. The significance of this quieter mode of disruption, was that it demonstrated the value in leveling hierarchies, even temporarily, and listening to *all* those who have a stake in the problem at hand; in this case in the teaching, production and display of art.

Co-production as promissory symbiosis

The promissory outcomes and the communality of both projects were underpinned by the formation of parasitic and symbiotic behavior that went beyond the usual collaboration or solo presentation, it was perceived more as a ‘co-production’. This notion of co-production, perhaps in place of collaboration is not new, Paul O’Neill for instance often refers to it in his capacity as an artist-curator, and the coalescence of ideas and artworks overlapping.

My understanding of the difference between co-productive rather than collaborative engagement is that collaboration is the action of working with someone to produce something or achieve some form of goal. Alternatively co-production tends to imply groups or individuals in society coming together to generate new knowledge and understanding, the latter being the mode of productive and symbiotic partnerships I detected in the two studies. My observations from the co-productive activity was that it tended to cultivate a potency to engage differently, which did not just occur between individual participants, but happened between the school, the participants and the research project as a whole. While this is a very subtle difference, it nonetheless had some resonance with the idea of socially engaged art, where there is an imperative for generative and transformative outcomes.

Quietly testing hierarchies

Testing compliance became a factor with most of the events. The tedium of undertaking the paperwork to meet with new OH&S (Occupational Health and Safety) legislation became something of a sport and made participants realise that as an exercise, testing compliance could be generative in its transformation of the staid situations and gallery procedures. To cite just one of many examples, when Amanda Shone and Bec Stevens papered over one of the exit doors in the gallery (with its illuminated safety exit sign) they were told by Security to remove

the paper, but they stubbornly and patiently negotiated an alternative. Instead, they placed their own peculiar stand-alone exit sign, which directed visitors to another door, a solution that either satisfied the Security staff, or wore them down.

Bureaucracy was quietly challenged on several other occasions when *The PI*, for instance, needed a liquor permit that could be implemented at any time depending on the participant's projects (normally it would take several days, but because people were developing projects constantly, a blanked seven-week liquor license was applied for, and finally accepted). Equally there were rules that were bent rather than broken, such as the animals coming into the gallery, security was lacking when the garden was opened to the public, and OH &S issues were breached with many of the works being sited in the dangerous storeroom or the loading bay.

The hegemonic role of the artist as the sole author was underplayed in *The PI*, for instance, there were no provisions for identifying whose work was whose, no labeling or planned promotion, with many works just appearing as spontaneous anonymous interventions. Titles for the works were often invented as they progressed or sometimes even after the event. The collective nature of the project, particularly in the WNF was where the individualist ego was transcended—mostly forsaken for the good of the collective outcome to rethink the Gallery's future and to be part of a collective action. However, the British artist and writer Liam Gillick contends that for the most part collectivity tends to offer a degree of freedom associated with anonymity, which was also evident in some of the events of *The PI*. In discursive models of collectivity, he argues it:

...is a practice that offers the opportunity to be a relatively un-examined, free agent in a collective project... allowing one to 'hide within the collective'. It allows the artist to develop a set of arguments and individual positions without having to conform to an established model of artistic or educational quality (2008, 30).

As is known, Claire Bishop takes issue with collaboration as a means of hiding, but also taking into account an artists' responsibility for the works; she contends that being involved in co-produced projects means one is able to discharge responsibility, or perhaps produce works while at the same time hide behind the group. In this way, it becomes unclear who is actually responsible for the work or project.¹³² While I am sympathetic to Bishop's concerns about artists' deviously using communal processes to their advantage—and I am sure there are many, I would likewise contest her concerns about authorship. I observed in the 'Rogue Academy's'

¹³² Bishop, Claire. 2006b. "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents." *Artforum* February. 180

two case studies that the issue of authorship almost seemed irrelevant to the participants. Most of the participants in *The PI* and *ODWC* appeared not to be interested in labeling their individual contributions and responsibilities; their concerns were more to do with the process at hand and how they were going to orchestrate their contribution as co-productive outputs of the projects, namely the zines and the WNFs. In view of both projects, I maintain that it is possible to create a successful co-productive agency (as opposed to collaboration) without issues of authorship—something that could be fostered more in future projects within art schools.



Figure 58. Undergraduate student Jason James' credentials as a Risk Assessment Officer being put into use for *The PI*
Image source: Fiona Lee

Testing the rules also included the fact that the Gallery's formal artists' contracts could not be completed because there were no provisions made in the document for works with no titles, no fixed medium or monetary value. We resisted branding the exhibition as much as possible, not as a deliberate attempt to defy order and conformity, rather because it simply didn't fit with what we were attempting to do, that is to be flexible and indeterminate for as long as possible up until the moment of presentation. Only when we

had to give fixed ideas, like information for funding or administration through the university system, did we relent. Formal risk assessments were assigned in part to an undergraduate student who just happened to have worked in the organisation of large events and had experience to help us. **(Fig 58)**

In reaction to the rigors and tedium of compliance with the new work health and safety regulations, two clownish safety officers suddenly arrived on the scene to become fixtures in the WNFs. A pair of drag kings, 'Barry Bothways' and 'Bruce', officiously but rather kindly issued safety breach notices whenever they thought they detected a line of any sort being crossed (for example, an over-filled plate), and formed arbitrary lines of ticker tape around objects they could not confidently identify as 'proper art'. **(Fig 59)**



Figure 59. Undergraduate students Tanya Maxwell and Pheobe Adams as performers Bruce and Barry.
Image Source: Fiona Lee

Hosting and generosity were a valuable and positive aspect of the *ODWC*. While it included a small self-selected group of people, the concept was carried over into the *PI* with the aim of being more inclusive: making people welcome and giving them a sense of overall responsibility for the success of the event.¹³³

The potluck dinners were a way of sharing company and the cost of gathering, welcoming new members to the group and to generate continuing interest. Participants organised and cleaned up, rather than the work being done by paid labour, Gallery staff or volunteers. The potlucks were held at key points during the seven weeks, and while not initially well attended, gained momentum as *The PI* progressed. Other acts of hospitality marked other events: Lucy Hawthorne baked a cake to go with the Speakers soapbox (**Fig 60**), Meg Walch

held a dumpling workshop and Brigita Ozolins, Yvette Watt and Rae Marr provided either vegan food or wine and a meal in respect to their different events. While many of these acts can be seen in daily life, being brought together in this particular venue at this particular time



Figure 60 Lucy Hawthorne's Soap box and the hospitable offering of cake
Image Source: Lucy Hawthorne

disrupted expectations of how this gallery had operated previously, with the only hospitality acts being the formal monthly gallery openings for exhibitions. The acts of hospitality unsettled the normal way in which people interacted with the space, which serendipitously evoked new conditions of understanding. Used in pedagogical art praxis in a similar way such as *Unitednationsplaza's*, fiery debates emanating from the kitchen, a particular set of circumstances was affected through acts of hospitality.

¹³³ Acting on and taking responsibility for one's own inclusion in events or situations was a finding of the wider group *PI* meeting 8th October 2012. See Bulletin No 4 on <http://pibulletin.blogspot.com.au/>

Rethinking the visual as pedagogy

As mentioned in Chapter one, art as education has been termed ‘transpedagogy’ by artist-educator Pablo Helguera, who is among those who identified conceptual art as the origin of this current resurgence in socially engaged art that has a pedagogical emphasis. Socially engaged art or SEA as Helguera terms it, has been seen as a new means to implant a more cognitive element to art through social engagement, particularly through the lens and associations of those from outside the art world. While SEA sits within the realm of conceptual and process-based art, the main distinction between them is the aspect of social engagement.¹³⁴

Using social engagement as a cognitive construct as *part of* the consideration and make-up of a material artwork paralleled the ambitions for *The PI*. I described this term in Chapter two as a ‘thinking aesthetic’. This strategy sought to identify a set of future pedagogical objectives for the Gallery (and through association, the art school’s teaching and learning) as dialogical components initiated to value-add, or add another layer to the understanding of what I knew as an unbalanced view of art—predominantly focused on the visual and material aspects of interpretation and display. By attempting to coerce a set of cognitive ambitions and enriching the audiences in Jacques Rancière’s emancipatory ways might well evolve through ‘letting go’ to what had been engrained in the Gallery’s culture—that of passively viewing artworks as a spectator.

Throughout the evolution of *The PI* project, an aspect of its ambition was to conceive of it as dialogical art; the title ‘inquiry’ signifies a strong basis for questioning and this was instrumental in the development of events for the Gallery. The aim was to bring about transformation or reform through simple interrogative dialogue, however there was no effort on my part to impose the stamp of ‘dialogical art’ onto *The PI*—equally for the most part, people involved in the *PI* seemed not to deliberately connect or fashion their contribution to my interest in dialogical art. After all, apart from a few writers, most participants identified as visual artists, and a smaller proportion identified as performers.

¹³⁴ As this research was ending, an important debate ignited over the London architectural firm Assemble who were the non-artist recipient of the 2015 Turner Prize in the UK, normally awarded to solo artists. An e-flux article suggests that Assemble were selected over the utility of their project to achieve practical outcomes and was critical of their project as a community project undertaken as a design brief, not as a critical artistic work. In light of this, the author argues Assemble were not able to critically articulate their status as socially engaged and are thus not representative of the field of artistic practice—namely socially engaged art. On the one hand, I argue the categorising of architects and designers in a ‘us and them’ manner is not useful. On the other, this article highlights the importance of artists and non-artists alike, being able to clearly articulate their critical position in terms of their own stake in the endeavour—be it an art prize, an exhibition or a design brief. See Quaintance, Morgan. 2015. “Teleology and the Turner Prize or: the New Conservatism.” *e-flux conversations* 10 (<http://conversations.e-flux.com/t/teleology-and-the-turner-prize-or-utility-the-new-conservatism/2936/11>).

Acknowledging that the conceptual artists of the 60s and 70s were operating within a different social art ecology at the time, there was nonetheless an echo of the past in the *The PI*'s mission. The initial ambition was for a strong dialogical component in *The PI* to increase the capacity for cognitive engagement, not at the expense of the visual, but to act as an active process of understanding through the social. It began with a set of lofty ideals, which included:

- a peer-reviewed publishing arm for the Gallery, superseding the customary exhibition catalogues and adding a more scholarly aspect to research outputs,
- platforms for analytic engagement to works that would encourage criticality,
- avenues for teaching and learning in the Gallery so that the Gallery and its programme could become more useful as a teaching resource,
- international guests artists to counter provinciality and a reliance on self-reflexivity
- pedagogues and curators to share thinking, encouraging interdisciplinarity and co-productive activity, and,
- modes of community outreach to bring diverse publics that would make the Gallery a more dynamic space.

While these ambitious objectives were not fully realised during Phase one of *The PI*, the value in this strategy became apparent in claiming them as potentialities; conversations readily emerged prior to, during and after *The PI*, articulating and seeding genuine prospects for the future of the Gallery, and the pedagogical repercussions for the art school's teaching and learning.

The broader public

The PI was driven as a question in and of itself; it was set up not as an exhibition but an inquiry and the artists, participants and students were often left to explain this to members of the general public that came through the Gallery door—which was a process that in itself became an act or performance. For the hapless visitor who stumbled upon *The PI*—and for him or her to see what could only be described as its shambolic aesthetic, and not 'art' as they expected—we made every opportunity to welcome each them with a statement 'this is not an exhibition, but an inquiry'. (Fig 61)



Figure 61. Audience listening to a presentation by a higher degree research candidate, which the general public attended.
Image source: Fiona Lee

Of course, an eternal problem for social practice is how does an audience stumble across something worthwhile? Claire Bishop notes:

participatory art [Bishop's interpretation of social practice] is often at pains to emphasise process over definitive image, concept over object. It tends to value what is invisible: a group dynamic, a social situation, a change of energy, a raised consciousness. As a result, it is an art dependent on first-hand experience, and preferably over a long duration. ...very few observers are in a position to take such an overview (2012, 6).

While the emancipatory nature of this project was found to give a collective sense of freedom from formally imposed ends, this liberty was however, confronting for some participants and audience members whose expectations and art works were accustomed to more methodical or outcome-based processes. This was also true of some of the artists participating in *The PI* who were not used to exposing their 'raw' ideas outside the security of a studio.

Greeting audience members as they came through the door, and enabling artists to discuss their works in the gallery was fruitful for viewers and artists alike. Although time consuming, the process of engaging in personal dialogue was useful as a way to increase the understanding of what we were trying to achieve in *The PI*, without being overly didactic. This was demonstrated when two art students conducted a prolonged and, I observed, agonistic conversation (at times bordering on argument) with two British tourists. Without being instructed both sides nonetheless took great care in using a Gadamerian-type approach of sharing their somewhat, different horizons where, at the end, there were no winners, just more enlightened individuals—on both sides of the argument.

The implication was made clear to them that they were taking part in the rethinking processes of the Gallery's future and that we welcomed their involvement. The reaction to this initial disclosure was not always successful. Those participants and visitors to *The PI*, who had fixed ideas (Humean—in contrast to its opposite Kantian-type personality)¹³⁵ and who displayed a lack of desire to engage in the playful notion of 'something else' or 'other' than what they relied on or understood, were not going to engage, and they often made this clear. It was not so much anger, but they gave a discrete sense of disagreement.

Conceptual, relational and socially engaged art is often challenging even for those who are fully cognisant of non-traditional art. The jaded observations made by one of the master class participants brought to light real issues for social practice in relation to the effort involved in experiencing these works. It reads:

"I've just come from the Istanbul Biennial and I think there are a lot of works that really reflected a particular focus on a relational experience for the viewer—an attempt at it anyway. But I was asking these questions, " What am I seeing? Am I seeing art? Am I seeing a documentary or documentation of an artwork? What am I actually experiencing?" I think there is a lot to ask about what expectations we place on the viewer as well. Site number five at the Istanbul Biennial provides a specific example. It was difficult to find the space and the work didn't look like recognisable art. It was a series of A4 images printed out and pinned to the wall in a row, and someone had to explain the whole process to me, which I didn't really understand very clearly. But I ended up sitting at a table, drinking Turkish tea and having a good conversation with interesting people. But as far as the art itself goes, I felt a sense of disappointment.... I wasn't seeing anything visually aesthetic. I had to work really hard at understanding the project. Someone had to stand there and explain to me what was happening. I had to read a lot. I had to take in a lot. I do that every day. I guess I expect something a little bit more from art. I want it to mediate for me so that it will give me an experience where I don't have to do that hard, everyday work".¹³⁶

I am of two minds about this comment, and although I agree with it up to a point; I find didactic works and much art-as-documentation mostly uninspiring, but I cannot accept the overall conclusion that art should be mediated to avoid effort on behalf of the viewer. Grant Kester also argues that 'these projects [do] require a shift in our understanding of the work of art—a redefinition of aesthetic experience as durational rather than immediate' meaning that in reality, we need to develop a new theoretical and aesthetic language (and perhaps setting) in which to critique and evaluate these artworks. This would enable them, historic terms, to be

¹³⁵ See Appendix A, Personality types for socially engaged art.

¹³⁶ The Plimsoll Inquiry master class with Nikos Papastergiadis and Ross Gibson 10th October 2013

seen as a ‘work of art as a process—a locus of discursive exchange and negotiation’ (Kester 2004, 12). This takes effort. It is clear in this statement though, that even those with a background in art still find the effort of more conceptual works demanding, so a general audience would likewise find them inaccessible.

Something that I felt I was not able to deliver on was to significantly increase the desire for this type of work. The master class participant’s ‘*sense of disappointment*’ to my mind was ameliorated by the participant ‘*having a good conversation with interesting people*’, which is the place of hermeneutics in this instance, and I would submit that this was possibly the most potent measure of the artwork, despite its lack of visual aesthetic. Perhaps for projects and works of art that are not much more than documentary evidence of an event, or conversely just a visual display of art objects, then ‘*having a good conversation with interesting people*’ to expand out the field of discussion beyond expectations might well offer some alternative that could be used within the art school setting. While this is the remit of a well-facilitated critique in many art schools, adding other people, dimensions, ideas and a sense of serendipity that extends and open out the discussion, could be more prevalent and be built into course structures, projects and exhibitions.

Participants



Figure 62. Academics, members of the public, artists talking part in the master classes facilitated by Nikos Papastergiadis and Ross Gibson.
Image source: Fiona Lee

In the *ODWC* project, we found comments and feelings about the project were not so evident while the project was underway, issues were discussed more in retrospect. Over the ensuing few months, feelings of exclusion became apparent. As I suggested earlier, the *ODWC* was reported as being ‘too academic’ and exclusive and anecdotal evidence also suggests that some felt alienated by the intrusion of a group of artists from elsewhere; it was likened to another ‘colonial’ invasion.

These types of feelings were not as apparent in *The PI*, and I surmise that this is because the participant body was more involved in the part they were to play in the proceedings, both in the development and presentation of their artworks.

The inclusion of three undergraduates in the master class discussions, created a useful tension for the students themselves, and for the more senior artists and academics involved. Being included in a more senior event as a participant equalised their position within the group and tended to give them a more empowered position to speak out about issues that were concerning them, for example, about the intimidating nature of the Gallery for students and highlighted its failing as a pedagogical tool for the University. (Fig 62)

Autonomy through transparency

Throughout the inquiry process, the intention of *The PI* was to be as autonomous, yet this made it seem ‘messy’ and uncontained, making it difficult to pin down the necessary ‘outcomes’ to fit funding criteria, satisfy bureaucratic regulations and justify our objectives to participants and others with a vested interest in the Gallery and the school. To overcome this, we sought to be as transparent and as flexible as possible.

In the second case study, we sought to bring organisational information into the spotlight by allowing the process used by the institution and bureaucracy (the organising entity) to be *transparent, accessible, and changeable* by all who took part. I made this move under the assumption that this action would more likely produce an openness and produce self-directed participants that share in the future of co-production of generative knowledge.¹³⁷ This was done through using conversation and dialogue as negotiating tools—for example through social media, email mail outs, blogs, cloud sharing of information, potluck dinners and informal hosting, such as one on one meetings at cafes, where participants were able to actively question. At one stage, however, some of the information became confidential and a separate ‘admin’ Dropbox was established for the steering committee, thus my contention was not effectively tested, however for the most part I contend that by informing participants and authorities, they became more accommodating to our needs and goals.

In conclusion, the duration of *The PI*, was over a period of seven weeks, which allowed us to experiment with ideas, within a specified timeframe and not concern ourselves with consequences. The fact that there was a ‘crisis’ in the school (in terms of uncertainty cause by major restructuring), and in contemporary art and education, seemed to give permission for

¹³⁷ Dewey contends that the minute one mentions ‘organisation’ the term is automatically linked to formal education and tradition. See Dewey, John. 1938. *Experience & Education*. New York: Touchstone. 31

the participants to bracket out certain constraints and throw caution to the wind. Events were 'allowed' to happen that would normally be constrained or generally avoided. These were only small things, such as undergraduates in the gallery, food, cooking and animals in the gallery, as well as a host of security breaches—but what they signified, was that something other *can* happen. This is how we enacted festival time – a suspension of the usual work time; it was outside normality. The projects used the soft approaches of hermeneutics to advantage by setting up an inquiry that spawned useful tensions or agonistic tendencies. This empowered participants to resist and overcome hegemony and aroused and attended to such irreconcilable things as absurdity, failure and the unknown, and indeed tackled obstacles (such as the overt hegemony of new workplace safety laws for instance) that seemed resolute.

This form of agonistic practice I would argue is especially useful in times of crisis where its methods can be used to play with the peculiarities of uncertainty to advantage and to address stasis. The breaking or deschooling of strict regimes, where permissions are temporarily granted for exploration, are where the pedagogical moments occurred, where the 'what ifs' can be tested and risks are taken without penalty. These agonistic conditions were found to elicit a number of unexpected, but innovative responses, in which participants in the projects sought to problematise not only their own work for the project, but its relationship to the gallery's physical space, and its exhibitionary and administrative programming. 'Friendly conflicts' occurred by bringing divergent everyday interests together such as cooking, hosting, Fung Shui, dance, music, writing, activism, theatre, architecture and philosophy for instance, that mixed in fertile, yet agonistic interactions, that temporarily and playfully challenged fixed positions.

The question I asked in terms of the facilitator position—did the CoI approach work in terms of conversational hermeneutics, and the answer is yes and no. In *The PI* there were a number of different circumstances I needed to consider that made the CoI different from that described in the philosophical teaching of children. First, as I mentioned, we were dealing with erudite adults not children. Second, the object under inquiry was a gallery, its operations and agency—not a book or text as suggested in the CoI literature, and third, the facilitator function became more curatorial, not only driving the course of discussion and action but also the administrator and initiator position—much more than would be in a normal CoI. So I had to find and adapt relevant points from this approach, which I believed would provide a flexible and dynamic mode of questioning needed for a philosophic and ethical pathway towards understanding, so that it could be robust enough to work in a real working environment. A well facilitated critical feedback session in any art school, where the artwork is the subject of wider conversations is

very similar in nature to the COI. However, the difference lies in the way the two case studies operated, offering unmediated and durational episodes of self-actualisation as serendipitous moments for participants. They were driven by a sense of collective engagement all aiming to reinvent a way of being co-productive. This all being said, the process of consultation, along with question and response to others in the community throughout *The PI* was classic CoI. We had formed a community that was ‘inquiring’ into a subject, and this fits the wider CoI mode of operation¹³⁸.

Finally the aim of finding true democratic platforms for community engagement were tested, but found to be unattainable, my only solution offered from this experience is to make them as democratic as possible. Divisiveness and power, as Miwon Kwon and others have pointed out, is inevitably a problem the moment a community is created, because you immediately set up the notion of the ‘other’—there will always be insiders and outsiders. You just have to make inclusion as egalitarian as possible. Despite the many issues to do with community exclusivity, the dissolution of the author and the openness and inclusiveness leading to some low-quality works, there is no doubt that projects that are well facilitated by egalitarian means can open up some unexpected surprises through a social agency, which can be used as a means of transformation.

¹³⁸ In the interim research between the two projects, this leveling of power in group conversations (opposed to one-on-one conversations) around a specific topic also confirmed greater production of knowledge. See Appendix A, Other Research

CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY AND FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

Over the last fifteen years, I have been a student, artist, curator teacher and researcher within a tertiary art education system and worked in arts administration at a contemporary art organisation. These diverse experiences have led me to understand that sound bureaucratic administration and economic accountability have increasingly become a priority for art institutions trying to survive in harsh economic times. The preceding four chapters of this research scrutinised aspects of a university art school as a critique of the common type of institutional structure that provides educational instruction in contemporary art practice and found that the determination of bureaucratic structures in which these systems operate have created many weaknesses. The original contribution to the field of creative visual arts is in the establishment of facilitated conversational platform, informed by a Community of Inquiry methodology that enables some of these weaknesses to be addressed in positive ways. These platforms are initially parasitic in nature towards their host; yet unfold as a mutually beneficial social tool for students, artists, curators and educators developing university programmes and courses curricula.

Central to the research has been a general discourse on the diminishing sense of democracy associated with education. As Raimond Gaita (2011) and Robert Manne (2012) point out in Chapter one, autonomy is fundamental to protecting pedagogy from outside forces, including the aggressive demands of commerce, however, there is some evidence to suggest that the move toward the commodification of education comes at the expense of ‘conversational contestation’ as a democratic agency within pedagogy. Manne argues that ‘If the disciplined pursuit of truth was the university’s purpose, untrammelled freedom of thought was its condition and lifelong tenure its guarantee’ (2012). One of the main issues evident is that democracy in the form of autonomous thinking must be maintained as means of preserving the integrity of education.

Moreover the shift toward the highly bureaucratised education affects the agility and flexibility educators need to develop innovative curricula, not only as a fundamental requirement in the field of creative arts, but as an essential component for keeping programmes and courses

abreast of current practices in the field. The current practices in the field that I suggest here are those that have not yet been grounded in formal theoretical or artistic analysis. This is normally through peer reviewed scholarly essays, curator publications and authentications by galleries, museums, art fairs and biennials to name just a few systems. The practices I refer to work outside these formalities whereby they retain a specific capacity to continually reinvent artistic practice and shift viewer expectations in a much more urgent manner. While there are exceptions to the rule, there has been an unexplained reticence by universities to explore and transform traditional beaux-arts education and to shift to encompass these urgencies. A situation exists where art schools revert to known and tried standardised systems that tend to be compliant to university bureaucracy, one that prioritises economics and satisfies consumer demand. Unfortunately, maintaining inflexible silo-based teaching based on these criteria leaves little room for liminal thinking, the experimental, the immediate, the emergent or the durational aspects of art to unfold. This means the knowledge that is imparted is not always indicative of the wider depth of practices currently being applied in the field, nor does it mean the provision of a rounded quality education much less the autonomous production of knowledge.

Artists, working outside academia, from grass roots level to highly refined research, in the visual arts, have a broad capacity for understanding what are fresh and emerging creative practices. Consequently, as we saw in Chapter one, their autonomy means they are at liberty to develop new approaches to pedagogy without the restrictions placed on them by overly bureaucratic systems of control. This is not always straight forward, for there are some cases where influence by funding bodies, and other entities that have vested interests, which are also manipulative, influential or biased in outcome, (Bishop 2004, 2006b) on works that are said to be autonomous. In the main though, it is argued that artists do have more of a free reign to develop dynamic pedagogical projects that advance the production of knowledge outside traditional learning platforms. My interest is bringing some of those strategies into the art school, as a curatorial methodology, by permeating at little cost in a way that value-adds to existing courses and programmes.

As is often said we live in an information age in which we are facing the consequences of an addiction to 'speed', as Paul Virilio has identified (2006). This is best exemplified by our habituated dependence upon instant access to knowledge. As Virilio describes, living on (and with) 'speed' has many consequences, both good and bad (2007). On the one hand, for the

visual arts it has opened up access to knowledge and information previously not available to such a wide global community. On the other, it has created a public that surface skims for information that leads to superficial knowledge gain—or what as Bakhtin refers to as ‘rented’ information because there is no labour involved in accessing it (Holquist and Liapunov 1990). Whatever the effect of easily accessible information, it has nonetheless created a public that is continually seeking more; and this includes more diversity and richer experiences from their engagement with art. In other words, there is an increasing public thirst for deeper, more meaningful ways to engage in the art experience. This experience is an encounter that goes beyond the normative Modernist legacy of formal ideologies that are still engrained in many of our institutions, academies, galleries and museums. The art experience that this research refers to offers a richer engagement for a public that are now connected to world debates, who have an ability to voice their own ideas through platforms like social media, and are aware of greater issues than what art has formally delivered in the past. There are types of practices that offer an art experience that delivers a closer connection to people’s own lived experiences, provide a connection to world issues such as the environment, global migration and other global conditions, which are increasingly now affecting them.

Artists are dealing with these issues in a variety of ways, in the former case of speed, artists are rethinking the idea of instant gratification and organising durational projects that lengthen the experience of art in order to delay cognition. The result is that this draws out thinking processes so that publics have time to become more cognitively aware about issues or thematic ideas within art projects. In the latter case, many artists are rising to the challenge of giving more of their works to the public by taking a curatorial stance in the production of their works – a multi-layering of concepts and ideas rather than relying on the single function of visual aesthetics. In this case, we see the use of social formats to develop pedagogical platforms as models of education, which deliver new modes of social engagement that add to the experience of art.

Early in the research, I established that the pedagogical and dialogical forms of practice, grounded in hermeneutic conversation and understanding, play an important, but unrecognised, role in linguistically mediating new and emergent ideas of artists practicing in the field. These circumstances emphasise a need for rethinking the way in which art is taught that might help artists in training to critically engage more with their publics, which in turn provides a better-informed public audience. Socially engaged art is a flexible mode of practice

that can provide the flexibility needed. Through the establishment of communities around an object or subject of inquiry, it supports an environment that generates synchronicity and helps to negotiate embryonic concepts.

With its historical roots in early-mid twentieth century avant-garde, socially engaged art and the pedagogical models of art practice that evolved around it, emanated from a decisive moment in the early 90s, identified by the French curator Nicolas Bourriaud. He coined the term 'relational aesthetics' in which he describes a growing tendency for artists to work in interpersonal ways with their public audiences. Around this groundswell of sociability in art was a rise in educational art practices, which follow a long line of artists, including Joseph Beuys and Alan Kaprow, who engaged in a mode of practice that had education as its core component.

Historically, pivotal moments in education occur in the upheaval of post war environments where radical experimentation in industry, culture and education saw the foundation of educational institutions such as the Bauhaus in Germany and Black Mountain College in the USA (1933). We then saw the establishment of alternative progressive education in the 60s and 70, particularly in America, influenced by John Dewey and in South America from the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire.

Despite some early radical thinking around performance and non-object based art practices in the 70s by writers such as Donald Brook and Ian North, there has been very little activity or critical writing emanating from Australia on art associated with social modes of engagement or alternative education. While alternative education is now becoming more common in the work of artists and collectives in Australia there is still very little discourse. I postulate that these earlier incursions into art education by artists and institutions in Western Europe and America may well be linked to why this current trend of social engaged art, and the educational formats that are emanating out of the practice, remain more prevalent.

An important aspect is that the place of art education in a highly regulated university becomes questionable when problems of homogenisation and control become fundamentally at odds with the freedom and creative autonomy of art practice and its pedagogy. One of the consequences of this is a lag between current art practice in the field and contemporary art education leading to a failure to properly account for experimental fields of art (such as social

practice) that are happening now. This shortcoming is not only a disadvantage to emergent artists who, when they leave art school, find activities in the field they know nothing about, but ultimately further distances emergent publics from such fields as social practice.

Early this century, a number of major conferences and publications brought to the fore some of the issues to do with art school education highlighting how socially engaged artists are reframing the way we experience art and drawing our attention to the way in which audiences in our contemporary culture desire more rewarding experiences. The current watershed has enabled socially engaged artists, through modes of dialogue and pedagogy, to quietly become game changers in the educational debates and in the way the public experiences art.

Problematic issues though have arisen as a result of attempting to pigeonhole the often unwieldy activity of social and pedagogical practice into what are effectively evaluative structures based on the current, but stable, historical and theoretical readings of art. Those at the forefront of identifying and evaluating pedagogical practice are a number of historians, critics, theorists and educators including Claire Bishop, Grant Kester and Irit Rogoff how have been attempting to corral pedagogical art into some form of evaluation.

I acknowledged an imbalance in the critical discussions of social practice where very few observers support Claire Bishop, who at times seemed a lone critic of social practice. Bishop's main concerns centre on the evaluation of these active, multi-dimensional and durational projects, which are in fact thwarted by the often emancipatory and highly ambiguous nature of the ideas and knowledge around social practice. Most seem to claim and counterclaim her arguments about the appraisal of the spectatorial aspects of works themselves, with little evidence in scholarly writing on the transformative capacity of the 'weaknesses' or lesser nuances of pedagogical exchange, let alone how they might then be adapted to be of use in art schools.

Two principle attributes recognised in this context are those of play and agonism, which are characteristics of the conversational space. Conversation in a Gadamerian sense is foremost hermeneutical, in other words, it facilitates understanding by ontologically situating the interlopers, at play, along with object to be discussed. It entices criticality while at the same time retaining respect for the opinion of others, which aligns with the political principle of agonism, so described by Chantal Mouffe. What ties these attributes in so well with art, and

social practice, in particular, is that hermeneutic processes and the agonistic ‘friendly conflicts’ have the capacity to quietly break down the authoritarian voice; something that underpins the ethical and egalitarian approaches of socially engaged art and its use of pedagogy to challenge the art institutions.

A key element of this type of thinking is the ability to embrace weakness as a strength. This can be found in Gadamer and Mouffe as well as many of the artists who use flexible, multi-dimensional and convivial modes of production as strategies to destabilise hegemony. Their hermeneutic and political approaches have clear links that ask that we come together in conversation through respect, the sharing of horizons as a space for interpretation—one that is always infinite, a pluralistic view that is not antagonistic but always remains in conflict.

Pedagogues, such as Tania Bruguera, Anton Vidokle and Pablo Helguera, while acknowledging the structures and support of more regulated entities such as the school and the museum, nonetheless have found their epistemological roles most effective when they work outside (but along with) the formal systems of education and presentation. Pedagogical art forms used in this pluralistic way quietly disrupt our immediate understanding of what it is we are experiencing yet, mutually respects and adds to its existence. Mobilising these alternative ways of pedagogy through dialogical processes acts as both an instrument for, and a means of, understanding.

The durational aspects of pedagogical art require extra work—and thus a new approach that compels those who engage in understanding art to exert more time and effort in thinking. Claire Doherty (2014a), the Director of the public art commissioning agency, Situations, argues that there is some evidence to suggest an increased public desire for more thinking and innovation in art, which underscores an intellectual engagement that sets art aside from the myriad of visual and spectatorial art forms that are so easily accessible (and readable) today. Pedagogical art projects promote a new culture of reading art that slows down our rate of exchange and thus enables more time for rumination.

The cases studies

'*Rogue Academy*' was developed as a research project that comprised two curated dialogical interventionist art events, presented here as case studies and devised as 'alternative' thinking spaces as much as they were alternative spaces for pedagogy and the presentation of art. Two guiding observations led the development of the studies, the first of which is the impact of institutional bureaucracy in art schools on creativity, autonomy and knowledge integrity, seen as the cornerstone of higher education. The second observation is that art schools have failed to adapt from traditional Beaux-arts conditions where the production of an art object or performance is finished before a viewer experiences it, to conditions where the 'production' ("practice" in the conventional sense) and reception are coincident' (Kester 2015). This problem is compounded by the loss of opportunity to create affiliated critical discourse in academia to bring these non-traditional practices to account.¹³⁹

Both observations have led to an 'uncontested hegemony' (Mouffe 2006), a stalemate that leaves a gap in knowledge and first-hand experience for the student artist, particularly for when they leave tertiary education and practice in the field. The research has concluded that university art schools often fail to respond directly to current experimental practices in the field, particularly in light of a push by supporting agencies toward community, collaboration and social participation in public art. By the time many innovative modes of non-traditional contemporary practice infiltrate the curricula of institutions they are often highly mediated and historic. This research investigation is a response to this gap between what is being taught in the academy, (as a site of learning), and what is going on in the field of creative practice (acknowledged as a site of research activity).

Rather than remain flexible to shifting changes in culture and society, the detachment caused by an institutional reliance on quantitative measurements (student/ teacher ratios, research outputs, cost efficiency and other performance indicators), effectively limits the possibilities for genuine understanding in the field of practice outside the academy. This distancing places educators in a position of conformity and compliance rather than knowledge production. As

¹³⁹ In the very last stages of writing this thesis, Nicolas Bourriaud published an article in *ArtReview*, which describes some of the methodologies suggested in this research. He advocates teaching from a 'curatorial' model rather than a traditional Beaux-Art model, the need for a stronger balance between practice and theory, the academy and the art world, contemporary practice and historical traditions, and that art schools are generally out of touch because they are caught up in the university systems of governance and economics. He contends that art schools have lost the monopoly on art education in its broadest sense, and that, despite the so-called sweeping energy of the 'educational turn' at the turn of the century, things haven't changed – something that I also allude to Bourriaud, Nicolas. 2015. "Revisiting the Educational Turn (How I Tried to Renovate an Art School)." *ArtReview* (November).

such the academy has become a non-democratic and non-egalitarian place to learn.

Institutionalised hegemony along with a domination of medium-based specificity, object and material production is constricting and not conducive to the development of curricula that is considerate of public life, such as the subtle shifts in social and cultural values and ideals.

Against these observations, the central question that motivated this research project was how might artists, academics, students and teachers counter the hegemony created by these reflections. If so, could these measures be used to develop degree programmes, projects and events that enable art schools to be more conversant with practices occurring in the field?

The solution I proposed was to develop two multifaceted and conversational projects that were mutually symbiotic; integrated into existing teaching and exhibition structures in a provincial art school with the aim of increasing knowledge and offering a pathway into difficult projects. They would adopt elements from hermeneutic philosophy and in particular, the alternative Philosophy for Children movement that inspired the facilitated Community of Inquiry (CoI) approach.

The projects were socially engaged platforms that sought to momentarily destabilise the formality and inhibiting power structures existing in art schools that tend to teach from a beaux-arts tradition. This disruption enabled the flexibility needed to sample current practices in the field and allow democratic and egalitarian learning methodologies, where participants had the capacity to be ‘simultaneously teachers *and* students’ (Freire 1970, 72).

Thus, the projects were inquisitorial and ‘rogue’, experimenting with a number of diverse social processes that were adapted and could be used as future working models. These projects enabled a link between current contemporary practice and more traditional modes of art production and presentation by providing the opportunity for academia to develop a more rigorous critical discourse and analysis of art as it is happening.

As a contribution to the field, the research identified that by integrating facilitated one-off projects through establishing an egalitarian Community of Inquiry (CoI) approach served to fill a gap in knowledge. This strategy forged links between first-hand knowledge and that, which is traditionally distilled through academia. A CoI approach encouraged the production of new knowledge by expanding participants horizons through shared exchanges, increased

intellectual inclusiveness by offering the opportunity to use social ‘weak’, modes of engagement (such as gathering, hosting and conversation), as an extension of their practices.

Embracing the notion of ‘the festival’; an anti-authorial communal gathering of individuals who collectively work towards ‘free-play’ and open-ended discovery, established the projects as ‘non projects’. This ambiguity allowed the freedom to subvert and ‘misuse’ some of the existing infrastructures of prevailing university course and programmes, and for participants to do the same with their own practices. The concept of the festival gave capacity to engage and adapt to knowledge (and practices) as they unfolded, allowing the ‘non-projects’ to become agonistic sites that quietly served to disrupt entrenched mechanisms and fixed modes of thinking. The special bracketed-out time effectively enabled non-traditional practices such as socially engaged art (as an example of contemporary practice), to be brought immediately to the student, teaching and academic body, and provide examples of open-ended projects that could potentially support the development of expanded practices within the university’s curricula and gallery programming.

It was found that using existing structures in the school provided the scaffolding for support so that there could be a certain amount of freedom in the delivery. For example, a complimentary studies unit could provide a template for basic teaching and learning, and a co-productive relationship between the teachers and students in the complimentary studies unit demonstrated that they could be used to fine tune the lectures, tutorials and assessments. The two case studies developed a capacity for transformation as sites in the production of what theorist Irit Rogoff might call ‘uncontained’ knowledge; by which she means ‘knowledge that we don’t already know’.

As a result, the projects encouraged higher order thinking by bringing aspects of indeterminacy into the academy, deliberately testing their amorphous characteristics and alleviating some of the oppressive conditions associated with educational régimes. This flexibility enabled participants to extend their practices and value-add, rather than compete with, the more rigid structures of quantifiable modes of academic evaluation.

This adaptability effectively alleviated the hegemony of visual aesthetics drawn from the modernist canon of art that prioritises object-based works and medium specificity. Through an open call for participants, the project presented equitable access to conceptual modes of art

making than would have otherwise occurred in the art school. The mission of the projects as an indeterminate undertaking invoked the notion of a 'non-project' and as such, presents a working model for the academy of the future by providing a critical connection between educational practice and current creative practice in the field.

There are limitations to my approach, the most obvious being its narrow field of operation both institutionally and geographically, which still leave questions unanswered about how these types of projects may operate in a less secluded and friendly environment. The scope of the project likewise did not fully explore and recognise the artists in Australia who I believe have been practicing socially engaged art over the past twenty years, particularly from a pedagogical base.¹⁴⁰ Finally, the limitations of public engagement with social practice; how these works are properly accessed, received and interpreted by the general public, was not fully explored due to the focus of the project within the art school environment.

The next logical step from this is to build on the research by adapting the CoI approach and by using hermeneutics more diligently as negotiating tools to achieve research outcomes that can be useful heuristic methods of public art practice in a wider field. This move could involve reaching into the sphere of government agencies such as the welfare, education, health or the environment, for instance, in much the same parasitic way in which the two case studies evolved. The extension of this parasitic behaviour, as demonstrated in both projects, was to be symbiotically 'useful'. By being useful, I do not mean that these projects should be entirely pragmatic, (Kester 2015), or that would be the job of professional specialists in the field of social welfare, education, science etc., those who need to comply with set agendas, quotas, performance outcomes and other quantitative measures—rather it is in a way that concerns writers such as Stephen Wright and his 'lexicon of usership' in art, which questions the validity of conditions such as expertise, ownership and spectatorship (2013-14) and turns them on end.

Warranting further investigation is a comprehensive overview and recognition, historically and contemporaneously of practicing artists in Australia, exploring unidentified contributions to social practice in the past by rethinking the practice within a contemporary understanding of social engagement, value-adding to the contemporaneous discourse on social forms of art making that are so lacking. Potentially, a more critical discussion around social practice could

¹⁴⁰ For example, some of the more recent projects include Neil Berecny-Brown, who in 2001 developed Brown's Cows Art Projects, initiating issue-based projects that are often time-based, open-ended and dialogical, and Liz Woods whose practice, since the early 2000s, focuses on developing relationships between art, site and the community.

be explored not only in projects such as ‘Rogue Academy’ but by developing blogs and support structures similar in nature to ‘A Blade of Grass’ and its quarterly journal *Fertile Ground*. Another potential would be to develop useful repositories and resources for critical writing on socially engaged art such as the recently established international online journal, *Field*¹⁴¹. Toward the end of the research, an online course was developed as a MOOC (massive open online course) through Duke University in Durham, US in Socially engaged art. Called ‘The Art of the MOOC’, it does give some ideas for establishing an undergraduate course, which could be developed using some of the strategies employed in this programme.

5.2 Social engagement and the CoI as an antidote to education as hegemonic problem child

Socially engaged art practices, particularly those involved directly in pedagogy have in recent times attended to this gap in knowledge by drawing attention to many hegemonic problems associated with the commercialisation of education, and the commodification and presentation of art. They highlight the failure to address contemporary practice in schools and raise questions about hierarchy and compliance in artistic, teaching and curatorial practice.

As the revolutionary pedagogue Paulo Freire argued, many dominant positions in education, such as the teacher/student hierarchy (and by implication here, exhibition and the curator-as author model), for instance, rely on the ‘banking’ concept of education (Freire 1970, 12). These are conditions where teachers (or curators) deposit or fill the minds of students (or viewers). These situations are indoctrinated into a culture so that they often go unchallenged. The acceptance of traditional forms of art such as painting, sculpture and new media, for instance, are an example of hegemony that tends to regulate the educational market, of which the student is the consumer. The organised categories, such as the silo studio-based models of teaching (divided into discreet sections such as painting, sculpture, printmaking and photography areas) used in most institutional art education tend to ‘shoehorn’ people into departments or mediums. While this system meets student-consumer expectations, it nonetheless perpetuates enslavement towards the beaux-arts tradition. As the research discovered, the historical criteria used to critically examine the well-worn categories of art, are not suitable for evaluating socially engaged art.

¹⁴¹ <http://www.abladeofgrass.org/discuss/fertile-ground/>: Accessed 1/11/15
<http://field-journal.com/>: Accessed 15/5/15

The research investigation found a way to counterbalance this hegemony by identifying some of the shortcomings of the education system delegated to teach critical analysis to emerging artists—so that they can operate at the very edge of contemporary art in the real world. By recognising weaknesses in the system and invading through parasitic action, they developed symbiotically as strategies for improvement. The projects offered temporary platforms to counters stagnancy, provides avenues for empowerment, encouraged plural rather than singular activities and supported open-endedness and ambiguity.

This hegemonic position is instilled into the culture of art systems outside the institution, where recognition and dominance of object and material-based artworks prevails.

Notwithstanding some acknowledgement toward performance art, these art forms are still given priority over social, relational and many forms of participatory art. This preference is despite a number of artists developing social and pedagogical projects, and a call from support agencies, such as government funding bodies, for more collaboration and community engagement.

The problem stems from being overly dependent on the self-perpetuating types of traditional art forms and their associated histories, which in one sense is a form of oppression, suggested in the writing of authors such as John Dewey and Paolo Freire. In another, it becomes a failure in the system to keep abreast, and adapt to changing societies and cultures. In essence, the art world has not had enough theoretical or practical exposure to social practices as an art form, and thus art schools are not taking up the challenge and introducing it into their foundation-level courses. The research found the development of multifarious, symbiotic platforms that provide the coupling of conversation and contestation, trigger small but pivotal flash points to cultivate useful tensions, thus exposing new forms of knowledge. Rather than break the hold over tradition completely—the hold that established forms of art have over practice can be quietly disturbed; this methodology enables a better understanding and communication of expanded notions of practice—and this lies at the foundation of this research.

The motivation behind the ‘Rogue Academy’ then was to test whether or not collapsing power relations could, to some degree, ameliorate this form of oppression that, in this research, comes from two key sources; the bureaucratic hold of university administration that dictates the most profitable fiscal outcome, and the hold that traditional medium-bases specificity has over

foundation course structure. To do this, I created openings for post-formalist institutions to be more flexible and adaptive to current environments by inserting points of productive contestation and opportunities for ‘others’ and ‘otherness’. I proposed to experiment with creating mutually symbiotic relationships that might add value and purpose as new modes of sociability, ones that would dissolve the authority of the ‘teacher-student’ hierarchy and relaxing the dominance of the material object by collectively exploring the notion of a *thinking aesthetic*.

When beginning this research in 2011, there was no evidence of any undergraduate course related content that dealt with social, community or relational practice on the website portals of many Australian art schools. In 2013, as *The PI* was in development, a minor unit called *Introduction to Installation: Temporal, Spatial, Relational Practice* was introduced. However, it was never run due to the lack of student numbers.¹⁴² As a postgraduate student at the University of Tasmania’s College of the Arts, I was not in a position to overhaul the school’s curricula, so a proposal to introduce elements of contemporary practice in these projects through the redesigning and rethinking some of the existing programmes and courses already available in the school. An example of an actual programme was the Complimentary Studies Unit (FSA 200), a unit outline that sat as a hollow receptacle, capable of being adapted to take advantage of innovations in the field and run as part of the undergraduate Bachelor or Fine Arts degree structure.¹⁴³ For example, in 2010-11, the then School of Art adapted this unit in partnership with MONA to teach a series of practical invigilating skills. Called *Fronting MONA: invigilating Australia’s largest private museum*, art school students who successfully undertook the course, would then be eligible for employment at the newly opened MONA art gallery.

During this research, an elective course was developed into a specialist course on the role of the artist-curator and participatory practice. Outlined in Chapter three and discussed in several conference papers in Appendix B, it was one of the examples of the way in which current structures within the university could be adapted effectively to accommodate new research from the field. Others included adapting the art school gallery by disrupting its traditional programmes and spaces, extending the art forum programme by inviting the speaker down to the Plimsoll Gallery for coffee and conversation, and inviting a Research Higher degree candidate to conduct his annual review in a conversational style forum. The projects

¹⁴² A copy of the course majors at the University of Tasmania, College of the Arts is in Appendix C. Accessed 7/11/15.

¹⁴³ FSA 200 is still available for course content development, as well as a unit where individual students allowed to develop their own course material, however this is not highly promoted due to the high number of teaching hours per single student.

demonstrated that by using these programmes and spaces differently; as disruptive mechanisms, they became new common thinking spaces for shared dialogue.

Anticipating that the development of a platform for social interactions to support collaboration and co-production, rather than individualistic practice, the projects would encourage constructive critical dialogue, inspire inclusiveness, egalitarian and co-productive endeavours—establishes them as markers of hermeneutic activity in art practice. The methodology for developing the projects was parasitic—it was an opportunistic activity, one that eventually led to a symbiotic condition, where the benefits were mutually shared. In this way, the projects are seeking to take from, but add value to what exists, rather than totally consume or replace it.

As a contribution to the field, I was able to demonstrate that challenging existing power structures through a CoI approach leveled out some of the hierarchical barriers that impede the exploration of communal and non-traditional art forms. Providing a shared platform for participants to rethink their designated practices in new and exploratory ways, momentarily collapsed the power relationships—for instance between the teacher and the student in the master classes, the curator and the artist at the conversation table, and demonstrated that encouraging communal voices shifts the power structure and realigns thinking around fixed positions.

This extended to the previous habits of physical spaces, such as courtyard, which was used as a thoroughfare, and the white cube gallery, which was disrupted and requisitioned for alternative purposes. These moves demonstrated their potential as sites for emergent knowledge—for example: a loading bay has fantastic acoustics when it becomes a performance hall; an old goods lift makes an excellent stage for a music gig, or the steps in a school courtyard make perfect seating for a temporary outdoor amphitheater. The value in temporarily renouncing the hold over the identities of these structures lies in the way in which this type of activity encourages divergent thinking and generates collateral forms of knowledge, value-adding to existing knowledge bases.

The social nature of the case studies made them more open and inviting, which aided greater inclusion and engagement particularly for students, emergent artists and those interested in socially engaged art, performance and other forms of post-object art. This elicited the capacity

for change and the emergence of new knowledge and experience; the participants' breadth of skills, beyond their identified 'practice', revealed extraordinary competencies outside their area of professional repute; they were surprised, as were others around them, that they could be consummate performers, cooks, writers, curators, designers or actors. These counterbalanced the dominant method and studio-based learning and went some way to addressing the issue of the lag between current creative practice and educational practice.

The limitations of this approach were that the bureaucratic system demanded some compromise; security issues dampened some activities, risk assessments had to be adhered to and mandatory funding body requirements such as fixed budget items challenge the projects as they unfolded. Challenging fixed positions raised the problems of open-endedness and formlessness as an outcome; the amorphous nature of these projects, in particular, made them seem messy and disorganised, and this contravened the visual and procedural cues and conformities we expect in the presentation of art, exhibition and education.

The projects featured processes in action, and in attempting to define them I struggled to fit them neatly into the already distinct categories (such as specific artworks, mediums or exhibitions as outcomes in themselves) that are laid out for us in art history, something that Claire Bishop and others have recognised. What is left unanswered here is how do these modes of practice become part of the intuitional degree programmes without taking away from the edgy contemporaneity that is inherent in process. Concentrating on process rather than outcome is embedded in educational design and is implemented in different ways throughout undergraduate art courses. However, this project went some way in addressing the *cohabitation* of expanded research as practice (process) and reception (outcome).

Following on from the examples shown in ODWC teaching unit, I developed an interest in working towards instilling a culture of acceptance of collaboration, non-fixed processes and projects as adjuncts to, not replacements for, institutionalised teaching and learning.

Facilitator as agonistic but diplomatic negotiator

The role of the contemporary curator as a form of exhibitionary facilitator has had a short but chequered history, with the often-autocratic authorial position often questioned in social

practice and democratic platforms of art.¹⁴⁴ The problem I found is that there is little information on how to ameliorate or deal with the hierarchical position of the authority figure in the development and management of participatory social art projects.

By implementing elements of the CoI, described in Chapter two, I sought to rethink the power of the facilitator, organiser, curator or artist in devising community projects. Because I was dealing with erudite adults, not children, I sought to test the degree to which I could push the role to become more egalitarian by enabling people to be more responsible for decisions and outcomes. The role I would play in developing, facilitating, documenting and analysing both case studies would be that of curator-facilitator, which occupies the realm described by Paul O'Neill and others who employ the hyphenated term 'artist-curator'. This term describes what is still a relatively germinal mode of practice that carries with it a measure of influence and control. I was aware that my position would be a compromise—my functions would variously be those of provocateur, enabler, researcher, negotiator, participant and, because of the sometimes-officious administrative responsibilities I was aware that at times, I would be in an autocratic position. While this role appeared to challenge the proclaimed democratic values of the case studies, I sought to diffuse this aspect in the second study by the formation of a Wider Reference Group, and a smaller steering group or Curatorium. Both of these groups would come together at various intervals to operate as a working 'community'—thus sharing the authorial role.

Because of the research, my role was redefined as essentially a gatherer of people to glean ideas—thinking in such a manner as to evoke generative and transformative conditions through creative practice. I found that the role of facilitator needed to become far less pronounced and more diplomatic to maintain the captive attention of participants, and the processes of facilitating conversation in a community, needed to be conducted with a degree of diplomatic dictation. In seeking to achieve a more democratic facilitatory role for myself, I found that it became a delicate balance between wanting to break down my authoritarian position, yet continue to provide the stability of a critical communal inquiry—enough to enable a deeper co-productive form of knowledge production. Providing 'scaffolding' as a structure and ease concern about the sometimes loose and open-ended processes, and enabling durational proceedings to open up natural organic 'zones of inquiry' increased the complexity

¹⁴⁴ For a comprehensive view of the curator as supreme author, see Anton Vidokle's polemical essay in *e-flux*. Vidokle, Anton. 2010a. "Art Without Artists." *e-flux Journal* 16 (5), Rus Bojan, Maria ibid."Letters to the Editors: Eleven Responses to Anton Vidokle's "Art Without Artists?." 18 (9).

and intellectual content of the projects. These were a significant part of the labour of the curatorial and facilitatory role. In contributing to the field, I found that the specific role of facilitator informed by the CoI approach and borrowing elements from hermeneutic conversation, built greater capacity for critical inquiry.

The particular emphasis on communication was a key contribution; demonstrating that spending the time keeping participants in the two main groups regularly informed, broke down the authorial tones of any requests by implicating them in decision making. I did this through informal emails, blogs and incidental dialogues in hallways, but I also found that spending special time with the individual participants crucial. This one-on-one involvement was where I met with many of the members individually for coffee, not just to explain the complex situation and the project we were endeavouring to undertake, but their role within it. I found that this tended to make them feel part of the project and desire to explore rather than just take part through obligation or some other motivation. This form of immediate communication also extended to the general public; I concluded from observations that strategies such as ‘meet and greet’ for visitors to these projects, while labour intensive, were vital to increasing accessibility and likewise found to be useful approaches in social modes of practice.

My research did not succeed in its ideological concept of finding a true democratic platform through community, collaboration and co-production; it was unachievable in the sense of true democracy. However, democracy is contingent; ultimately someone had to have authority and power. For projects to get off the ground and retain momentum, a degree of dominant assertiveness is required, which despite any amount of community negotiation, often falls to the facilitator artist, curator or teacher to deliver. The formulation, brokering and delivery of the projects hinged on the role of the facilitator being slightly autocratic, communicative and ‘nonconformist’. The limitations of this were that no matter how hard I tried to dissolve myself within the groups, I was always the one in charge, and the project always appeared to be attributed to my practice and research in some way. This notion is influenced by the expectations of notoriety and promotion that surround professional artists as individuals. The realisation that there is no such thing as true democracy in these types of projects, rather they elicited an agonistic democracy that as Chantal Mouffe argues it is:

a conception of democracy [that] acknowledges the contingent character of the hegemonic politico-economic articulations that determine the specific configuration of a society at a given moment. They are precarious and

pragmatic constructions that can be disarticulated and transformed as a result of the agonistic struggle among the adversaries (2006, 158).

I conclude that a utopian situation of true democracy, author anonymity and autonomy in this situation cannot be fully reconciled.

The natural progression of this research is to continue building on the germinal role of the artist-curator model by developing formal skills in artist facilitation for philosophical dialogues whereby they can be used as tools in a number of different ways. Along with the use of the CoI approach as an autonomous tool for art schools, it could likewise be implemented into a number of different teacher training courses such as a Graduate Diploma of Education or into university learning and teaching.

5.3 Building capacity for inquiry through duration as effort- A thinking aesthetic to value add to the visual

In general, our modern capitalist condition of being ‘time-poor’ sets up a conundrum. On the one hand the ease and speed with which we gain information has revolutionised the production of knowledge, but the cost on the contrary, is that flicking from one piece of information to another produces ‘surface information’; a type of knowledge best described by Mikhail Bakhtin as ‘rented’ information (Holquist and Liapunov 1990). The Internet and advanced technologies offering a proliferation of visual imagery at our fingertips mean we no longer need to engage deeply in what we are examining. The seduction of the visual spectacle in a consumer society, so condemned by Guy Debord in the 1950s, has not changed. The problem with the Internet age is that very little effort is needed; instant gratification has given us the capacity to gain more of what we think is knowledge with less effort—but in reality, as Marxist theorist Franco Berardi (2010) tell us, this means that we know lots of things, but not in any meaningful depth.

It has been equally argued that mass consumerism diminishes the worth and capacity of many things, not least of which includes art and art education. Art forms that need time and effort, such as socially engaged art, tend to be an awkward fit for a contemporary culture driven by speed, instant gratification and the production of the time-poor subject. While this consumerist drive appears to have developed an audience for simplicity and easily accessible art (Vidokle and Rosler 2008), there is some evidence to indicate a new emergent public—one

that seeks to engage in more complex and cognitive experiences (Doherty 2014a, Bishop 2011). I believe the problem lies in the notion of what drives the formation of the 'slow scholarship' movement, that most tertiary education is constrained by the missions of a market-driven neoliberal university culture (Mountz, Laurier, and Bonds 2015, Hartman and Darab 2012). As a result, art schools in this instance do not have the capacity to address these more complex (time consuming) art forms. I argue that if they did, it would generate greater understanding through critical dialogue and informed practice, so that a wider public then becomes more cognisant of experimental art. The 'Rogue Academy' sought to shift the definition of an aesthetic experience by placing value on *duration* (Kester 2004, 12) as a deliberate operational strategy, using its capacity to strengthen and consolidate knowledge and increase intellectual and cognitive engagement through the process of open inquiry through dialogue.

The shift in the research focus from merely gratifying an audience by staging an event, to instilling duration as part of the project's central element permitted more 'fallow time' or time-out for rumination. It slowed down the event of understanding and increased the effort needed for the participants to understand their role in the project (that which Mikhail Bakhtin calls the Marxist idea of 'labour'). This strategy permitted greater flexibility for participants to play with ideas, discuss them with others and deliver when the ideas were better formed.

In supporting durational processes, the proposal would provide the security for participants to make assurances on delivery of events and projects. The slowness of the projects would enable participants security to take time to think, reveal their work, question their role in the events, their capacity for delivering it, and to share their critical and theoretical position with each other as a promissory mode of conduct (Malpas 2009). Promissory behavior involves the participants' events being accepted upfront as constituting a process unfolding, leading to the promise of eventual delivery. Taking time to converse about the presentation space and its regulations, the complex negotiations of give and take between other participants, and establishing new associations for their own practice, for instance, required considerable time and effort on behalf of the facilitator and the participant.

The research contributed to the field through a particular way in which the two case studies unfolded; a deliberate strategy of encouraging 'promissory conduct'. Fully supporting participants without formal application enabled a promissory and co-productive mode of working that would ameliorate some vulnerability so that participants felt confident to step

outside their usual mode of art practice. This enabled not only some sense of autonomy for their work, but gave them ultimate responsibility for their own outcomes. The weekly focus around the specific questions in *ODWC*, followed by workshops, film viewings, dinners and the co-production of the zines, gave participants time to find a way to involve themselves or to rethink their contribution and contribute to the weekly zine. Similarly, artists Rebecca Stevens, Amanda Shone and Sally Rees were able to develop their works over three Wednesday Night Fiascos as part of *The PI*, each episode building upon the other, and none of them predictable from the start.

Shifting the focus from the urgency of delivery to the slow and methodical effort of experience, trial and error, became a strong draw card for self-selection. The promissory process redirected the focus of attention away from attainment and the need to deliver a certain thing/object/mechanism for student assessment or display in the gallery, and redirected it to the experience of the *process unfolding*.

Also contributing to the field was the CoI approach of enabling a zone of inquiry, which became a valuable tool for providing a collective, but stable, space for reflexive conversations—one that encouraged group mentality of wanting to know. These were powerful and engaging ways that extended meaning; they not only captured collateral forms of knowledge and brought it together with known knowledge but by taking time enabled participants to address issues of concern, locating them within current economic, political, societal and cultural concerns, broadened the participants' language of art practice and theory. I argue this mode of understanding does not replace the visual but suspends and transcends the hegemony adopted by our reliance on visual and object-based aesthetics, which value-adds to the art experience.

The limitations of these strategies were that they were inaccessible for some, particularly the public. Despite attempts at involving the public in each of the events, there was not sufficient opportunity to engage properly, and audience engagement tended to be happenstance. Accessibility, regarding intellectual understanding, to both projects was alleviated somewhat in the second study by participants spending time individually greeting members of the public as they entered the gallery. This access gave students the opportunity to engage in a prolonged discussion about alternative contemporary art forms, which increased their experience of dialogical exchange, and those of the visitors. However, due to the narrow scope of the project, accessibility to more conceptual modes of art tended to suit an art-savvy audience (artists,

students, curators, academic), and providing access to the general public engagement was not fully explored. Despite this, however, only a few members of the public were disappointed.

In the future, developing communal projects that are more inclusive and have a more direct focus on the public would be a logical step to further this research. Introducing and educating audiences to conversational events that are developed as Community of Inquiries could achieve this. The events would be where the public is invited to take part in the discussion and contribute to an expanded knowledge of art through their own lived experience in relation to urgent local and global issues.

5.4 The non-project or 'festival' providing access to difficult projects

Outsiders as agonists to disrupt community as critical interloper

In examining community, I wanted to bring in the notion of the 'outsider' to provide other points of view and difference. Community naturally means plurality; people coming together in collaborative and co-productive ways to increase capacity for knowledge. Small provincial communities are problematic, they can become self-referential and stagnate, or as Miron Kwon (2004) argues, be non-democratic, exclusive enclaves, yet others such as Gary Pearson (2009) argue that they can offer a great opportunity to operate under the radar. The problem with the concept of communality is the lack of specific teaching and learning about communal, co-production and collaborative values in art schools. While these principles are deployed into teaching methods at all levels of art course degrees, they are not taught as discrete practices in themselves.¹⁴⁵

The problem exists that the inherent assessment processes in art schools are in the main, non-democratic entities based on a focus on individual attainment and final marks for a bachelor degree qualification. There is no doubt that the concept of community and collaboration is necessary to teach in the classroom but as I mentioned above, it is relegated to exercises in the classroom, such as group critiques, or collaborative exercises for the generation of ideas for class projects for instance. The only other form of collaboration and community activity would

¹⁴⁵ Professor Marie Sierra, former head of Sculpture & Spatial Practice, School of Art at Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne, and Head of the Tasmanian College of the Arts, now Deputy Dean and Head of School, UNSW Australia Art & Design. Email conversation 20th December 2011

be in the extra-curricular activities outside teaching time such as group exhibitions, activist causes and social functions. Despite the notion of community and collaboration as a vital part of our democratic society, collaboration and communal art practices as discrete subjects in an art degree programmes, are virtually nonexistent in art schools that are primarily based on the beaux-arts tradition of medium specificity. Apart from teaching methods, the notion of communal behaviour is not generally part of art school culture, nor taught as a subject in itself.

On the one hand, this research promotes the development of teaching community and communal experiences, but on the other, there is an inherent issue with the provincial nature of communities, which has mostly to do with critical context and the availability and opportunity for exposure to criticism. Anecdotal evidence gathered working with artists in the community, and when I was part of a critical feedback group attached to an ARI, revealed a distinct lack of desire to communicate their work or criticism from others, despite being offered a choice of platforms for engagement. There are intrinsic difficulties in mounting an objective argument about a work as an individual in a small regional community without standing out, mainly because of the familiarity and repercussions of being known to most within that community. Other evidence gathered from the master classes during *The PI* revealed a concern by artists in the community about the lack of opportunities and experience of objective critique for their work between peers, in media and other reviews.¹⁴⁶

Gary Pearson (2009, 168) argues that the problem for regional areas is the provincial nature of a community, which is often caused by a lack of ‘direct contact’ with a variety of art forms and artists. In Tasmania, due to the opening of MONA, exposure for emerging artists to a broad range of art forms has dramatically increased in recent years. Despite the Tasmanian College of the Arts holding an impressive series of art forums when visiting artists are in town, it has not, as Pearson urges, followed through that art school students, and local artists in the field, have the direct, hands-on contact with these artists and their work. It has certainly not followed through with an increase in critical writing and analysis of local artists’ works—something that is unarguably so valuable to practice.

Conventional wisdom has it that the problem of provinciality is not part of a larger urban art scene; however, there are smaller individualised enclaves of community that form in cities. The clustering of community occurs when people—audiences (critical writers, other artists and

¹⁴⁶ See Six_A ARI Critical Feedback notes Appendix C, and comment by Mary Scott in the Master Class run by Ross Gibson in Appendix A

students) choose the most popular or the most engaging artists to be involved with, which in essence, does offer a form of self-selection; which could be considered a mode of criticism. The artist-run initiative, ClubsProjects ran Critical Feedback Sessions in the early 2000s in Melbourne, which sought to address the lack of critical debate for artists. However, as Mirwon Kwon suggests, the moment community forms—there is the notion of exclusiveness, which inherently precludes people from speaking out in favour, or otherwise, of a particular artist or artwork.

One imagines, given the higher population in urban centres, that there are more opportunities to encounter further diverse forms of art production, and for artists to present art and seek critical feedback, however with this comes the problem of relativity and the increased competition for recognition. The higher number of newspapers and journals in larger centres that critically engage in arts writing may provide access to critical engagement. However, this is in contrast to the very small number of critics in regional communities that are of questionable quality.¹⁴⁷ Perhaps a more interesting way in which critical analysis of artists' work can occur (which is something that could be furthered after this research), is through the different online feedback and commentary portals that allow a modicum of anonymity toward critical scrutiny. Unattributed critical commentary, while not ideal, does go some way to debasing the conundrum of provinciality and criticism in communities.

Taking inspiration from Pearson's essay on provincialism in small art communities, I sought to challenge the production of knowledge and the entrenched ideas that prevail in university degree structures by bringing in a particular type of outsider. These were conversational interlopers brought in to disrupt some of the entrenched thinking, provide other forms of knowledge as a mode of critique. This strategy encouraged plural thinking, collaboration and co-production that would benefit teaching and learning and provide an injection of critical dialogue. In *ODWC*, the artist and myself would select the artists, curators and writers, all of whom were of international standing, and in the second case study the outsiders were local and national professional artists and academics selected by a community of individuals; the curatorium.

¹⁴⁷ The top 25 entries for arts writers on LinkedIn are all from the main urban population areas. <https://au.linkedin.com/title/arts-writer>: Accessed 10/11/15. The Age, The Australian and the Sydney Morning Herald all have a number of arts journalists who, for the most part, provide critical analysis of works by artists. By contrast, however, writing in the arts for the Mercury in Hobart is rudimentary, and over the past few years has at best been a descriptive and subjective analysis rather than a critical review.

Both case studies confirmed the importance of inviting outsiders into CoI, providing a robust foundation for enabling critique and the production of emergent knowledge. The host-guest dynamic, in particular, elicited not only unique views from ‘outsiders’, but invoked shifts in behaviour and expansion of scope from ‘insiders’. This incident was found to be a rejuvenating and invigorating dynamic and at best can lead to broadened horizons all round.

The international artists and curators in the *ODWC* project and the professional artists and scholars invited into The PI community by the curatorium, provided the backbone or scaffolding to the projects, and opened up broader ‘zones of inquiry’, which increased opportunities and access to wider knowledge bases.

The risk of the interloper’s potential ‘superior’ position was found to ameliorate hierarchy through the uses of hermeneutic principles; the notion of authority was countered by their generous, communal and sometimes playful approaches to their fellow participants. The non-hierarchical hermeneutic condition of ‘sharing of horizons’, or points of view, meant that communal dialogue with the outsiders was always a productive—but a persistently unsettled, agonistic space of negotiations.

The value of these outsider-interlopers as agonists was not in bringing new knowledge in and depositing it into a provincial community—instead the significance was in their capacity to work with participants as co-productive investigators. Selecting this particular type of outsider to cohabit intellectual and physical spaces with others in a more mutual and symbiotic way, I view as imperative to autonomy in the production of knowledge, which in the case of this research is a contribution to the field of education and social practice.

The value in durational approaches to art making is underscored in Chapter one, with the prolongation of time considered as a pivotal factor in the thinking part of making of socially engaged art. The two case studies invited outsiders in to loiter—asking them to attend to their events with a durational approach in the work. It was found that this extended the chance opportunities for cross dialogue with students and other viewers to the projects. These encounters constituted unscripted, unregulated, autonomous, forms of knowledge production that were unaccountable.

During this research project, the Tasmanian College of the Arts initiated an Artist in Residence (AiR) programme, that aimed to develop and extend professional practice opportunities for University students and staff, and guests of nearby The Henry Jones Art Hotel, through creative events like artist talks, exhibitions and workshops, as well as the daily studio-based interactions with professional artists. Effectively the value for undergraduate students is that professional artists have time to provide direct experience for students by working on their individual projects. The programme, which offers a studio to the visitor for sixteen weeks, efficiently blends into the school's teaching curriculum with undergraduate students given an opportunity for hand-on encounters and exposure to the development and presentation of a diverse range of art works.

In contrast the hour-long weekly Art Forum programme at TCotA, while providing access for students to a variety of local, national and internationally renowned speakers, is limited in its capacity for direct encounter, due to the short timeframe the speakers are in the school. *The PI*, sought to expand the contact time of the Art Forum visitor by inviting them down to the Plimsoll Gallery for coffee on the couch, a convivial chat away from the podium of the formal lecture theatre, enabling students and staff a prolonged, and more casual, engagement with the speaker.

The two case studies involved a number of outsiders that were highly renowned, most recognised internationally, I nonetheless felt the selection was only ever as autonomous as the self-selected participants of the CoI. These limitations are relative, however in both studies I would have liked a more diverse CoI—that is from an organisational point of view and a direct participatory point of view. It is to be expected that it would only ever involved the art school students, staff and a few members of the local arts community, but in future projects, I would like to see the involvement of participants from varied and more diverse backgrounds. Apart from the two visiting academics, the curatorium for *The PI* for instance was predominantly made up of academics from the school itself, and involved no undergraduates or individuals from other fields. In retrospect, I felt this limited the scope and decisions to a select group of people and their interests, which could have been made more dynamic if the curatorium included others from outside the art and perhaps students. While this nonetheless highlights Kwon's argument of exclusive enclaves and Pearson's concerns with provincialism, the managerial scope of this project did not allow this to be followed through.

In the future, I would like to find ways in which I could bring more diversity into the notion of 'inquiry' and adapting the CoI, using hermeneutics more closely as a negotiating tool try to reach an outcome that is broader than what was achieved. Over the course of this research, I have become acutely aware of apathy, or perhaps it is tiredness, toward participation in art. This is the type of art that continually requires one to engage more intently by physically 'doing' something. At an art project or event I occasionally even find myself feeling bemused, unwilling or uninterested in taking part as a physically 'active' participant and have become cognizant of a pressure to play along, even when I don't feel like it. More often, I am found to be one of the ones that will stand back and watch others rather than taking part, something that gives me a sense of guilt because it lets the team down. In following this course of research, and in the future projects I initiate, I have resolved to be more mindful of participation and what this actually means to the participants. I will be curious to see if this feeling I have is actually a pendulum swing away from physical participation as doing, and in fact a swing back toward object and material-based practices. In the mean time, I accept that in an art context, viewing an object *is* actually a form of participation as much as physically 'doing' something.

5.5 Conclusion

The research principally comprised two case studies, each a series of events configured as Communities of Inquiry. For each of these I took the role of facilitator and participant, in the mode of 'artist-curator'. Both studies were proximate to, and, to different degrees, integrated into the formal structures of learning and teaching within an established provincial art school. I have described the relation of the 'Rogue Academy' as a parasitic in the first instance that evolved into a symbiotic relationship with the host institution: the Tasmanian School of Art, which by the time the second case study was undertaken, was amalgamated into a larger entity, The Tasmanian College of the Arts. Different types of events and practices were examined for their limitations as well as their ability to explore the idea of social efficacy and agility to mean something beyond a consumerist art culture and bureaucratic capitalism

Parasitic symbiotic relationships underpinned the formation of the two case studies both in securing the school's consent and encouraging participant involvement, but participants in particular, were drawn in by the project's capacity to remain 'rogue'. The fugitive or rogue state that they occupied appeared to open up a range of diverse opportunities of inclusion for those

whose ideologies and practices that normally struggle to fit within standard curricula or exhibition programming.

The methodological approach I took was that of dialogical artist and the processes I employed were insight-driven and philosophically informed by conversational hermeneutics and the free-school movement. It was found that developing the Community of Inquiry approach and their associated structures, such as the scaffolding and zones of inquiry, aided the integration of more democratic platforms for the production of knowledge. The notion of true democracy I found to be impossible, less the projects would founder; the authoritarian role of the facilitator was not eliminated as much as I had hoped, however it was lessened through the use of hermeneutic principles, which helped build a greater capacity for egalitarian inquiry. I found that providing pluralist and democratic measures that searched for equality in conversational discourse around the task or object at hand, were successful modalities that drew community together. It is unresolved from the research however, as to how one sustains these labour intensive modes of communication and diplomatic dialogue needed to make these projects successfully egalitarian, much less integrate them into an outcome oriented degree programme. What the research did accomplish however was the development of platforms that provide a useful tool for expanding traditional art beyond the fixed silo position that art schools still habituate.

Despite the many incidences where things failed or just never eventuated as expected, the potency of the two projects was nonetheless compelling, not only because they drew in the customary artist-experimenter, but on occasion the radical outsider and the marginalised. These were those 'others' who were not left out because of stereotypical conditions of race, gender, class, religion or political persuasion, rather they were considered outsiders because they thought and behaved differently. Some of these previously sought to belong to academia, but had subsequently felt alienated from the school because they did not fit into the controlled schedule of an institutionalised régime. It has been surmised that this occurred because of the projects ability to draw from the stability of academia, yet sit at the edge of, and remain outside it.

In conclusion, I found that dialogical events through a facilitated Community of Inquiry approach can support open-ended and pluralistic artistic inquiry. With careful reflexive curation using specific elements from hermeneutic philosophy, they can be evaluative and self-

critical for all parties concerned. It is some way off before socially engaged art is fully integrated into the academic curricula as a course for undergraduates, nonetheless the research found that it is imperative that a solid foundation of knowledge in social modes of art making be integrated into foundation degree programmes. This enables graduating artists, who perhaps do not wish to undertake postgraduate studies, to have some basic skills in communal, collaborative and participatory environments.

Institutions that are open to supporting the 'non-project' or the 'unsettling project' can cultivate useful tensions that trigger flash points—disturbances or upheavals that create a rethinking of sedimented cultural ecologies, and that which enable opportunistic, fluid, transformative and emancipatory conditions. While acknowledging the specific limitations of location and breadth of community chosen, I determined from the research, that roguish behavior and agonistic inquiry can enable university art schools to keep abreast of current experimental practice, and be relevant to students – thus keeping agile in a threatening conservative political and economic climate. The 'Rogue Academy' approach, I argue, has value for seeding future intentional projects, and for generating content for formal curricula.

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