

**Principles** ~~**Institute**~~  
**for**  
**Organised**  
**Naivety**

or otherwise, a proposal  
for how to engage with  
and practice within the  
art academy.

**“Principles for Organised Naivety”**

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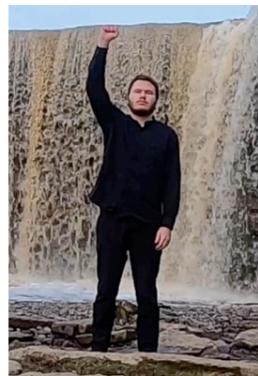
# Introduction

I proclaim as Naomi Hodgson, Joris Vlieghe and Piotr Zamojski have proclaimed in their Manifesto for a Post-Critical Pedagogy that “there are principles to defend.” Of course, not only are there principles to defend, but there are principles that are to be shared as an invitation for you to defend or reject them in your own way.

This is a thesis about arts education. I believe that art academies can be a site of study, possibility and rehearsal for a kinder, more just world. Personally for me, the art academy has been the locus for the most important, formative experiences of my life. Good, bad and ugly - all contributing to the person that I am today. Having studied and worked within the art academy, having criticised the academy and loved the academy, I wish to share my aspirations for the art academy in hopes it can become a transformative space for everyone, as it has been for me. And while the art academy is the specific subject of my writings, I suspect that these ideas are relevant for all critical education.

I also wish to share my own relations with these principles. This is to say that I will try to honestly share both moments where I believe that I have lived up to the ideals that I describe and those moments where I have failed to practise these principles.

Fundamentally, this is a thesis about love. Love for education, love for students and love for each other as practitioners. Through the text, I try to paint a picture of what arts education might look like if we committed to decision making from the position of love. Naturally, there are always multiple forces at play, pulling us, pushing us. Some are totally opposed to the feeling of love that I believe most practitioners within an educational context somewhere feel towards their profession or study. And it's that sometimes hidden capacity for love that I want to tap into with this thesis.



1. **Connection is everything.** Education, organising, learning, creating, it's all also an intimate process of collective self-development. The connections we make during the process of trying to have a go at something big or small can sometimes be more meaningful than the work itself. It's also about the friends we make along the way, the allies we find and the solidarity we generate across disciplines and generations.

2. **Naivety is a practical mindset.** To address the multiple simultaneous humanitarian, ecological and political crisis we require more than what neoliberal pragmatists or "apolitical" technocrats have to offer. In this spirit, naivety is also a rejection of the professional, and a celebration of the amateur, or as Moten and Harney might say, the more than professional. It's about recognising that together we can create hope, vision, and a sense of collective. And it's not a question of desire, it's a question of duty. To be naive is to serve. If we are to overcome the existential challenges facing humanity, it will only happen with a belief in the impossible and naive. It is a prerequisite.

3. **Always begin from a place of love for yourself, others and the subject matter.** Alternatively call it joy, commitment, passion, optimism. Whatever the specific term that you prefer to use, begin from a positive position. One that is both critical, but also tries to imagine the world otherwise. Start from a place which can generate hope.

4. **It's about sitting with ideas that at first seem totally impractical.** And they might well be, but organising naivety is about staying with those ideas long enough so that you start to wonder about the "what if-s" and "could be-s" of what might be possible were we to even partly realise these naive ideas. It's much more about process than goal. About understanding why it might be worth to try, rather than what precisely should be achieved.

5. **Commitment to nonviolence & justice.** We cannot fight fire with fire, therefore we should ground our actions in our deeper beliefs and values. And although sometimes it is difficult to muster the hope, optimism or sensibility to also underpin those beliefs and values with a commitment to nonviolence & justice, we still have to try. There's no sense in striving for a better future if we lose our souls in the process.

6. **Critical thinking is key, but it's often confused with oppositional thinking.** The achilles heel of a critical thinker is that they become so good at analysing the weakness or hypocrisy of any given argument that they will always fail to see the possible merit. Here, the critical thinker becomes an oppositional thinker. Oppositional thinking traps us in a cynicism that isn't able to provide hope or generate solidarity. It becomes about propagating a rigid oppositional viewpoint. The critiques offered by oppositional thinkers may well be merited, but the oppositional thinker doesn't have the capacity to seek common ground. Only from such shared ground can coalitions start to emerge to address the subjects of our initial critique. Organising naivety then is about recognising the difference between critical and oppositional thinking. This is not to be confused with compromise. It is not about compromise. It's about refusing dead-end binaries.

7. **Never forget that the body is the true governor of your freedom.** This idea does have a certain predicament of privilege. Only for those who are already free does the body govern freedom, we could say. But were we to set aside its immediate faultiness, there is something to be said about the power of the body. Of course there are rules, laws, restrictions, confinements, but for many of us there is also a choice in how to engage with those forces. It is possible to love without a contract, be friends without a code of conduct and resist without a job description. Our choices can and will have consequences, but it's possible to live life on our own terms. Especially when we offer our support to one another. Our own body, not the legislative body, is the governor of our life. And if we acknowledge this, then no matter what the legislative body does to us, we will always be free. Because our freedom is not something granted to us, it comes from within. Be it unemployed, in poverty or in prison, it is impossible to take our freedom. Dignity of course, is another matter.

These are the principles that I want to discuss with this thesis. They are written in the spirit of organising within the art academy, and so are also first and foremost written for those who do or want to organise within the academy. By organisers I don't refer to a specific formal role however, so it can be a director, a student, a teacher or the chef in the canteen. I recognise that there are people within the art academy, both students and staff alike, who want to engage with the art academy in a less intense way. Whether that might mean studying for ones own self development or working at the academy for sustenance. I have no gripe or qualm with that approach. The art academy is far from the only context for organising, and certainly we all serve our communities according to our ability and need. For me however, the art academy has always been a little bit more than a school or a workplace. It's been a place of community and sanctuary. It's where I have met the most important and beautiful people of my life and with a few important exceptions, the art academy, in its expanded sense, remains the place in which I've made my happiest memories. I feel an emotional connection to that context that I hope will come through the text as you read through the different principles of this thesis. For now, I would just say that while many artists find teaching at the academy as something stable on the side, I seem to be building a practice that is built in the exact opposite way. What I really want to do is to be at the academy, teaching and organising, and to stay in touch with the world, I have started to reconnect with my artistic practice.

The principles also come about as a result of an intense six years of being involved in arts education at the KABK, first as a student and then as a policy adviser, and now as a practitioner with many different simultaneous contexts. The research partly started at the KABK in my last year as policy adviser, but following the institutional turmoil and me leaving the institution somewhat as a result of those harsh realities, the research continued outside of the KABK, in multiple institutional as well as self-organised contexts. This in some sense made the research more challenging, but at the same time more exciting as it opened space to make it more personal and also use the research process as a way to learn about what kind of an educational practice I would like to build for myself. So while I hope with all my heart that the principles and the ideas expressed in this thesis can be useful and hopeful and inspiring for you, I would be lying if I didn't admit they are written as much to guide my own formation as a more mature (but still totally playful) practitioner as they are written for you.

In terms of structure, each principle opens up ideas that have formed through conversation or literature research and then also looks at how those ideas have manifested in practice, whether that be through a reflection of a situation at the KABK, or through the experiments and workshops I have organised and facilitated myself. As is customary for a thesis, most of the ideas are expressed through the text format. However sometimes within this piece, the spirit of the subject matter is as important as the precise content. The documentation then, which is often image based, offers you a certain energy through which to look at the thesis. I don't explain in depth many of the images in this thesis, the details are not so important, or if they are, you find them in the text. What is important is that you can see what are the energies, situations, relationships that the principles and approaches I write about have looked like in my practice. I invite you to engage with the imagery, perhaps it results in a gentle smile or a slight smirk.

Something to note is also that the principles are here to be defended yes, but more importantly they are here to be shared with you to take and adapt them according to your own needs and abilities. Of course, I write about the principles with a certain passion. They are important for me, have helped me as a practitioner and I believe in what I am writing. This can sometimes mean I defend more than I share, perhaps the thesis will read as if I am advocating for a very particular kind of academy. Partly of course I am, but mostly I am just interested in connection. The beauty of the academy is that it is never made in the face of one person. I believe there is space within the academy for all of our aspirations. That's what makes it such an exciting context for me. That being said, I choose specifically to share principles, not recommendations, questions or hypothetical alternatives because I believe that each of us in this line of work should ground our practice in something. The world is too messy and complex to try to go through it without being grounded to something. Whether that be gut feeling, the curriculum, your politics, our artistic practices or the teachings of pedagogy. We have a choice in terms of what to choose, but we all need something to refer back to. For me, it's these principles. They will change over time as I learn from all my collaborators, but for now I share them as they stand.



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the new doe  
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1. **Connection is everything.** Education, organising, learning, creating, it's all also an intimate process of collective self-development. The connections we make during the process of trying to have a go at something big or small can sometimes be more meaningful than the work itself. It's also about the friends we make along the way, the allies we find and the solidarity we generate across disciplines and generations.

In this first section, I describe the events that have led up to this research, how the research has evolved over time, and how the methods and frameworks within this thesis are much more about reaching out to find connection than they are about claiming an empirical truth or making a statement.

# Research Background

This research is in many ways a culmination of my time at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague and the subsequent year after. First, having spent four years there as a student, and after these two years as a policy adviser, the KABK is the site where my interest and love for education grew stronger and stronger. Doing this research has helped me to reflect and analyse those different experiences. Not all of the activities that I describe were even “research” at the time that they happened, but were nevertheless formative experiences for myself as a person and how I see education. Through reflection I draw certain conclusions, sometimes just speculations. With the thesis, I offer these thoughts to you as a reader in hopes to find connection. This thesis is a thesis written for practitioners of arts education, whether it be in the classroom or the boardroom. It’s written for my colleagues and friends I have met along the way. The standpoints I take make sense from my own personal position from which I depart. I suspect many will relate to these viewpoints or notice themselves as part of this story, but if you don’t that is also okay. I don’t wish to convince anyone with this thesis, I am only interested in connecting, whatever form or intensity that may entail.

To give some more background for how I got interested in arts education I have to take you back to the time when I was still a student at the BA Photography department at the KABK. One of my teachers at the time, Pawel Pokutycki was then chairing the University’s Central Council of Representatives<sup>1</sup>. Pawel’s term on this council was coming to an end and so he proposed that I should participate in the elections for the next cohort of representatives. With some initial hesitation, I put my name down. To my surprise, only four students from the whole academy participated in the elections and with there being four seats on the council of students, I was automatically elected. Subsequently I was chosen by the other members of the KABK’s Council of Representatives to chair the council.

This is where my involvement in school politics started. I chaired the council for the full two year term. This was a crazy period where we were confronted with all different possible topics that are important for arts education. We started with budgets, hiring a student counsellor, advocating for better working conditions in the workshops but were quickly also faced with having to respond to the pandemic, transitioning to online and hybrid learning and simultaneously reacting to the absurd and scary politics of the world, including the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States. Then, in October of 2020 Lucette ter Borg en Carola Houtekamer published an article<sup>2</sup> in the NRC about Julian Andeweg’s sexual crimes and abusive relationships with friends and colleagues. This article rocked the whole Dutch cultural world, including art schools. It also unleashed the discourse of social safety at the art academy. Never before had students discussed so vocally about how they felt unsafe in the classroom. In many ways, these discussions confirmed what we already had been discussing as a Council and also trying to advocate for with limited success around the boardroom table. The director of the KABK at the time, Marieke Schoenmakers ordered an investigation into social safety by a kind of corporate research firm, Bezemer & Schubad. Although somewhat sceptical about this firm, we agreed to support the research and I appointed a number of students and staff to help steer Bezemer & Schubad through the different institutional layers at the KABK. Much to Marieke’s surprise, the report<sup>3</sup> ended up being rather devastating towards the KABK. In fact to the point that in the end she had no choice to resign as the director.

<sup>1</sup> This was a group of students, teachers and staff from both the Royal Academy of Art and the Royal Conservatory in The Hague. Together these two institutions form one organisation, the University of the Arts in The Hague.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2020/10/30/hoer-eeen-kunstenaar-carriere-maakt-onder-aanhoudende-beschuldiging-van-aanranding-en-verkrachting-a4018047>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.kabk.nl/storage/documents/Culture-survey-report-KABK.pdf>

After my two years as chair of the Council of Representatives was over I was already in my graduating year. Rather suddenly, the co-head of the photography department decided to leave the academy. A vacancy for his position was published and I joked to my partner Liisa that hey, maybe I should apply. Somehow she convinced me that yes, why don’t you give it a go. So I spent some time discussing with my friends and classmates about whether this would be a good idea. And if I would do it, what would be some of the ideas that would be important for us as students to advocate for. I quickly wrote a small 20 page plan about the future of the photography department and received recommendation letters from both my classmates as well as managers and supervisory board members of other schools that I had met during my work chairing the council. Of course, I knew that this was not going to work, I was not totally delusional after all. But I enjoyed the fact that the committee would have to read the ideas of students, so already for this reason it was worth applying. I was not chosen to be the new co-head of the department, but to my surprise the Deputy-Director of the academy came to me with another offer to first, chair the Study Programme Committee for the last months of being a student. This was a committee that was previously chaired by Martijn Verhoeven, a teacher in the fine arts student whom accusations of inappropriate conduct were made against and all kinds of rumours were circulated online. I have to be honest, working with him I would have never suspected anything like this myself, but I guess I was now the cleanup crew. The second offer from the Deputy-Director was however more pivotal, that was to come on from September of next academic year as a Policy Adviser and continue to implement some of the initiatives and ideas that I had started as a student. Of course, I agreed. We’ll get into some of the things that happened within that role throughout this thesis, but I hope this background can help to contextualise my work. At the KABK, I was always someone working with students, but also often found myself being positioned between students, teachers and the management. The spirit of my contributions always remained very loyal to the centre of education, that being students and teachers in the classroom. In fact when I started to work at the KABK as a Policy Adviser, one head of department even told me that now I have to “choose with whom my loyalties will lie.” Suffice to say, this was a very easy choice. Although peculiar that it had to be one at all.

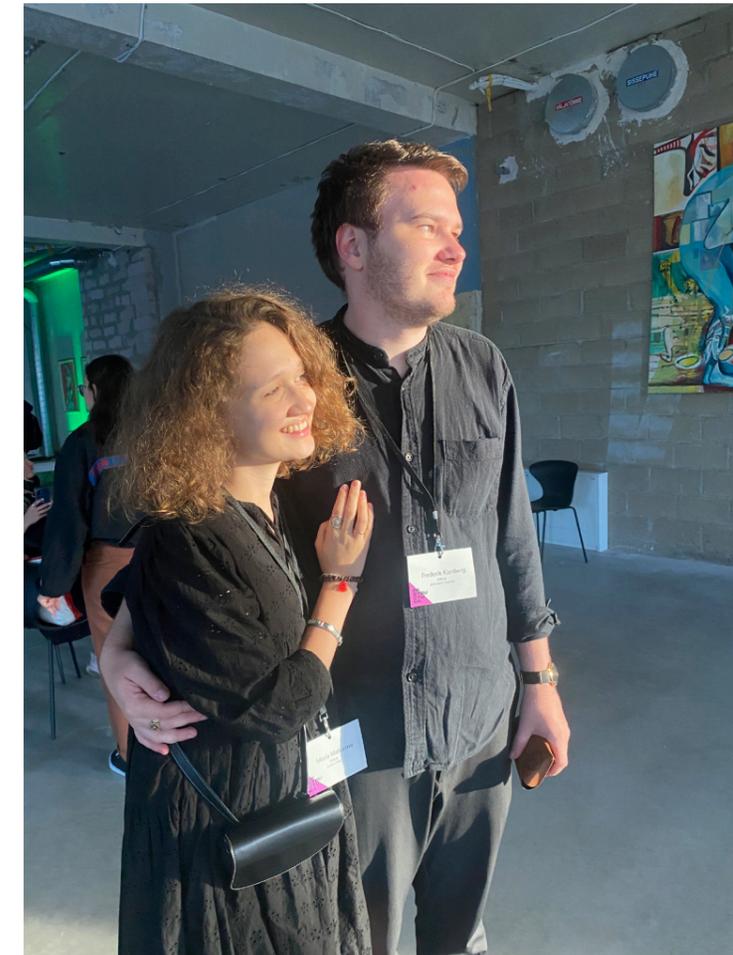
# Research focus (and its evolution)

The research question has shifted and evolved throughout the process of engaging with this research. Initially, I posed the question “How can we align institutional interests of art academies with the values of its communities?” This question however presumes that the institution and the community are by default at odds with one another. While this certainly can be the case, I realised that starting from a cynical position means that my research will always carry that undertone, even if the answer I found would not be a cynical one. The question then shifted its focus more towards the people who participate in institutions by asking “How can communal support systems help cultural practitioners retain their integrity when working within spaces of difference?”. This question however doesn’t address my problem of cynicism as it still assumes that the institution is a “space of difference”. And although again, it can often be, I didn’t see how the research is aided with starting from this perspective. Moreover, within this question the burden of integrity is put on cultural practitioners. The responsibility of institutions is somewhat disregarded. This feels like giving up on the institution, and this I am not ready to do.

While I was working my way through these multiple iterations of the research question, my friend Maria Makarova and I were also in the process of starting a small experiment that is rather grandly called the Institute for Organised Naivety. Through discussions and previous collaborations with Maria, we both felt that in a world that is either characterised by a particular kind of neo-liberal hopelessness or by militant critique of those neo-liberal systems, there was not that much space for just dreaming. Perhaps the act of dreaming in itself is already too naive in this dark world, but nevertheless we felt that an antidote to the current state of affairs is needed. An antidote that will not eventually reproduce the same systems of harm it is supposedly positioned against. From this spirit, the research question “How can naivety be legitimised as a methodology for change within higher arts education?” emerged.

After posing this question, I myself felt that now there was room to breathe. So in that sense it was funny when during my conversation with Mirjam Pol (Student Counsellor, Amsterdam Conservatoire) she described naivety as that space where there is oxygen. This oxygen however drove me not so much to answer the question of how naivety can be used or legitimised as a methodology for change, but rather just to immediately practice naivety as a position from which to write this paper, and to engage with the arts academy. In that sense, I cannot say that the following pages give an answer to any one particular question, but rather are a culmination of a research motivation and thematic that tries to offer oxygen, hope, inspiration and tries to articulate the possibility of the art academy itself as a site of study, community and rehearsal for a better future. I realise that perhaps such a scope is unusual for a masters thesis, and perhaps even somewhat at odds with traditional academic conventions, but I find that during this time of constant crisis, it didn’t make sense for me to engage with a very particular question with a narrow focus. Rather, I want to offer oxygen and put trust in the reader that they will find tools and means to operationalise that oxygen on their own terms, in accordance with the particularities and needs of their own context.

Through these conversations and experiments however quickly a certain focus again narrowed and in the end the research thematic is really about principles for organised naivety. **Through discussing the seven principles I open what I mean by organised naivety, how it can be practised and what it might result in were we to use such an approach within insitutional frameworks.** Both the practice and the theory present in this thesis all support that ambition.



Maria Makarova and myself, dreaming and celebrating after organising a 9-day forum for artists and cultural workers in Estonia.

First, it's important to state that this research has little empirical ambitions, it is not a proclamation of truth but rather an invitation to connect, talk, eat and organise together. This is not to say that there are no strong statements within this text, there are. Sometimes they might even read as proclamations of truth, but this they are not. I'm not here to convince or prove. Just to share and connect. It is also not a whimsical document or something that despite its size and scope is in the end only useful as a paperweight. Multiple sources feed into this research, including personal reflections, study groups I have facilitated, workshops I have hosted, interviews conducted and literature read. This is somewhat of an eclectic mix of sources and methodologies that underpin my research, but I also think this combination of contexts and approaches is what ultimately makes the research stronger, albeit perhaps academically bi-polar.

During the academic year of 2022-2023, I facilitated a Study Group at the KABK on the topic of "Safe & Engaging Learning Environment." Eight teachers from different departments and levels of experience participated in this group. During a period of 8 months, we encountered discussions and experiments around thematics of social safety, hierarchy, institutional politics, embodied learning, active listening and more. This Study Group was a hugely rich and rewarding experience for me. Much of my educational ethics and outlook was formed within and around this study group.

During the current academic year, while no longer working at the KABK, I organised a number of workshops and experiments in institutional as well as non-institutional contexts. Within this thesis, a few that are highlighted are the "Under-Practice" workshop as an introduction to the most recent cohort of students at the MA Education of Arts of the Piet Zwart Institute, the workshop on Forgiveness which I hosted at our own space in Amsterdam and a number of smaller (embodied) experiments that served as ways to test, experience or feel certain ideas and values on the body itself.

Within the past months, I have also conducted four interviews with practitioners that currently hold positions of leadership within arts education institutions in The Netherlands. The practitioners who participated were Siela-Adjosemito Jethoe (Vice-Dean, Avans Creative Innovation), Liza Swaving (Project Manager of the national professional doctorate Arts & Creative), Miriam Bestebreurtje (Director, Gerrit Rietveld Academy) and Mirjam Pol (Student Counsellor, Amsterdam Conservatoire). All four interviews were natural conversations situated around the topic of organised naivety as a way to generate some kind of momentum for change within arts education. The conversations both support some of my own outlooks, as well as challenge them. This dynamic is made transparent within the body of the text itself.

Having not been a big reader up until this part of my life, the research also became a good reason to dwell into different kinds of literature, some which speaks to pedagogy and education but also for example Kazu Haga's book "Healing Resistance: a radically different response to harm" which covers the principles of Kingian Nonviolence. The literature research opens up an additional layer of dialogue and in a certain way, I think of the authors of these works also as collaborators in my research.

I have to also say that the context for the research is not one particular classroom or even institution. It transverses between institutional settings and informal contexts. Between working with groups of colleagues and students, to just experimenting with friends. Nor do I pose a very specific problem or answer a very specific local question. I'm not inventing a new methodology for designing a new educational programme or context. Instead, I am drawing from multiple sources and experiences to speak to a broader passion and love for arts education as a whole, in its many diverse forms. The outcome then, are a number of positions from which we as educators or students can use to look at our own pedagogical context. I made this choice very deliberately in the middle of my research, because at a certain point I realised that no concrete proposals for a new methodology, organisational model or curriculum can help us with the real problem, which for me is that we are living through a crisis of imagination within education and politics at large. This is the discourse to which I want to in a small way contribute to. Again, this doesn't mean that what I write here is written as an answer to this problem, but rather more as something that I hope can be generative to a process of thinking together and coming up with alternatives or new ways of thinking about education within depressingly rigid and uninspiring neo-liberal governance frameworks.

The role of (institutional) critique also has an important place within this research, although I should explain that I have a very particular idea of what critique is and should do. For me, critique is a very active process of engaging with the institution in a particular way<sup>1</sup>. Some of my colleagues at the KABK used to say they wish critique would be more constructive. I always had a problem with this idea, because stating the need for constructive criticism seemed to be code for calling for a kind of critique that doesn't go too far. Critique for me is about challenging the structures, the political paradigms and systems of injustice that arts education exists within. So in that spirit, critique is not directed at any one individual, although there can be moments when choices of individuals do uphold or even advance unjust systems. Still, even with colleagues who I don't personally like or agree with on much, I try to recognise that the way they operate is not necessarily an autonomous choice, but rather a materialisation of a larger political and economic apparatus that impacts all of us. Although perhaps it would be useful to do so, I still don't want to call this type of critique "constructive". I firmly believe that all sincere critique comes out of a place of love, care, having skin in the game. If we believe this then even aggressive, angry or misdirected critique can actually be useful and informative. Critique is always already positive, because it means people are engaging with the structures and systems that they are part of and impacted by. Therefore, there is no bad form of critique, only bad ways to react to it or facilitate it when it happens.

Before getting to the heart of the matter, I would also like to invite you, as Kaza Haga invited at the beginning of his book, to focus on the spirit of my writing, instead of the very particular words, mannerisms or style choices that are part of the way that I write. I don't expect anyone to agree with everything fully, but by focusing more on the spirit, and less on the details, we might find that even if there are some nuanced differences of opinion, there is also plenty of common ground to share. Acknowledging this common ground, means that we open up a space of possibility from which it is possible to organise movement. Naturally, all inclusive movements exist in part inside a tension of difference. And this is to be loved and celebrated.

Should you be an educator or administrator or a student or hold any other kind of position within education, I also invite you in that same spirit to not read this book as an alternative to the kind of education that you know, but rather as ideas and principles that can be integrated into what already exists, what you already know.

<sup>1</sup> I recently watched an interview with Judith Butler on the PoliticsJoe YouTube channel. In the interview, Butler described their vision on critique and said "Critique for me is a dynamic process and it also involves imagining the world otherwise." I really connect with this kind of spirit for critique.

# Framework & research ethics

To describe the research framework and ethics, I want to go back to the notion of organised naivety that I already described earlier. Initially the idea of organised naivety and how that can be applied, used within arts education was part of the research question itself. Quickly however, it evolved into not being as much the subject of my research but rather the spirit through which my research was to be conducted. Developed together with my friend Maria Makarova, and further discussed with colleagues from different art schools in The Netherlands, it became clear that the idea of organised naivety can offer air, space, freedom to go both beyond conformity and a kind of antagonistic critique that struggles to generate solidarity. Mirjam Pol (Student Counsellor, Amsterdam Conservatoire) describes naivety as having “oxygen, willingness & curiosity”, the three characteristics that for Mirjam education requires. Characteristics from which dialogue becomes possible and that centre learning.

In research terms, this departing perspective of organised naivety means that during this period I have engaged and encountered multiple modes of research (or methods), such as embodied inquiry, interviewing, close reading and reflection. This has been in the form of small experiments, hosting/facilitating workshops and study groups and reflecting on concrete and documented events which took place mainly at the KABK. The relationship between practice and theory is also quite entangled and intertwined, making it sometimes difficult to separate the two, and sometimes also hard to pinpoint whether a certain idea came from practice, theory or most likely an iterative process of going between the two. Mostly I feel that the theoretical ground I try to construct comes intuitively from the practices and relationships I have been part of. The practice is then enhanced by the theoretical ideas (for example currently I am planning a workshop around looking at different aspects of the academy from the position of love based on much of the literature in this thesis). These new practices then again point me towards new theories and hopefully it becomes a process of walking with two legs, one being the theory leg and the other being the practice leg. Such a process however means that not all of my activities are grounded in all of the theory that I refer to in this thesis, nor is all of the theory there to frame the practice based aspects of my research. The practice and the theory are all the time part of an ongoing exchange between each other and together they have informed my outlook on and aspirations for arts education. This also means that the practice side of my research is always imperfect, and never manages to fully materialise the idealism of my theoretical narrative. Sometimes this might be because of a lack of resources or institutional requirements that also have to be met, other times it is simply a result of my own capacity. This is to say that I will be the first to admit that I am always learning as a practitioner, and there is always a gap between what I want, and what I know how to do. This is in many ways similar to the creative gap experienced by many artists, whereby there is always a difference between what we can visualise and conceptualise in our heads, and what we are able to produce as tangible results. In that sense, the practice side of my research is more like the craft of activating my imagined reality. The skills of this craft however are constantly catching up to the ideal conditions of my practice. When they do, I usually spend more time with theory, concepts, beliefs, vision, and by doing so create this gap again only to repeat the process over and over. This is how I learn.

To situate my research with a concrete methodological framework, I am guided by two publications. The first is “Valuing interdisciplinary collaborative research” edited by Keri Facer and Kate Pahl. Within this publication, Facer and Pahl lay out a lexicon for conducting such research:

“Productive Divergence: divergent and sometimes disorienting ways of knowing and doing things together is a core characteristic of much of this sort of research (for example as described in Chapter Six on what artists do when they work with partners to do research together.)

Materiality: a material engagement with texts, objects or things in general was also common to many of these approaches, so that instead of ideas moving invisibly across sites, their movement could be traced within objects and things. Collaborative research, as Vergunst et al point out in Chapter Seven, is materially situated; it is often also felt and experienced.

Messiness: a characteristics of these kinds of research projects, in that things don’t always go to plan, and often things look uncertain and vague in process (Cook, 2009).

Complexity: openness and divergence require an attention to complexity, and the entangled ways in which meaning gets made and constructed within projects. Clear lines of causality can be less obvious when many different kinds of knowledge and stakeholders are involved.

Praxis: many of the chapters stressed the importance of praxis (for example Chapters Two and Five) – the value of knowledge being produced in and through action rather than as disentangled theoretical knowledge. Many of the projects stressed that collaborations were inherently useful in ways that might not always be articulated back to the academic field.

Translation: the work often requires attention to process of translation and border crossing, as knowledge and understanding is transformed through its move from place to place and person to person.

Stories: were often the site of exchange, dialogue and reflection and the connections between objects and stories provided rich sites for exploration, as Chapter Four showed, as well as the more historically located work of Smyth et al (Chapter Nine).

Embodied Learning: legacies were often personally transformative and involved the development of new capabilities as Chapter Three highlighted. Such projects led to embodied learning that could not be dis-articulated from the people involved in the project.”

Not all but, but many of these words (I have underlined the most relevant) and ideas also characterise and guide me in my own research. I would like to specifically highlight Embodied Learning. This is not to be confused with the idea that much of what I have done is physical in nature, but rather that the felt experience of myself and of my collaborators has been an important source of inspiration and motivation for my research. I operate as much in the emotional as I do in the intellectual realm. Specifically to speak to this dimension of my research, another important publication that informs my methodological framework is “Embodied Inquiry” written by Jennifer Leigh & Nicole Brown. I would like to highlight a small excerpt where Leigh & Brown discuss the idea of multimodality:

“As a consequence of the three tenets that human understanding is embodied, that language is insufficient and inexact and that communication and human understanding are metaphorical, Embodied Inquiry draws on multimodality. Although ‘multimodal’ and ‘multimodality’ are commonly used in research contexts, the precise meaning is somewhat difficult to grasp and requires deeper thought. The compound consists of the two elements ‘multi’ and ‘modes’ or ‘modality’. Modes or modality describe the ‘means for making meaning’ – thus all the different elements humans have at their disposal to express and make meaning. Multimodality therefore refers to ‘multiple means of making meaning’. The real concern of multimodality lies with the understanding that many modes, thus the different means and elements for making meaning, appear together and not in separation from one another. For example, we use images with written text or we use gestures in addition to the spoken word to convey particularities and details.”

These are the ideas that I use to frame my multi-contextual and potentially at times eclectic research. While doing so, the idea of organised naivety is also always operating in the background as something that guides the ethics or principles of how I go about this type of research. Through practice and theory, the thesis articulates what those principles are and how they can be used within educational contexts.

*The coalition unites us in the recognition that we must change things or die. All of us. We must all change the things that are fucked up and change cannot come in the form that we think of as “revolutionary” – not as a masculinist surge or an armed confrontation. Revolution will come in a form we cannot yet imagine. Moten and Harney propose that we prepare now for what will come by entering into study. Study, a mode of thinking with others separate from the thinking that the institution requires of you, prepares us to be embedded in what Harney calls “the with and for” and allows you to spend less time antagonized and antagonizing.*

- Jack Halberstam  
in the introduction to “The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study” by Stefano Harney & Fred Moten

#### WE MUST BECOME IDEALISTS OR DIE

— I believe this is the spirit with which to confront our world. It’s the starting point of a critique and of possible organisations. There is not enough idealism involved among young people to deal with the world, and that is required. Without idealism, you don’t have the energy to go forward, it needs to be encouraged, fostered and supported.

And it is a fight, this is so important. I say Fight, come out fighting, that’s all I can say.

GUSTAV METZGER  
(We Must Become Idealists Or Die)

2. **Naivety is a practical mindset.** To address the multiple simultaneous humanitarian, ecological and political crisis we require more than what neoliberal pragmatists or “apolitical” technocrats have to offer. In this spirit, naivety is also a rejection of the professional, and a celebration of the amateur, or as Moten and Harney might say, the more than professional. It’s about recognising that together we can create hope, vision, and a sense of collective. And it’s not a question of desire, it’s a question of duty. To be naive is to serve. If we are to overcome the existential challenges facing humanity, it will only happen with a belief in the impossible and naive. It is a prerequisite.

I often refer to rather grand ambitions or abstract concepts, so while relating to this principle I try to open up how my practice materialises on the daily. First, in terms of my pedagogic approach, and then by reflecting on my work and time as policy adviser at the KABK.

# My pedagogic approach

My own pedagogic approach has steadily formed through various activities inside and now outside the KABK, but some significant learnings and articulations came about when teaching the “Artist as Educator” course at the KABK with a small group of BA and MA students. Teaching this course was a fantastic and simultaneously bizarre experience. Although I had by then been involved in education for some time, it was my first proper experience of teaching. Given that, it was quite amusing that my first experience teaching was more or less a course about how to be an educator, something I was still learning myself. This dynamic meant that I was in no position to be an “expert” so I had to take another approach to teaching, as even if I wanted to give classical lectures or deposit knowledge into my students, I didn’t have the experience to be able to do that. But I had chaired many meetings about all different kinds of topics related to education and I had facilitated and participated in different groups that all discussed matters of pedagogy. So I was comfortable with the idea of group work. I was also in the fortunate position of being an alumni of KABK myself, I was only in the shoes of the students I worked with a few short years ago. Naturally then all of these conditions led me to teach in a very horizontal way, giving students a lot of agency and flexibility about how they wanted to study. In many ways, I taught in a way that allowed me to become a student myself. I was also lucky enough to be able to invite guest teachers like Mona Penn-Jousset, Renee Turner and visit artists working on informal educational projects like Pankaj Tiwari. When one of the students discovered that BAK Utrecht was organising something called Ultradependent Public School, we were able to immediately shift our programming to be able to visit as a group and learn together.

Also within the Study Group at the KABK and the workshops I have facilitated outside of it, I always try to generate a very informal environment. I try to teach as much as possible over food, or at the very least tea or coffee. I also see the classroom as a space that should be disrupted, not always even because the traditional sitting by the table approach is not good, but simply because I think it’s important for students to feel that they have a choice over the default arrangement. And not only is the classroom a space to be disrupted, it is sometimes also a space to be abandoned. Whether that be for a simple walk, a field trip or studio visit, I believe in a multiplicity of learning sites. The school or the academy certainly shouldn’t be the only context in which we learn or teach. Education is also about engaging with the world.

This more communal approach to teaching does mean however that I was sometimes seen by students as quite a passive teacher. This was deliberate, and it didn’t come out of disinterest, but rather patience to wait for students to take ownership over their learning. For example, for the Artist as Educator course I used only peer-assessment to evaluate the course. This meant that students were encouraged to help each other and hold each other accountable throughout the study period as well as during the assessment. It was a way to make assessment, something that I otherwise would have seen as an institutional requirement, also useful for learning itself. Naturally, I guide them through this process and it doesn’t always work perfectly, but rather than putting expectations on students in terms of what they must individually accomplish to pass the course, I try to set expectations in terms of how students should contribute towards the group as a community of learners. I often encounter challenges like this when working within institutional contexts, so I spend quite some time thinking about how to find creative ways of turning assessments, credit points, attendance requirements and things like this that teachers can sometimes be encouraged to use punitively to actually enhance our capacity for learning. For example, many students at the KABK are very often late to class. This is something that I found personally annoying, as it totally disrupts the group dynamics and makes it impossible to make use of the full collective as a rich resource of knowledge, experience and aspirations. So while there were not many rules in my class, one was that nobody can be late. People have to commit themselves to care for the full group. If they cannot make that commitment, I try to discuss with them their worries and see whether there may be a solution. This almost always works. And if not, that is okay, but then we have to meet and collaborate in another context. When framing notions of attendance and being on time in this way of being acts of care, love towards the group or collective, I find that students are much more likely to commit with a certain passion and love for each other and the subject matter.

I also have a background as a documentary photographer, or alternatively you could say, as an artist. Although the art world is sometimes quietly buzzing away in the background of my practice and research, it is never too distant either. And sometimes opportunities present themselves where education, art and my sensibility for organising can all come together. Two good examples of this are the “Why does it hurt to carry my bad?” and the “I miss you home” exhibitions which I helped students organise at the KABK.



Pictures of our trip to BAK Utrecht’s Ultradependent Public School where we participated in a workshop hosted by Czar Kristoff with the title “Be(com)ing a monument”



Pictures from a lesson of the Artist as Educator course where we were reading bell hooks.



Exhibition at KABK dedicated to the International Day  
for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination



gather up!

why does it hurt to carry my bag?

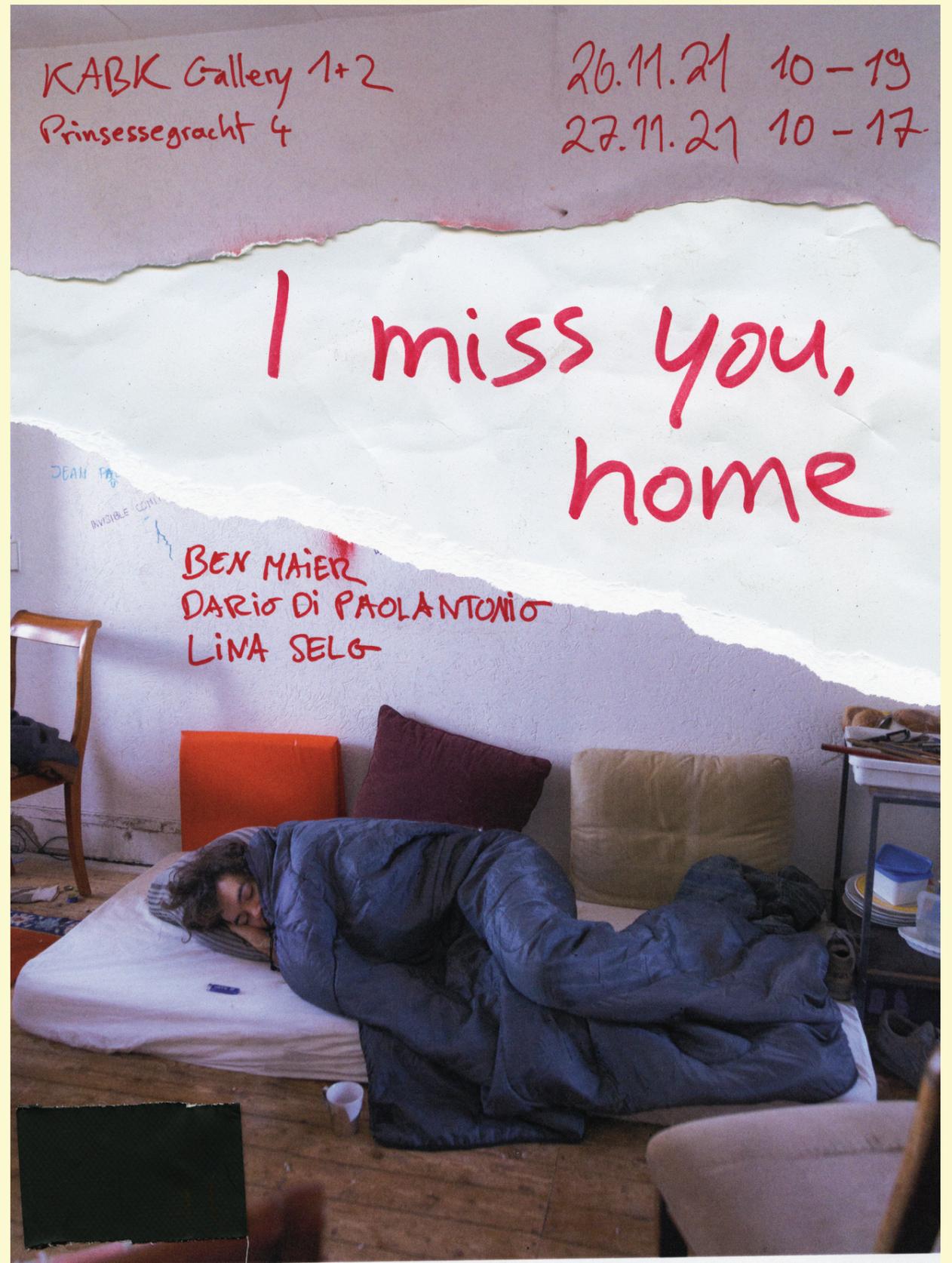


exhibition  
18 March 2023

time  
12:00 - 17:00PM

location  
Gallery 1 and 2

Design by Sonya Umanskaya



KABK Gallery 1+2  
Prinsessegracht 4

26.11.21 10-19  
27.11.21 10-17

I miss you,  
home

BEN MAIER  
DARIO DI PAOLANTONIO  
LIMA SELG

more info + program at [www.studyinthehague.com/hi-the-hague](http://www.studyinthehague.com/hi-the-hague)



Pictures of the Gather up! exhibition. Photographed by Anastasia Troshkova

Pictures of the "I miss you home" exhibition. Photographed by Ben Meier and myself

"Gather up! Why does it hurt to carry my bag?" was an initiative that came out of the KABKs Blue Office. It was an exhibition organised by international students of the KABK. I helped to facilitate this process and bring people and resources together. It's not necessarily an example of teaching or pedagogy, but it is an example of how I try to practice my values within larger institutional contexts. My contribution to this exhibition was trying to generate an environment for people where they would feel the freedom to express themselves in an honest and critical way. Since the exhibition was organised in the context of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, we wanted to encourage international students to contribute and curate the show as to honestly speak towards their experience of The Netherlands. It's also a day when locals in The Hague come to visit the academy, so such an exhibition also becomes a site for generational and cultural exchange.

Another exhibition I helped students curate was called "I miss you home" which was a commentary on the precarious housing situation of (international) students that come to study at the KABK. It was organised in collaboration with the municipality of The Hague, which also meant that local policy makers and city councillors came to visit the exhibition and learn from the students. While I don't make any grandiose claims about how exhibitions like this generate social change, I do see them as learning moments for students to start engaging with society more broadly, breaking out of the often isolated cultural bubble that feels very comfortable for many of us during our studies. My role is again to make things possible for people, find resources, publics and act as a bit of a buffer between students and institutions that often have their own agendas when it comes to these kinds of events. They are also examples of how art academies and art students can get involved in the politics that exists around them. I really believe that art education is also a political education, and in moments like these exhibitions are examples of how that belief can in a small way be practised.

They are also important moments for my personal grounding, they serve as reminders of why we do what we do. Much of my work can sometimes be quite meta, thinking about art education as a subject, teaching about art education as a subject, putting together training programmes where art education itself is again the subject. Currently I'm in the process of curating a micro degree on art education, again the subject of the education is education itself. So sometimes when thinking so much about art education as a subject, it can get a bit confusing what is actually the subject of the art education that I am trying to contribute to. Because of this, I try to build these little contact points into my practice of helping organise or curate shows but also more and more also getting back in touch with my own artistic practice again. It all means that I do tend to be quite an eclectic practitioner, sometimes even confused. I facilitate, I teach, I curate, I create work myself. I jump between spreadsheets, funding applications and intimate workshop moments with students, participants or friends. But somehow, everything informs each other and I try to make sense of it all through a commitment to art education.

And as already hinted at and evident throughout this thesis, there's always a sense of amateurism in my work. I like to be busy with things I don't quite know how to do yet. It forces me, even in the rare instances I might not actually want it, to be work with others, find ways with others, learn with others. When you're an amateur, not much can you do alone. But you can find clever ways of doing things in a new way together. I think somewhere subconsciously, it is also my way of rewriting, and not reproducing the profession, it's my way of being "more than professional" as Harenny and Moten might put it.



All pictures of students that participated in our "Artist as Educator" course

Fredrika: It was really interesting to participate in this class, maybe because it didn't feel like a class so much. ~~It~~ It felt like a communal space for sharing knowledge, discussion, teaching each other. ~~It opened~~ It lacked a sense of hierarchy that often sabotages this openness. This allowed ~~us~~ ~~each~~ us to teach each other, instead of only having one person giving out knowledge. And having 7 teachers at the same time seemed to work pretty effectively.

It was really fun to meet you all during this course. I appreciate the opportunity of getting to you better, in other circumstances we probably would not have such conversations as we did.

Lucas, although we are not so close with you, I think you are a good friend. You are very reliable, smart, have original ideas and strong beliefs. I appreciate your ability to ~~stay~~ be who you are and be honest.

Lee, it was great to have a chance to talk to you, learn about your practice and way of thinking. It's very important to question everything and dare to ask these questions, but also good to keep in mind your own openness to the answers.

Lee, it was really fun to be in class with you. You always have something to say and you share it very easily. It's very inspiring to ~~see~~ see your passion to the process of drawing and your ~~passion~~ ~~surrounding~~ you all the time, I think it will lead to lots of interesting findings.

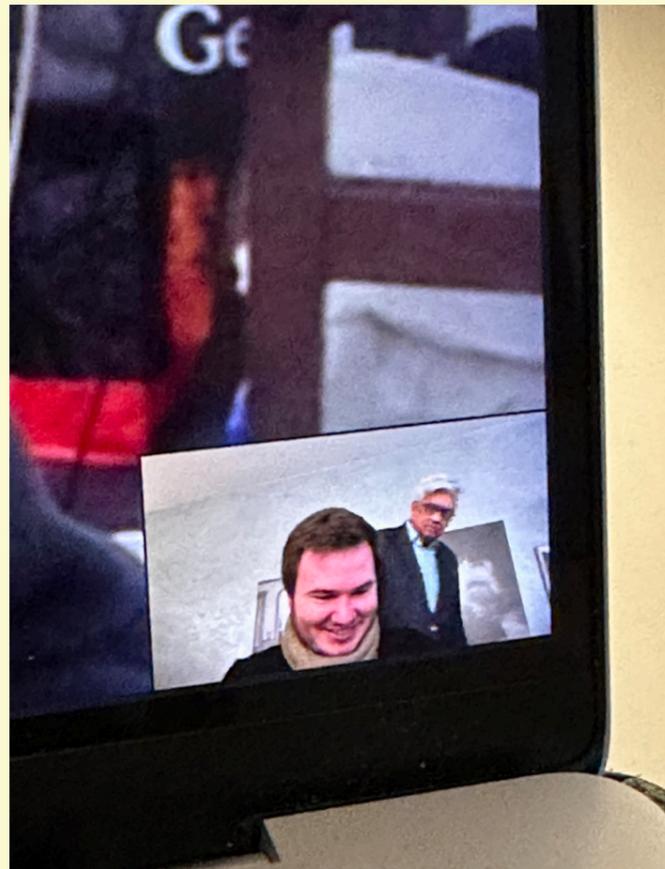
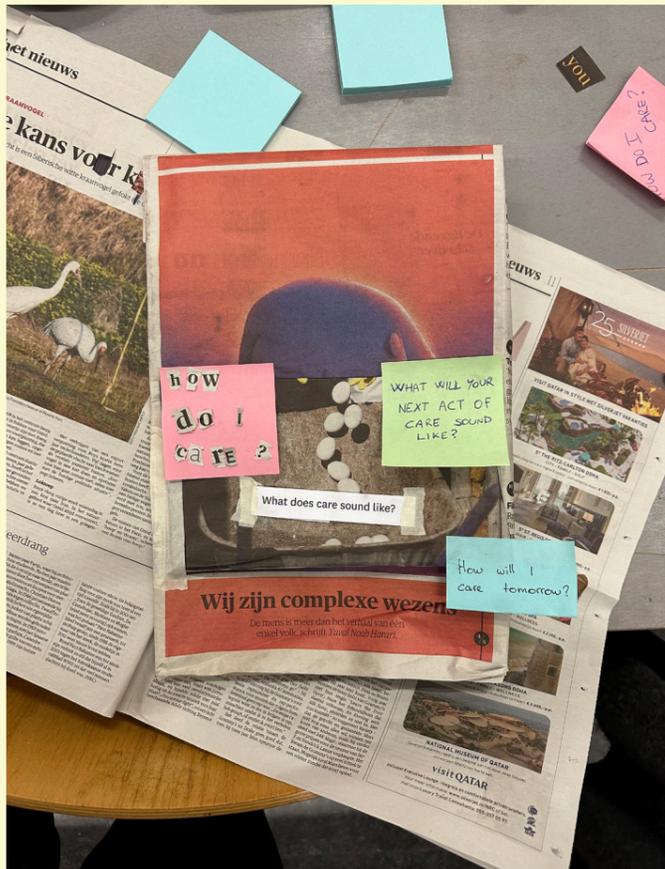
Anna, the way you interact with your art is very lovely. I admire that little universe you've created around yourself (it feels like) that you shared with other people. Your workshop was a very pleasant experience for me, thank you.

Lee, it was always interesting to hear you talk about all the connections you've created and knowledge you've gathered. The trip to BAK was super interesting. Thank you for sharing so much with us and being so open.

Paulo, it's always a pleasure to be around you. You have a very kind soft heart, and I like how sensitive and sincere you always are. Thank you for sharing your passion to the collage as well, it makes a lot of sense.

Federick, thank you for creating this wonderful experience for us. You are one of the kindest and caring people I've ever met, you know everything everyone.

Feedback from students about their experience in our class "Artist as Educator"



These are all images of my work with teachers and students at the KABK. Various workshops and meetings throughout the academic year of 22-23.

“It was really interesting to participate in this class. Maybe because it didn’t feel like a class so much. It felt like a communal space for sharing knowledge, discussion, teaching each other. It lacked a sense of hierarchy that often sabotages this openness. This allowed us to teach each other, instead of only having one person giving out knowledge. And having 7 teachers at the same time seemed to work pretty effectively”

- Feedback from a student who participated in the “Artist as educator” course which I facilitated at the KABK



These were the members of the Blue Office. From left to right standing: Andrea, Lyndsey, me, Ranti, Malcom, Sonya. Crouching: Julie, Alexandra, Elisa, Lara



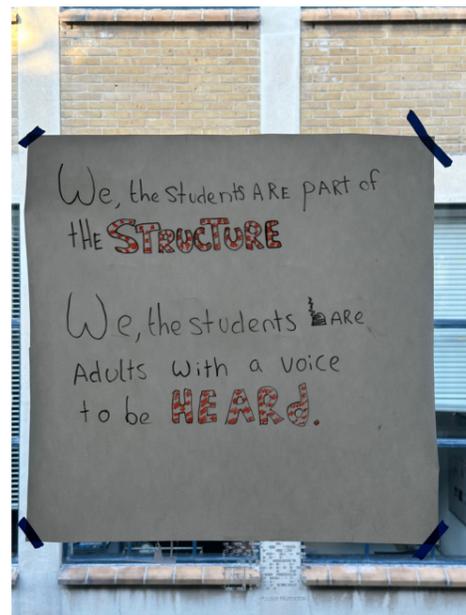
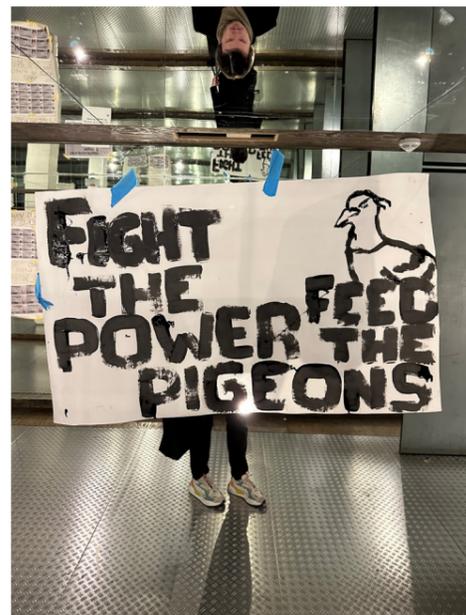
My former office at the KABK in The Hague. It was a beautiful space which I shared with great colleagues and students.

I became interested in arts education studying at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague. I was involved in the politics of that academy for 4-5 years, chairing various councils and eventually ending up as policy adviser. The academy was my community and the institution could never quite live up to our expectations or needs. But we had each other. Through various public scandals and mismanagement, the turmoil within the academy became constant and although as a community we had moments of alignment, it rarely felt as if it was enough to enact real change. In May of 2022, a new director, Ranti Tjan was appointed and a feeling of enthusiasm came across the academy. It seemed like finally the academy had a director that was able to communicate both with students and teachers, but also had enough experience to lead an institution. Unfortunately less than a year later, a letter was sent by Ranti Tjan that the Executive Board intends to dismiss him due to a disagreement about the governance structure. All was well and good, but proposing systemic change went too far.

These are images of the banners that remained on the academy's canteen windows after the night of the occupation on the 3rd to 4th of April 2023. They show students calling for more power for the representative bodies that speak on their behalf, more transparency for the institution as a whole and above all, a recognition that students are integrally part of the academy and its structures. It was a powerful display that the relationship between the students and the institution cannot be a simple one of client and service provider. These are the terms that neo-liberal education has accepted as the norm and certainly terms that I heard in conversations throughout my time at the academy. Of course when using these terms to describe the academy, the idea of an occupation, or protest generally, becomes unacceptable.

The occupation then, clearly crystalised the confrontation between the student body and management. Months of negotiations followed. And while some small wins like a formally established and institutionally funded Student Union were achieved, a Dutch civil court nevertheless decided that the dismissal of Ranti Tjan could go through. In fact, the court ruled against Ranti Tjan on all points, meaning that no compensation was awarded to Ranti Tjan and all costs involved for the University would have to be reimbursed by Ranti Tjan also. Essentially, the court system ruled that a damage working relationship between the director and the board would mean that even though the director was internally supported en masse by students and staff, his employment was no longer viable. No amount of public support, protest or negotiation could change that. A conflict between two men meant that the whole community and the institution as a whole would be put into jeopardy.

And it's not only the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague where students have turned to protest in order to be seen and considered by the art academy. Similar actions have been witnessed at art academies across the world. This tells us something about what the art academy means for students. They have skin in the game. The art academy is a place of refuge, community. One that is deserving of personal sacrifice if it can help to align the institutional interests with those of their communities. And of course, not all students feel the need to be engaged in student politics. Some students are there with very specific intentions for their own artistic or design practice. And that is alright, there is no obligation for students to take this weight on their shoulders. But given that so many often do, how can the art academy start to better facilitate this kind of engagement with the institution? What can we do to make sure that these protests are not in vain?





Ranti Tjan

Break the Pattern

To: Students\_all verzendlijst, Algemene Verzendlijst KABK

27 March 2023 at 09:27



Dear KABK-community!

Over the past ten months we have worked together on a better KABK. I wanted the academy to move into calmer waters after the tumultuous period 2020-2022.

Unfortunately, there is commotion because Huug de Deugd, the chairman of the Executive Board of the University of the Arts, has decided to fire me, because of a discussion in which I disagree about the top governance structure.

*The situation until now*

Freedom of expression is the foundation of art, culture, and our whole society. The main difference of opinion is my advice to let the faculty directors (KABK and Conservatoire) be part of the Executive Board of the University of the Arts, The Hague. With the construction of three people instead of one person, the University of the Arts can impose policy on the KABK with our consent only. I have given this advice several times, but the Executive and Supervisory boards have refused to have a serious discussion about the governance structure. I have also asked for the structure to be evaluated in the future. These proposals too have been rejected. I have informed both Huug de Deugd and his superiors, the Supervisory Board, that a difference of opinion is no ground for firing someone.

Recently, February 16, 2023, Huug de Deugd, in the presence of Jan Willem van der Wal of Human Resources, told me that the University of the Arts wants to say goodbye to me because I do not renounce my opinion on this subject. On February 21, I received a proposal to be gone before March 1, 2023 in exchange for € 70,000. I declined this offer. It goes without saying that I would like to be and remain director of the KABK. I have also made multiple pleas towards this conversation being discussed through (external) mediation. These requests have been ignored. Wednesday 22 March I heard from Huug in person and in writing that he will go to court to get me fired.

I advocate for a safe working environment. The one-person decision making in this matter by the Chairman and only member of the Executive Board Huug de Deugd and the passiveness demonstrated by the Members of the Supervisory Board (Dr. Susana Menendez, Prof. Dr. Pancras Hogendoorn, drs Anneke Hogenstijn, drs. Ron Soonieus) should concern us all.

*Why do I make this news public?*

Many of you might find it shocking to suddenly learn of such events or may even wonder why I make it public in the first place. I believe that in a transparent organisation, that the KABK should be, everyone must have the chance to hold their management accountable, including the Executive and Supervisory Boards. This would not be possible if I stay silent. When it comes to important matters one should speak up, in the same spirit of criticality as our education at the KABK. Until now the discussion about the top structure is only discussed between the management, the DMR and me. I did not bring it to other bodies of the academic community.

*Why do I believe in a 3-person Executive Board?*

The University of the Arts The Hague consists of the two faculties KABK and Royal Conservatoire. Only in the faculties can you find students, teachers, and education. The educational expertise lies within the faculties themselves also. The faculties have joined into one University in 1990. The Executive Board should act as a facilitator of the collaboration between the two great institutes of KABK and KC. Until recently the Executive Board consisted of the two faculty directors, which was not perfect either. According to the current governance model however, the newly installed one-person Executive Board can impose policy and decide the budgets for the KABK and KC. I do not believe that such a strict hierarchy should be imposed on our academy by a distant construct. Including the faculty directors of KABK and KC in the Executive Board would solve this issue, as power would be shared amongst equals and the Chairman would act as a useful facilitator of the important collaboration between KABK and KC. Currently, decisions are made top-down without consultation or consent with the faculties. This is not right.

*What happens in court?*

Usually, an employer must show what he did to keep the employee on board. Are there performance interviews held (no), is another job offered (no), and have there been any talks with a mediator (no). Is there a conflict about vision or mission (no). Is there a "damaged work relation" (no, last three months, I took part in all management meetings. I had two one-on-one meetings with the Executive Board and an informal coffee). Is there a personal issue (no, not from my side). The only matter is that the Executive Board disagrees I have my opinion on the top structure (and I did not express this opinion outside the boardroom). Having said this, I'm confident the court will be just. This process can take months.

*What do I want?*

My goal is to work at a strong, stable, and vivid KABK together with a strong, stable, and vivid conservatoire. For this we need to break the pattern. We need a balanced Executive Board and a truly engaged Supervisory Board.

*Attachments*

In the interest of transparency, I attach several documents that I have shared with the Executive and Supervisory Boards in the past months, as well as a number of documents they have sent me.

Understandably you might have questions or would like to talk with me in person. I will be available in my office for the whole day for walk-ins. Let's break the pattern and go for a new KABK.

Sincerely,  
Ranti

Ranti Tjan



Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten  
Royal Academy of Art

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2514 AN Den Haag-NL

+31(0)6 2436 3331  
[ranti@kabk.nl](mailto:ranti@kabk.nl)  
[www.kabk.nl](http://www.kabk.nl)



This was the e-mail sent by Ranti Tjan to everyone at the KABK announcing his intended firing.

## Haagse kunstacademie schorst twee docenten wegens beschuldigingen van grensoverschrijdend gedrag

De Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten (KABK) in Den Haag heeft woensdag twee docenten geschorst, na beschuldigingen van grensoverschrijdend gedrag.

Redactie 4 november 2020, 23:00



Beeld: Hollandse Hoogte



Illustratie vooraf aan de Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten in Den Haag

De Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten (KABK) in Den Haag heeft woensdag twee docenten geschorst wegens beschuldigingen van grensoverschrijdend gedrag, naar aanleiding van de aflevering van een onderzoek naar docenten van de academie.

Aankomst van de docenten op woensdag 4 november 2020

## Opnieuw conflict KABK: directeur Ranti Tjan weigert ontslag

**Kunstacademie Den Haag** De Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten in Den Haag is brandpunt van een arbeidsconflict tussen directeur Ranti Tjan en College van Bestuur-voorzitter Huug de Deugd.

Lucette ter Borg 27 maart 2023 Leestijd 2 minuten

Op de Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten (KABK) in Den Haag is opnieuw een conflict ontstaan, dit maal rondom de in juni 2022 aangestreden directeur Ranti Tjan. Huug de Deugd, enig lid en voorzitter van het College van Bestuur van de Hogeschool der Kunsten in Den Haag, heeft Tjan op 21 februari j.l. schriftelijk bekendgemaakt zijn arbeidsovereenkomst te willen ontbinden vanwege „een duurzaam verstoorde arbeidsrelatie.“ Tjan zou daarmee de derde directeur zijn die bij de KABK het veld zou moeten ruimen sinds het verschijnen van een onderzoek in NRC in oktober 2020 naar wangedrag van een ex-KABK-student.

In het vertrouwelijke „voorstel tot beëindigingsovereenkomst“ in bezit van NRC-schrijft De Deugd dat hij Tjans arbeidsovereenkomst na overleg met de Raad van Toezicht op 1 juni a.s. of al eerder wil beëindigen. Tjan heeft een ontslagvergoeding van 40.000 euro aangeboden; dat bedrag zal worden verhoogd met 10.000 euro voor iedere maand dat Tjan eerder vertrekt. Tekent Tjan de overeenkomst dan is hij verplicht niet in de openbaarheid te treden over de redenen en details van zijn ontslag, aldus De Deugd in de beëindigingsovereenkomst.



Directeur Ranti Tjan Foto KABK

INTERVIEW RANTI TJAN

## Ranti Tjan, nieuwe directeur KABK: ‘De rust moet in alle kunstacademies terugkomen’

*De Volkskrant* spreekt met Ranti Tjan, de nieuwe directeur van de Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten in Den Haag. ‘Hier tuimelt het talent echt over de drempel. Dat trekt mij aan.’

Anna van Leeuwen 1 juni 2022, 16:22



Ranti Tjan, de nieuwe directeur van de Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten in Den Haag, in een atelier op de Academie. Beeld Pauline Niks

## Docent KABK maakte ‘honderden’ stiekeme foto’s van vrouwen onder tafel

**#MeToo** Opnieuw ophef op de Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten in Den Haag: een docent is beschuldigd van het maken van stiekeme foto’s van vrouwen onder tafel.

Lucette ter Borg & Carola Houtekamer 5 september 2022 Leestijd 2 minuten



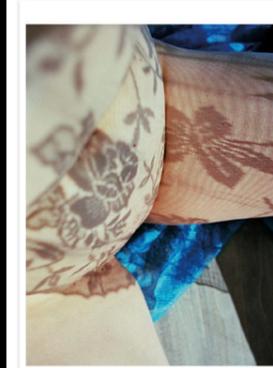
De Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten (KABK) in Den Haag. Foto David van Dam

De Nederlandse kunstenaar Pim V. (1961), al bijna 32 jaar docent bij de afdeling Fine Arts op de Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten (KABK) in Den Haag, wordt ervan beschuldigd jarenlang stiekem foto's van het kruis van vrouwen te hebben gemaakt met een camera die hij onder tafel verstopt hield. Onder de foto's die V. in zijn bezit had, zat ook een aantal foto's van vrouwen op de KABK. Dat heeft de directie van de KABK maandag bekendgemaakt aan alle studenten en docenten.

## Studenten van de in opspraak geraakte KABK in Den Haag organiseren benefietverkoop

De helft van de opbrengst van de werken van fotografiestudenten zal gaan naar het Centrum Seksueel Geweld.

Anna van Leeuwen 30 mei 2021, 22:54



Maria Kalaghir-Ciszewska, Untitled, 2020 Foto: Maria Kalaghir-Ciszewska

## Interim-directeur Haagse kunstacademie stopt per direct

**Sociale veiligheid** Paul van Maanen, interim-directeur van de Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten, heeft met onmiddellijke ingang zijn functie neergelegd. Zijn actieplan viel niet goed bij studenten en staf.

Lucette ter Borg & Carola Houtekamer 30 juni 2021 Leestijd 2 minuten



De Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten (KABK) in Den Haag Foto David van Dam

## Kans op terugkeer directeur Ranti Tjan naar Haagse kunstacademie KABK gering

**Arbeidsconflict** Bij de rechtbank in Den Haag diende dinsdag de zaak tussen de Hogeschool der Kunsten Den Haag en Ranti Tjan, de op non-actief gestelde directeur van de Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten. De kans op mediation bleek gering.

Lucette ter Borg 31 mei 2023 Leestijd 1 minuut



De Koninklijke Academie voor Beeldende Kunsten in Den Haag: directeur Ranti Tjan heeft een conflict met de Hogeschool der Kunsten, waar de KABK onder valt. Foto David van Dam

NIUWS

## Directeur Haagse kunstacademie vecht ontslag aan, nog steeds onrust onder studenten en medewerkers

De rechter wil weten waarom de op non-actief gestelde directeur Ranti Tjan de vuile was heeft buiten gehangen.

Anna van Leeuwen 31 mei 2023, 17:14



Ranti Tjan (blauw pak), die zijn ontslag aanvecht als directeur van de Haagse kunstacademie KABK, betreedt de rechtbank in Den Haag. Links van hem Sjarel Ex, oud-directeur van Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen in Rotterdam. Foto David van Dam

KRITISCH RAPPORT

## Directeur Academie Beeldende Kunsten stapt per direct op

**Sociale onveiligheid**

Lucette ter Borg & Carola Houtekamer 23 maart 2021

Leestijd 1 minuut

Marieke Schoenmakers (1966) legt per direct haar functie neer als directeur van de Koninklijke Academie voor Beeldende Kunsten (KABK) in Den Haag. Aanleiding is een dinsdag gepubliceerd onderzoeksrapport door bureau Bezemer & Schubad naar de bedrijfscultuur en sociale veiligheid op de academie. Het rapport concludeert dat Schoenmakers' leidinggeven een gevoel van sociale onveiligheid op de academie creëert. De raad van toezicht neemt de aanbevelingen en conclusies van het rapport over. Het rapport van Bezemer & Schubad volgt op een in oktober in NRC verschenen artikel over grensoverschrijdend gedrag door kunstenaar Julian Andeweg, oud-student van de KABK. (NRC)

Despite all my criticism of the art academy and the unfavourable conditions that the institutional systems generate and perpetuate, there is still room for possibility in the academy. Possibility to make the academy feel so small it starts to feel like something other than an institution<sup>1</sup>. During the academic year 2022-2023, when I was still serving as a Policy Adviser to the Directorate at the KABK, we started multiple initiatives that brought teachers and students closer to the peripheral management layers of the academy. And it was not merely proximity as a gesture either, it was a collaboration.

For example, responding to the adoption of a new Code of Conduct, we formed a study group of eight teachers from different departments and disciplinary backgrounds to consider how social safety materialises as a pedagogic challenge, rather than an institutional one. We had no specific goal or deliverables that we had to meet, but rather the study group was just that, a group for collective study. Although lightly steered by myself, its focus was largely collectively decided. During the academic year we encountered conversations about the safe space, governance, active listening, embodied practices and more. We read theory and we practiced and experimented with our ideas. The knowledge generated within this group was informally shared on an ongoing basis throughout the institute. On a formal level, the questions raised in the small scale study group made their way to the large scale didactic courses offered for all teachers. Points of tension between education and institutional policy were raised but possible points of symbiosis between the centre of education and the periphery were simultaneously utilised. And the group formed a community and a small informal support structure for other peers and colleagues.

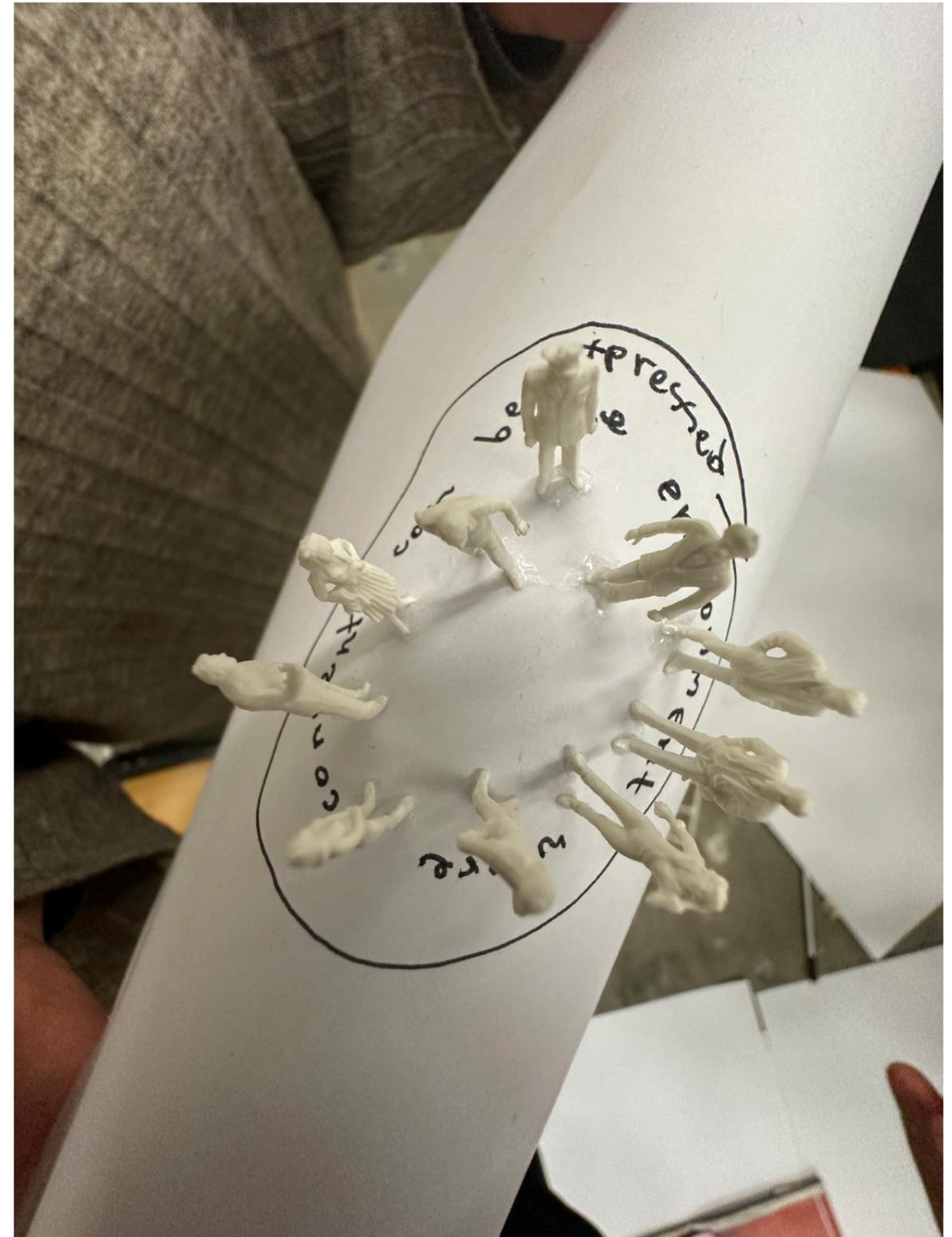
Multiple structural initiatives were also put in place to integrate students into the work of management. For example the Green and Blue Offices, with the former focusing on improving sustainability strategies within the academy and the latter its diversity, equity and inclusion practices. Both groups consisted of students, teachers and staff and were integrated into the work of management, meaning that formal decisions regarding the concerned topics were made in collaboration with all layers of the institute. Furthermore, a robust system of class and department representatives was set up. These students worked regularly together with their department heads and the director. This regular proximity meant that issues brought to the table by students could be immediately addressed by the appropriate colleague within the institute.

Of course, not everything went well. Trying to include more people at different levels of the academy also means that this inclusion in itself generates even more desire to be included by those that still remain excluded. Since it's practically not possible to always include everyone, and sometimes also not the specific persons that should have been included, the pressure this puts on these groups to be transparent about their work is significant. They have a risk of becoming these exclusive clubs, where proximity to power means that the students and teachers involved are perceived to be too friendly with management, generating suspicion about whether or not they are still sufficiently critical. This being said, the othering between the management and students or teachers of the art academy is arguably absurd to begin with. While understandably the different layers of the institute represent different generations, pay scales and responsibilities, I would like to think that it's possible to be allied with each-other at the art academy without always suspecting each-other of malice.

It's also necessary to point out that these kinds of collaborative setups between management, teachers and students is the only way to realistically mean that notions of equality, social safety, sustainability and representation become operationalised for the benefit of learners. Left to the institution, these ideas easily become instrumentalised as marketing buzzwords for the benefit of the institution, while remaining irrelevant for students and for teachers. Or worse yet, when policies around social safety for example are operationalised through hierarchic means, it may well mean that the affect on the pedagogic practices is not an enhancement or creation of the safe space, but rather a sterile and underwhelming education that is obsessed with risk management. After all, the easiest way to make education safe, is to not make anything possible at all.

None of this is to say that generating change within the art academy is easy, or that simply a few collaborative efforts between students and teachers are enough. Initiatives like these are only the beginning. First they will have to be maintained and integrated into the daily practice at the academy. After this, they might be able to generate momentum for more ambitious transitions to build academies in which institutional interests are aligned with the values of the communities they should serve.

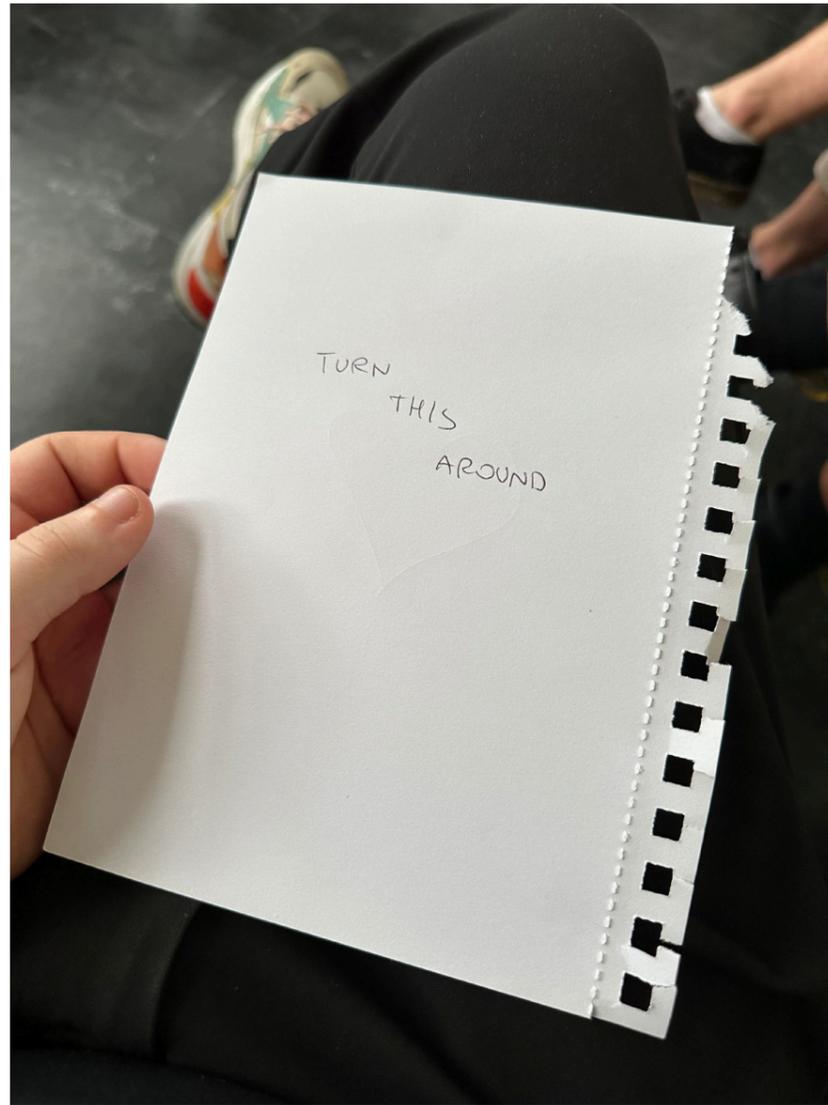
<sup>1</sup> Making the institution feel as small as possible was integral to Ranti's work at the academy. It was both literal and metaphorical and it was beautiful to witness how he practised this smallness.



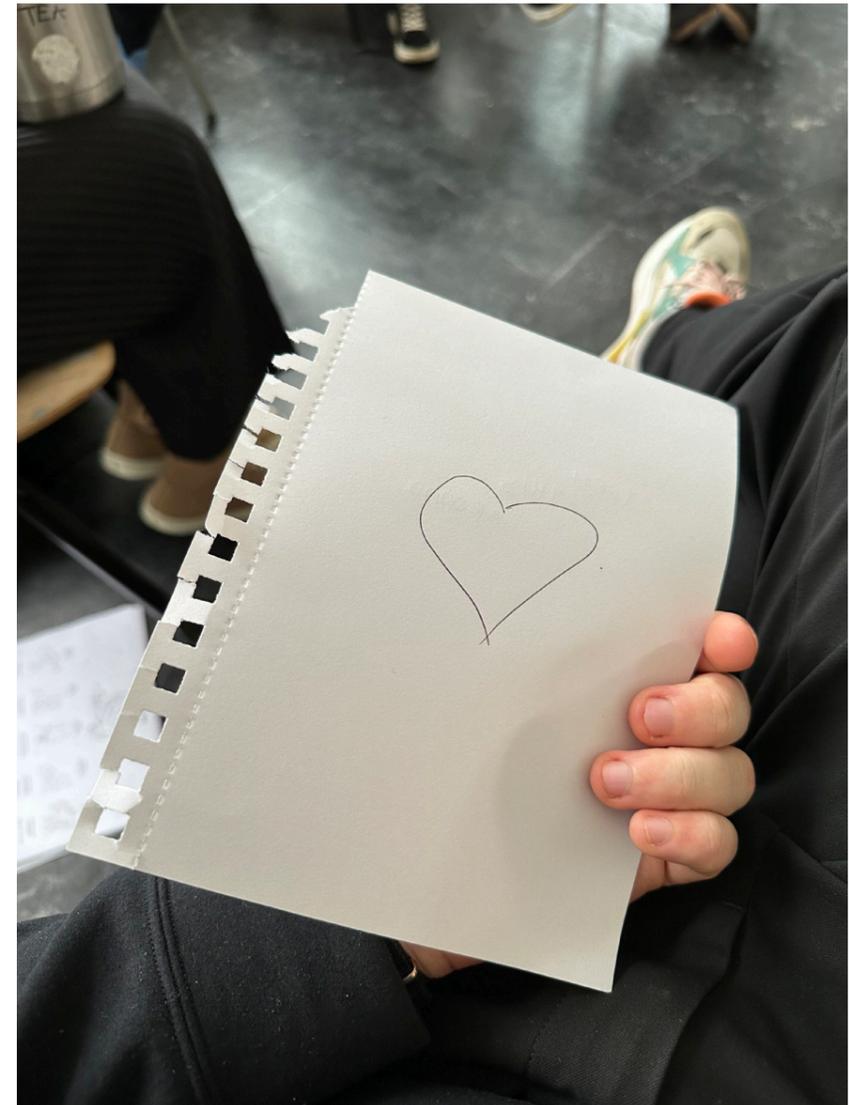
Material discussions about the "we" in the KABKs Code of Conduct

3. **Always begin from a place of love for yourself, others and the subject matter.** Alternatively call it joy, commitment, passion, optimism. Whatever the specific term that you prefer to use, begin from a positive position. One that is both critical, but also tries to imagine the world otherwise. Start from a place which can generate hope.

In the next pages, I discuss the importance of love in education. Love first and foremost for the student and each other, but also of course the subject matter, which I perhaps don't touch on so much within this thesis. While the theoretical part of this section utilises literature research and personal anecdotes to explicitly name, the practice side shows a way of centring love within the classroom without explicitly naming it. There it is more about centring our human needs and personal narratives. Something which can become a position from which to then cultivate a loving collective.



A note once passed to me by Leo



It starts with love. Everything I have ever done in the art academy has come out of a love for the academy and the people within it. The students and the teachers. The symbiosis of this intergenerational tradition that is education. I have not loved everyone, but as Jack Halberstam writes in their introduction to *The Undercommons* by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, “the projects of fugitive planning and black study are mostly about reaching out to find connection.” It is connection that I have sought and tried to cultivate during my time at the art academy. That almost primitive urge to be part of something, together with others.

Perhaps I could have been helped along the way by the principles of nonviolence that I have only recently started to read up on. The kinds of stances taken by David Hartsough when being pinned down knife to heart and saying to his assailant “Friend, do what you believe is right, and I will still try to love you.”<sup>1</sup> Not that I was ever held at knifepoint at the art academy, but I had my share of confrontations and I did not always respond with love. I felt that in order to stand for what I believe in, I had to fight for it at the academy. Advocate for my ideas in board meetings or private walks with heads or directors. I had to insist. And sometimes this meant I did not listen. I think that most of the time, I managed to do this work with kindness and respect towards others, but I also know that there were moments when it really mattered where I turned to more political manoeuvres. And although I now have to recognise how in those moments my actions were hurtful to certain people or groups, I nevertheless stick to the belief that it was out of love for education as a whole.

I often think of a former student, Sonya, whom I had the pleasure of working with as a teacher<sup>2</sup>. It was a quiet morning and we were reflecting with the group of us on some of the positive, formative experiences we have had within education. The conversation turned to a discussion about what are the characteristics that make up a “good” teacher. Of course an oversimplified conversation, but Sonya pointed out to us that a good teacher is one that is able to really notice and take interest in their students. I still don’t know whether it was purely a contribution to the discussion, or if it was her way of asking to be seen at that moment. Only later, when reading through the chapters of bell hooks’ *Teaching Community: A pedagogy of Hope*, I realised that is it not exactly this that hooks refers to in the chapter *Heart to Heart: Teaching with Love*. hooks describes a counterview to the prevailing consensus within education that teachers should not get too close to their students. She writes about the role of objectivism and how embedded in this notion “is the assumption that the more we stand at a distance from something the more we look at it with a neutral view.” I would argue, like I believe bell hooks argues in her writings, that to really understand and connect with a person, to really learn together with someone, we need to be able to love them.

<sup>1</sup> This was also an example shared by Kazu Haga in his book “Healing Resistance: A radically different response to harm”

<sup>2</sup> At the KABK I was lecturer for a course called “Artist as Educator.” Within that course we frequently discussed all different kinds of educational ethics and strategies.

Were I to think back to my time as policy adviser at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague, notions of love being inherently linked with education and learning would certainly have been controversial around the board room table. Likely also with individual teachers and students. I am sure that I would have been presented with arguments about how teachers need to be able to remain objective during examinations or how an emotional connection to students may quickly cross over to favouritism or worse yet border crossing and transgressive behaviour. These concerns would have been raised sincerely and certainly not with any hidden agenda to dull education. In fact, I would surely have sympathised with these arguments as being all matters to be taken seriously. Within the academy, I was engaged on multiple fronts to generate a more socially safe learning environment. So it is not that I am for a moment arguing against matters of social safety, or students and teachers setting and respecting each other’s boundaries. Nor do I want to hide the fact that the culture within arts education, at least in The Netherlands has been problematic. Toxic trends of the art and design worlds have been replicated within the academy. In my conversation with Miriam Bestrebreurtje, who was recently appointed to be the director of the Rietveld Academy she said to me that “I am repairing the harm that has been caused by what we have considered professional education.” I too believe that my work has been about repairing this harm, but of course there is a difference between healing and risk management. The latter may well come at the cost of our humanity, or at the cost of love. And so I point to love as a principle to defend within education because I fear that otherwise this work of repair might take on the face of risk management. The easiest way to make a learning environment safe, is to not make anything possible at all. Surely this is not in the spirit of education, or certainly not transformative, critical education.

And is it also not the case that it is exactly through love that we can exist as Jeanne Heeswijk would say “with, within and against” the institution. Part of the institution, working with it, but also acknowledging that there will be many moments in which the humanity that we cultivate through love for each other, and through love for education will be out of the institutions reach. This is no longer institutional critique, or resistance. It’s how we transcend education to the spiritual realm. No amount of policy or institutional planning can operationalise the experience of love. That is something that we do together, as friends.

I suppose that in highlighting love in this way it also falls on me to explain what I mean by love. In a simple sense, I subscribe to the definition of love that is offered by bell hooks, which is “care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect and trust.” Whenever I type the word “love” it is in a way shorthand for those six other concepts, ideas, feelings. This is already quite helpful, as it steers us away from any misunderstandings that I might also allude to romantic love. This is not the case at all. However, the definition offered by hooks, as clear as it may be, feels also somewhat stationary for me. It’s an extremely useful reference point to practically use within the classroom, but I want to be moved. It’s a case of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. To speak to the whole then, we turn to the way in which Kazu Haga describes the Greek notion of agape love in his book “Healing resistance: a radically different approach to harm.”

“When we talk about love in the context of nonviolence however, we are talking about what the Greeks refer to as agape. Agape love is unconditional love for all of humanity, for all life on earth and for all that exists in the cosmos. It is what Dr. King called “disinterested love,” because you have no interest in whether the object of your agape loves you back or not. Agape is the type of love that is capable of building Beloved Community.

You do not have agape love for someone because of all of the experiences that you have been through together. You do not have agape love for someone because of the things they do for you. You do not love them for the ways that they make you feel. You love them simply because they exist. You love them because you acknowledge a sanctity that exists deep in the souls of all people. When you experience agape love, you see past people’s faults, and you see their humanity. You see them at their best even when they themselves don’t see or express it.”

So in that sense, the way that I see love as something imperative to and within education, has little to do with how we think about love in a romantic sense. Nevertheless, there is no better word to use than love. In fact, it is essential that we use precisely this word, as by doing so we make it clear that this conversation cuts more to the essence of what is education for, rather than any discussion about policy, governance or methods which are all conversations that should reflect our understanding of what we want educate to be for.

That energy of love within education is also simply intoxicating, for those studying together but also for everyone else around them. At the Piet Zwart Institute, I was privileged enough to host the first day of new masters students to the MA Education in Arts programme I am also part of. We called the workshop “under-practice”, referring to the important human connection that within educational contexts is often perceived as less important than the professional aspirations of the individuals involved. We talked about our values, families, taste in music and humour, our politics and the culture and experiences that have formed us so far. Our hope with the workshop was that allowing ourselves to first get to know each other as humans, will set up a different dynamic of care and collaboration when we start to get to know each other in that more professional capacity that is often prioritised in masters programmes like this one. Love for education, is also about acknowledging that study itself is a collective process and that students often learn much more from each other than they do from their teachers or the institution. I am always humbled and touched when encountering my fellow students, for whom I had the pleasure to host in this workshop in September. They speak about how that first workshop formed them as a group and how that gesture of centering the human before anything else has stayed with them. Of course, I cannot take credit for their willingness and readiness to engage with such a proposition in the first place, that was already there through no doing of my own, but it’s for me an example of being able to choose how we begin with a new group of students.

On the other hand, I also know that the experience of intimacy, love, community, social life, however you might want to describe it, can also be disorientating for students. When teaching students at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague, I also experienced how intellectually students did seek more communal, non-hierarchical dynamics in the classroom but struggled with the responsibility of those ideas when put into practice. Worries about assessment, assignments and expectations sometimes overshadowed their ability to participate in the group. Students would sometimes get frustrated with what they perceived as my passive way of teaching when I was actually just waiting for them to lead. Not always, but certainly sometimes they wanted to be banked, as Paulo Freire would say. After some time though, when students realised that their input would actually be taken in and integrated into the plans for the next weeks, they would get engaged more regularly. In a certain way, I noticed how cynical the usual responses of teachers had made them. Or perhaps they had doubts about whether we could really get away with the different forms of learning we were discussing, while still having to exist within the rigid educational structure we were part of. Students didn’t think it was worth their energy to really engage, because too often that excitement was met with negativity. But when as an educator you choose to love your students, then such a response never even enters your imagination. Although in that case too, it’s always important to bear in mind how the hierarchical traditions of education have conditioned students (and of course also myself as a facilitator) to be receptive to particular power dynamics. Those kinds of influences on our bodies have to be discussed and dissected so that we can become conscious of them.

# Under-practice Workshop

## Under-practice

Think of the moment of falling asleep with others present in the room. Laying on our backs, looking at the ceiling and talking, conversing, philosophising. An innocent and universal moment and a way for stories to unfold. How might education look like if we draw inspiration from these intimate moments of our lives? The first day that MEiA starts with the premise that to study together, we should get to know each-other as humans. We will leave behind our professional identities and aspirations and delve into each-others backgrounds, interests, personal stories and all that makes us human. By making and holding space for our personal stories, we collectively humanise the learning environment from the first day at MEiA.

10.00: Welcome (with coffee and tea)

10.30: Check-in

11.00: Under-practice pt 1

During the first part of our workshop, we will build a pillow-fort for collective storytelling. Using pre-made cards with questions and prompts as a catalyst, each of us will share with the group light and humorous traits, deep and firm convictions with plenty of space for everything that falls between and beyond.

13.00 – 14.15: Collective lunch + extra space to discuss some practicalities of the course and any questions there might be from the participants.

14.15 – 16.30: Under-practice pt 2

In the afternoon, we will reflect on the stories told in the morning in smaller groups and use these ideas to create rituals for the group as gifts. We will practice these rituals and see whether they may find their place within your collective learning process for the years to come.

16:30 – 17.00: Closure, cleaning up

## **Background**

The Under-Practice workshop was facilitated at the Piet Zwart Institutes MA Education In Arts as part of the introduction days for new students at the beginning of the academic year 2023-2024. As students of the course, Emma Nantermoz prepared the workshop day which I then facilitated together with the new students. During the day there was one rule, we can talk about anything and everything but not our professional practices.

## **Check-in**

During the check-in I asked the participants 3 questions:

- What is the meaning of your name or the story of how your name was given to you?
- How many hours did you sleep today?
- Do you have any access needs to be able to participate in the activities today?

The first question I borrowed from MEiA tutors Renee Turner and Irina Shapiro (thank you both!). In this context it's powerful because it immediately sets the tone that personal stories are welcomed also within this educational space. This understanding was key to the success of the day. It is also of course a catalyst for all kinds of personal stories and narratives as well as family and cultural backgrounds. Asking about sleep tells us something more about the persons lifestyles, for example we quickly learned who in the group is a mother and was woken up by their child or who recently moved to The Netherlands from abroad and is still getting used to sleeping in a new environment. As a facilitator, it also tells me something about the expected energy levels for the day. If someone has only slept four hours, I will know to give that person more attention in the morning with the expectation that they will likely not have as much energy later on in the day. Asking about access needs is as much about learning about them in the moment as it is about affirming to everyone that this is a learning space in which personal needs can be asked for. Often participants don't say anything during the circle, but come up to me or make suggestions to the group throughout the day as to how they would be better able to participate in all the activities.

## **Pt 1**

After the check-in, we moved to the first part of the workshop itself. Everyone had already been asked to bring blankets, pillows and other materials for building a kind of pillow-fort. My invitation was that we build a place which has the spirit of a campfire, around which we can tell each-other stories about our lives, ourselves and those dear to us. This in some sense was also a powerful act as it means that one of the first activities a new group of students do is already a collaborative one. Learning is often thought to be an individual endeavour, but I've always found that the community we make is equally as important. After we had intuitively conceptualised, designed and engineered the pillow-fort and transformed the space into something of our own liking, we inhabited it. Emma and I had prepared more than 100 questions cards (some questions found online, others written by ourselves) which I then distributed randomly to the group so that everyone had five questions. Next, I invited each participant to distribute those 5 questions to 5 different people in the group. To decide who, we could base our choice on the check-in stories or simply physical appearance and feel. Once the questions were shared, we went in a circle answering them. I thought we would be able to do at least three rounds, but in the end we only managed one because the stories ended up being so captivating and detailed. Of course, participants were also allowed to choose which questions to answer and which not, and if they wished they could also modify them according to what felt comfortable to share.

## **Pt 2**

In the second part of the workshop we had planned a kind of ritual making exercise for the group to have certain exercises or rituals they could do in moments where they feel the need to find connection again. Instead though we were compelled to go walk outside in what was at the time a very warm and sunny day in Rotterdam. Some of us got ice cream, others went to a cafe. After an hour or so, we met back at the classroom and shared some rituals and somatic exercises that we had come up with during our walk, or just knew from previous experiences. What stayed with me also during this workshop was how students started to very quickly take ownership over how they wanted to use the time they had together, meaning as a facilitator I became more and more a participant, which is what I always in the end prefer.

What is your favourite type of landscape? Mountains, sea, forest...

Have you ever had a conversation under the stars?

Who do you go to for counsel?

What's the most inappropriate joke that you've made or heard?

When do you feel most alive?

How do you form community?

Have you ever mapped out your family tree?

What do you do to enjoy time alone?

How do you get involved in politics?

How often do you call your mum?

What would be the title of your memoir?

Do you more seek or fear intimacy?

What is a value given to you by someone close to you?

Do you believe that flag burning should be allowed?

Who in your life deserves the biggest thank you?

What's something you desire but should never have?

What is something you hate to ask for, but love to receive?

How does your cultural background inform your personality?

Do you believe in astrology? Why or why not?

Do you believe that over time things get better or worse?

What's your most controversial opinion about something mundane?

What's the worst haircut you've ever had?

Who was your first love?

What is an object from your childhood that you cannot let go of?

What's your favourite roadtrip memory?

What was your favourite age growing up?



Pictures from the "Under-practice" workshop



The previous images were from the workshop “Under-practice” which I facilitated with the new cohort of students at MEiA and developed together with Emma Nantermoz. The workshop was part of the introductory programme for the new students and our intention with it was to provide a space that encourages us to first get to know each other on a human level, leaving our professional aspirations aside for now. We felt this was important because often within professional settings, including education, we become so fixated on the subject matter that we forget how our personal, cultural and lived experience informs our positioning within these contexts. As we believe study to be a collective process, offering space for the personal rather than the professional was a way to facilitate the formation of the collective, even before any individual professional aspirations are introduced. By centering the humanity of the group, my hope was to be able to bond the students from a position of love. And if we can frame the beginning through love, then everything else becomes possible too.

Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public.  
- Cornel West



Pictures from the “Under-practice” workshop

Dear Frederik,

I hope you are well. I still look back at the workshop you gave us with such a happy feeling! I really think it helped our group to feel comfortable with each other. Thank you for that!

4. **It's about sitting with ideas that at first seem totally impractical.** And they might well be, but organising naivety is about staying with those ideas long enough so that you start to wonder about the "what if-s" and "could be-s" of what might be possible were we to even partly realise these naive ideas. It's much more about process than goal. About understanding why it might be worth to try, rather than what precisely should be achieved.

This is a short section in which I discuss some of the ideas that I am myself sitting with at the moment as a practitioner inside arts educational institutions.

# Ongoing, third conversations

I suppose this part of the thesis allows me to discuss some of the ideas that I myself am still sitting with, questions that haven't been fully resolved or positions that haven't been taken. I will try to do this as best as I can in this part of the thesis, also through the interviews that I had with Miriam Bestebreurtje, Mirjam Pol, Siela Ardjosemito-Jethoe and Liza Swaving. We encountered professionalism, activism, nonviolence, questions of the self as well as interdisciplinarity.

I'd like to start with the conversations with Miriam B. What stayed with me was her yearning to find what she called the "third conversations." This idea stemmed from, amongst other things, a discussion we had about the role of the art academy when students protest and demand the academy to take positions, in our example about the genocide in Gaza. My gut reaction is that of course the academy should take a position, neutrality for me is a way to escape accountability. But then Miriam said something that acutely challenges my position and that is that "by taking a position (as an institution), you exclude certain conversations." And perhaps, we might exclude those third conversations. Alternatives to the left, right, up, down, black, white kind of discourse that we are becoming all too quickly used to in our polarised societies. In that sense then, Miriam's dedication to not take a position, is not a choice of neutrality, but rather a choice to not reproduce the polarisation of society also within the academy. This for me is quite a brave pursuit and I suppose its success largely depends on the quality of that third conversation that is then proposed or facilitated. I would be lying if I didn't admit that part of me also struggles with this approach, perhaps it's that cynical side of me that comes in here to say hey, this might be too naive. The academy is always part of the fabric of society and a reflection of the inequalities and dynamics of that society, so I wonder if that choice to disengage, at least to a certain extent, is really possible or if it will inevitably generate more conflict? I'm not sure, but I want to believe that it is possible for the academy to be a place for those third conversations that can start to bring people and generations together to stand in solidarity when facing the issues of the world. Perhaps this can lead us to a place where the academy becomes a place of rehearsal for a new kind of world, instead of preparation for the one that already exists.

I have to now think back to my interview with Mirjam Pol, where she speaks about organised naivety as possibly being a kind of dynamic where we can say "okay, come and sit in, what do you mean, would it be okay to look at it like this, if we take it as a learning moment and not about who is right and who is wrong, it's not that interesting who is right, but it's about the quality of the discussion and the openness you can create." When I listened back to our interview and heard this sentence again, I couldn't help but smile. But there's again a part of me that feels also uneasy, part of me that also wants to be more radical, more of an extremist. The quality of the conversation is obviously paramount at an educational institute, but I also wonder how we go beyond conversations. How do we generate the skills, the openness, the willingness, the love to also act based on those third conversations that Miriam B. is seeking to have. If we can find a ways to also act as communities, then I think we can not only enable all necessary conversations, but also use those conversations to generate the change that we long for. At that point, we won't think about these issues as question of whether or not the institution should be neutral or not, or how to temper expectations between students and management, because through these conversations I would hope that we can bring everyone so close together, that the notion of an "institution" actually just becomes irrelevant.

And if we are to refer back to "the institution" then I think here there are also different ways to think about the responsibilities that institutions have. For example KABK is an institution more than 350 years old, so you could maybe say it's quite natural for it to be slow, a bit conservative and cautious and never too radical. Or alternatively you could say that exactly because of this stability, its capacity to endure all crisis that come its way, it is in a unique position to be totally radical, totally out for justice. This is also what Siela told me in our conversation: "With that type of stability, you should be more radical. If we can't be radical ourselves, what are we cultivating in our students?". It's that last point that hits a specific nerve for me. We often say that our education generates students who engage critically with the world, or use their art or design practices to speak to important social issues. But for some reason as an institution, we are afraid to do the same? I don't think this is a message that we can afford to give to our students.

That need to be more radical I think is also a way to break the cycle which in some ways is quite natural to education, and that is the cycle of professionalism. It's also professionalism which organised naivety is an alternative to. I think Moten & Harney describe this state in their book as "more than professional." In my conversation with Miriam B, she spoke about how "professionalism perpetuates professions." That is to say that education replicates the professional field, with all its precariousness and perhaps undesirable cultures and unhealthy work ethics. Students who graduate from that kind of an academy will later in their career return to the academy to teach their students in the same ways that they were once taught, preparing students to also uphold the kind of sectors and societies that we have learned to uphold. There's little space to make the world anew in this kind of education, especially if we also label this education a professional education while doing so. It's no wonder that Miriam B started our conversation by saying "I am trying to repair the harm which has been caused by what we have considered professional education." It's here I wonder how art education can become more a site for rehearsal for a different world. Artists are so often credited with their ability to imagine alternatives. Yet at the same time, artists seem to also spend a lot of their time figuring out how they can fit into a system that wasn't built for them.

Perhaps it's here that we have to turn to a radically interdisciplinary perspective. If professionalism reproduces professions, it also reproduces sectors and whole value systems which guide the communities that constitute those sectors. Suddenly we find ourselves living in a society in which the farmer is, through some series of events, no longer a natural allie in the fight to protect our environment. In my conversation with Liza Swaving, project manager for the Professional Doctorate pilot in The Netherlands and a friend and colleague for some time now, she says that "art and design practices are also social practices so it makes sense to connect with other disciplines." We have to break through the mud a bit, and artists are so well positioned to do that because art in itself is most of the time not an interesting subject, our curiosities as artists often lay elsewhere, in the social, political and communal realms. Liza goes on to say though that "disciplines all have their own canon", meaning that they all have their own sources of inspiration which underpin their philosophies, outlooks and value systems through which disciplines navigate the world. Perhaps if artists can sometimes serve as sort of carrier bags of the different knowledge of different disciplines, then the art academy can also become a place of solidarity. Liza says that "at its best interdisciplinary education generates curiosity, empathy, and from there solidarity can grow."

These are some of the things why I am still trying to materialise within my educational practice. How can I support interdisciplinary education to grow in a way that it can really become a practice of solidarity between communities? How can I also start conversations through which we can begin to think about education not as a preparation for the world, but a rehearsal for a new kind of world that we make together? I've been spending a lot of time thinking about the pedagogy of my practice, and through these conversations I start to sit also with the more substantive questions of my teaching and organising work.

To end this short section, I would also just take a few sentences to explain why for me the academy is such an important political site. I, as many practitioners these days, refer frequently to the multiple crises we are faced with in the world; wars, the return of fascist politics and the climate emergency to name only a few. I believe that in the face of these conditions, we need to reimagine our politics to be a politics of hope. I've only ever known a neo-liberal kind of order and I think for many people my age that kind of governance has meant that imagining politics otherwise becomes almost impossible. I am left with certain aspirations for my own life while being totally insecure and scared about the conditions in which we might all be living in soon. To address these crises I don't find hope in our politics, media or industry. Of course, there are some honest politicians, critical journalists and captivating inventors, but as a whole it's rather uninspiring. A place where I have felt inspired however, the place where I have felt hope, has been the art academy. As a context in itself, and also through the individual friends who come up with the most beautiful critiques and alternative modes for living. And also those friends who block highways or occupy university buildings. I've experienced the academy as a place from which change can start. It's a kind of refuge from the greyness of the world. A place where thought is still possible. And that is why I find it such an important place to protect, critique and to celebrate.

5. **Commitment to nonviolence & justice.** We cannot fight fire with fire, therefore we should ground our actions in our deeper beliefs and values. And although sometimes it is difficult to muster the hope, optimism or sensibility to also underpin those beliefs and values with a commitment to nonviolence & justice, we still have to try. There's no sense in striving for a better future if we lose our souls in the process.

Reflection on my own involvement of organising with, within and against the institution at the KABK, I will share here a workshop which I organised under the name *Forgiveness*. The workshop is mostly about mapping individual boundaries, values and ethics to then negotiate collective agreements. I suppose I relate the workshop to a commitment to nonviolence & justice because it was here where I started to pay more attention to the how of organising being as important as the why of organising. Seeking in the future to organise in a way to sustain the dignity of myself, others and any potential 'movement', I discuss some of the ideas of nonviolence & justice and their place and connection to the art academy. I cannot claim this as my practice, perhaps not even as a pledge, but certainly an aspiration.

## Forgiveness

a workshop convened by the  
**Institute for Organised  
Naivety**

12th November 2023

11:00am - 3pm\*

hosted by

Studio Current

Zeeburgdijk 25P, 1093SM  
Amsterdam, NL

## Forgiveness

Could it all start and end with forgiveness?  
Not a blind kind of forgiveness but a  
conscious one. Forgiveness as a framework  
to help us set our boundaries, realise our  
values and retain our integrity. What can we  
forgive, strive to forgive and never consider  
to forgive? By coming together we will map  
our collective, relational and individual  
ethics within a framework of forgiveness.  
As we depart out into the wild, we take  
that reinforced ethics with us in the hope  
that it can help guide us navigate a world  
that is never shy to offer a shortcut, a more  
expedient route, a slippery slope. But make  
no mistake, this workshop won't make you a  
saint. Just a more self-aware sinner!

## Forgiveness

A more detailed programme will be  
sent to those who will join. If you're  
interested, send a DM!

Tea, coffee, some snacks will be  
provided - all are welcome to bring  
more!

\*It's likely that we will finish earlier  
than 3pm, however to not stress plan  
for this.

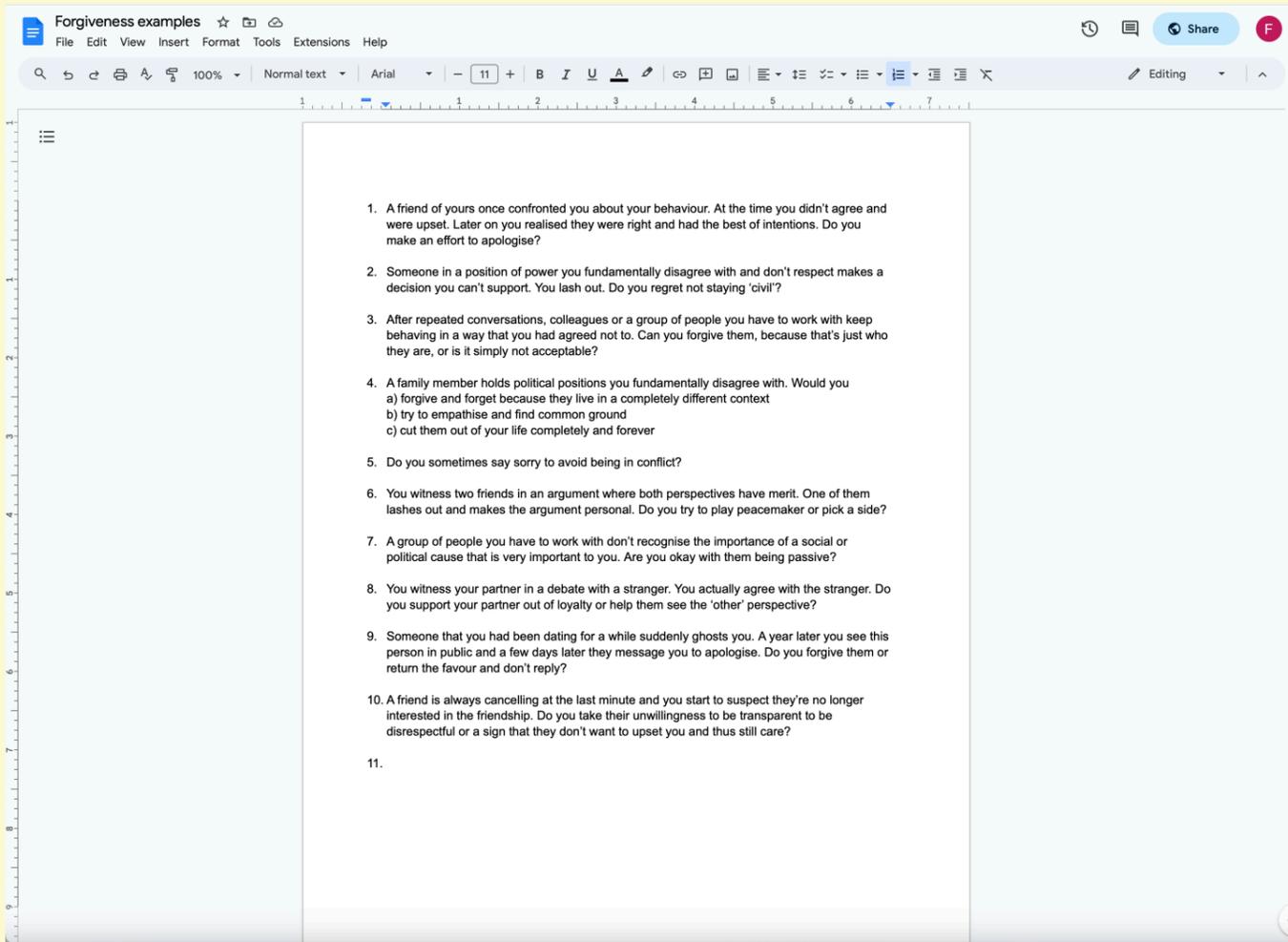


The first workshop that was organised within the framework of the Institute for Organised Naivety was called "Forgiveness." On a personal level, I think I felt compelled to do something around forgiveness after reflecting on my own role and ways of critique or resistance at the KABK. Some relationships that were dear to me were harmed or broken. At some point I started to doubt whether this was really necessary because of my ethics and principles, or if I had in fact crossed lines I should have set for myself but didn't. So I was interested to see if I could find some kind of a framework through which we could set and evaluate our personal and collective ethics. This is the history from which the workshop emerged. During the workshop we used the framework of forgiveness to explore individual, relational and collective ethics. Or simply put, our boundaries. What was interesting to observe was that even within a fairly homogeneous and like-minded group, our ethics and principles differed substantially. Given this, one can only imagine how these differences would be amplified when extrapolated to a more heterogeneous group. One step further still, we can speculate about what such a reality might mean for education, both in terms of teaching as well as institutional management. When even within our own internal communities within art academies for example there exists such a degree of different principles, ethics and individual boundaries, what modes of facilitation are needed for us to collaborate honestly? And what kind of efforts can really have the capacity to generate solidarity?

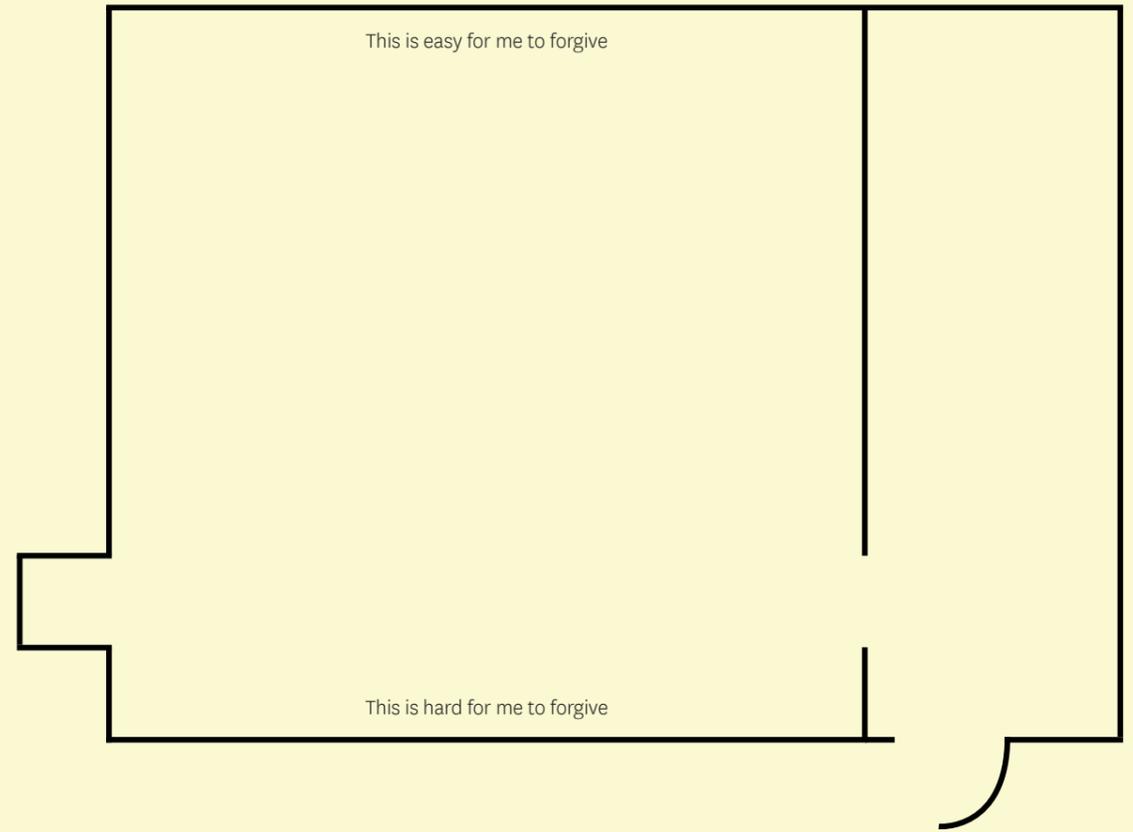
On the side of the participants, it seems that the framework I provided was successful in helping us articulate our preferences. We mapped examples of situations by placing them in the following 4 categories:

1. thing that are easy to forgive
2. things that are hard to forgive but I should do so regardless
3. things I often forgive but in fact shouldn't
4. things that I would never forgive

Using these categories, we mapped our individual ethics and started to negotiate our relational and collective agreements. Perhaps this bears some resemblance to what is often done within education already, where within groups of students or colleagues, agreements are made about how we are to work together or collaborate. Often these are kind of extremely localised codes of conducts and probably have a mixed track record of being effective. The proposed framework of using forgiveness for a similar kind of mapping however, is less reliant on predicting specific kind of scenarios that may come up in the future, but rather allows participants to become more aware of their individual boundaries, while simultaneously encouraging them to start empathising with the ethics of others. Such an approach tries to get more at the root of where any possible future altercation might come from, rather than trying to predict and arrange how we would react to a hypothetical scenario.

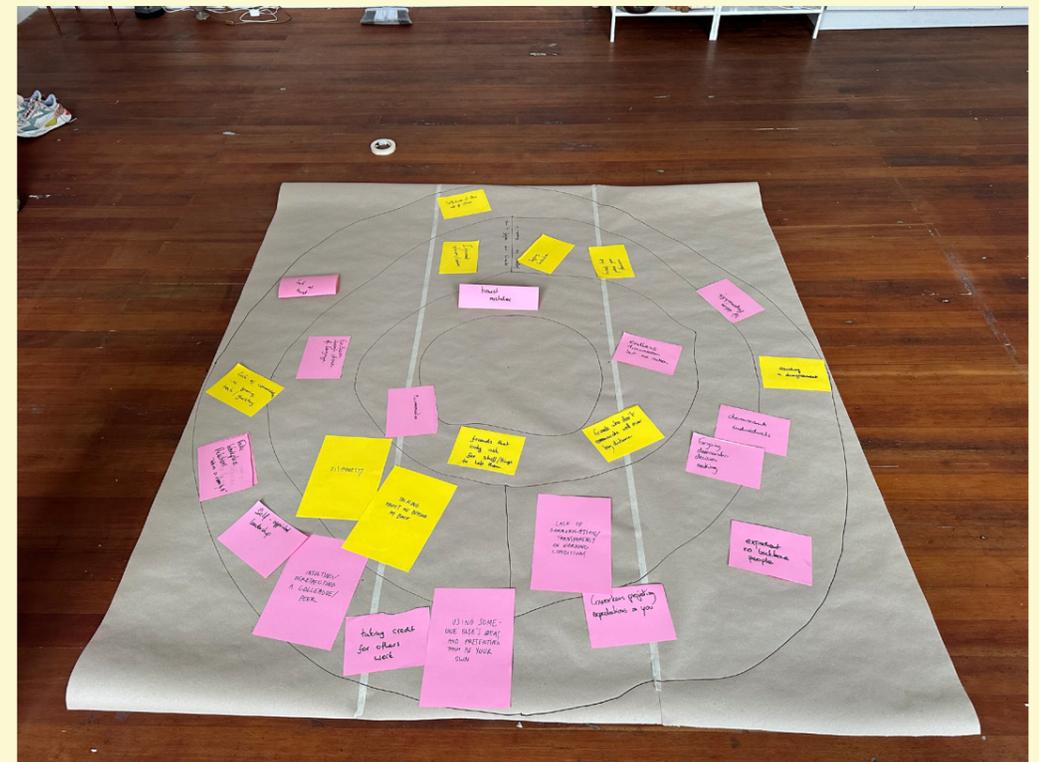


The prompts / hypothetical scenarios that were used to start the movements in space and conversations during the workshop

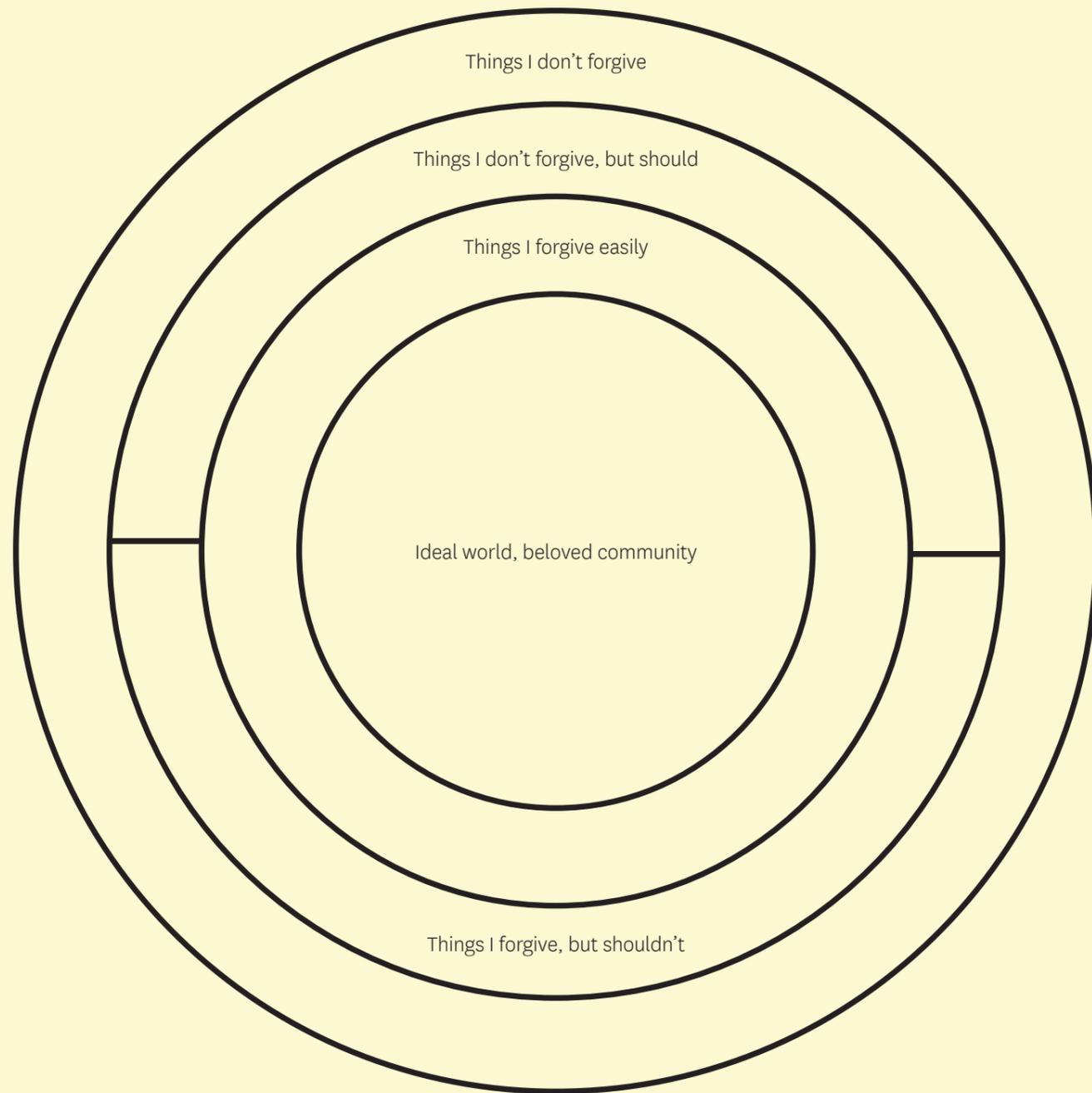


The first half of the Forgiveness workshop was about responding to various hypothetical situations and considering whether or not it would be easy or more difficult to choose for forgiveness in these situations. I had prepared some of the prompts (that you see on the left) in advance, others started to emerge naturally from the participants as we engaged in the conversation, using the opposite walls of the room as a kind of spectrum between easy or hard to forgive. Using the space in this way allowed for a very visual version of what you could describe as nuance. It also shows that some participants are naturally more hesitant to place themselves on the extremes, others

have a very clear idea of where on this spectrum they want to situate themselves. As with most of my work, the most interesting thing is not the exercise itself or the original prompts, but rather the conversations that naturally follow from them and where the experiences are directed by the collective effort of the group. Very quickly a group of people who had not met each other before started to share personal stories about their relationships, work place challenges or living situation. Through these conversations, the first half can be thought of as a kind of warm up for the individual and collective mapping exercise which we did during the second half of the afternoon.



Images from the "Forgiveness" workshop

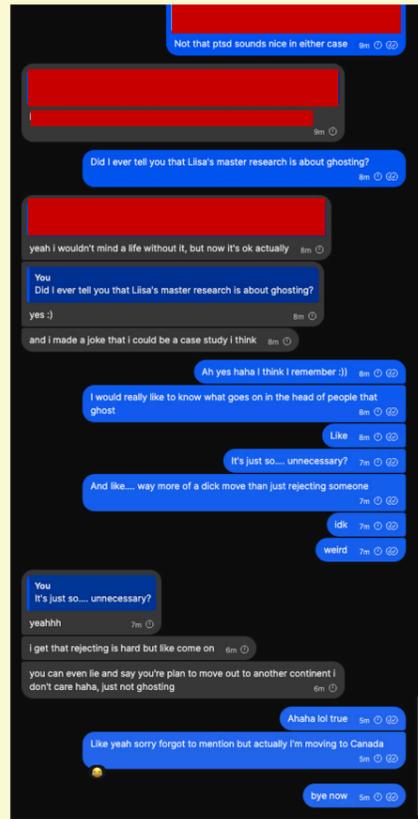
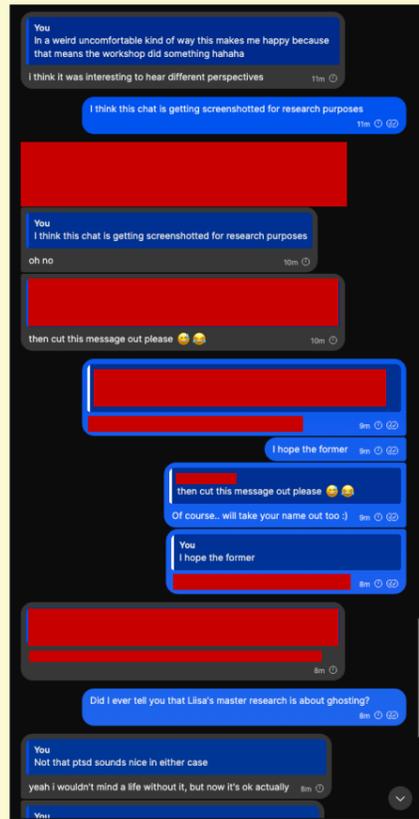
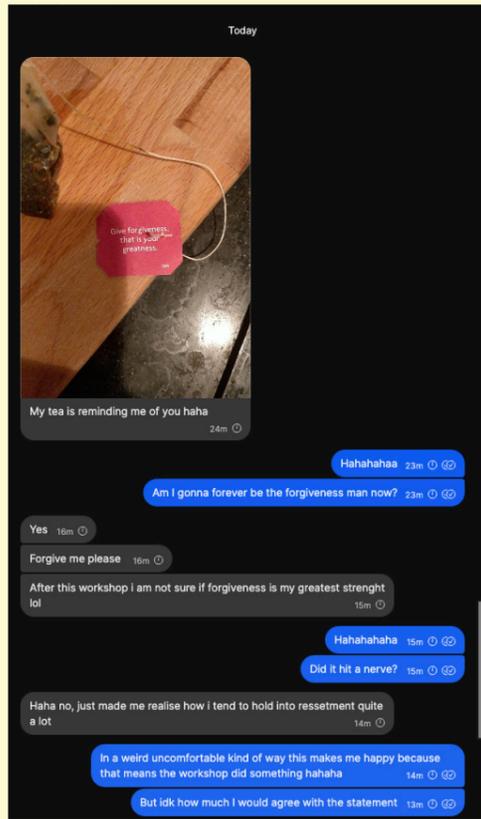


On the left you find the diagram that we used during the workshop to map our individual ethics, values and boundaries through the framework of forgiveness. We then used this circle to start negotiating our relational and collective ethics. The centre of the circle as seen on the left was blank during the workshop but in the second iteration of this diagram it seemed to be a necessary addition to make the circle also more positive and forward looking. The diagram can be used as a tool to make group agreements, but not from the perspective of what kind of behaviour or relations would best benefit whatever x-y-z goal we may have as workers or collaborators, but more stemming from our common humanity and needs as people. In that sense, it is designed with the belief that when relations between people are positive, inspiring, captivating of our imagination, then everything else becomes possible too.

To use the circle first each participant would have to contribute to each of the sections. Then a group discussion can begin about whether or not the values and preferences of the group are already aligned, or is there somewhere a need for negotiation. For example, in our workshop one participant put "Self-appointed leadership" in the things I don't forgive circle. If another participant would have placed something like "Clear, effective leadership" in the centre of the diagram, we would know that as a group we should discuss what the notion of leadership would mean for us, and how this leadership should come about.

Of course, the circle can also be used to map your individual ethics and boundaries without being in a group setting. Here the iterative steps, moving from outside of the circle to the inside is especially useful. The circle then can also act as a kind of guide to yourself as to how you wanted yourself to act in certain situations.

In the future I want to combine this kind of a workshop, or this diagram specifically, with a discussion about the principles of Kingian Nonviolence. I know that I will be teaching art educators again from October of 2024, and I'm planning a course in which I can open a conversation about what those principles of nonviolence would mean for the way we teach. The circle then, or forgiveness as a framework to identify our boundaries, values, can be a practical tool to ground ourselves in something bigger. As it is often the case, I am also not an expert on nonviolence, but these are little ways in which this research again goes back into my practice so I can learn more together with others.



Feedback from one of the people that participated in the "Forgiveness" workshop

To come back to that example of nonviolence in how it was practised by David Hartsough and the notions of distance and objectivity as described by bell hooks, we should also put our attention on another part of the equation, and that is identity. A beautiful thing about the arts education in The Netherlands is that it is firmly international in scope. International students might read this and cringe. Of course, it is not perfect. But where else in Europe could we have all met if it wasn't in The Netherlands? No other country offers as many BA and MA programs in the arts in English as The Netherlands. Of course the question of who can afford this education, and the discrepancies of tuition fees for EU and non-EU students are the dark side of this inclusive experiment, but the strongest aspect of arts education in this country is that it is relatively diverse. Art academies hold space for students of very different cultures, identities and socio-economic and political backgrounds. This is where the richness of Dutch arts education comes from.

Although, oftentimes it seems that executive boards and school administrators seem to be bewildered by the dynamics this can often create within the academy. A diverse group of students studying together seems to almost automatically generate solidarity amongst students, or at the very least curiosity for the cultures and histories of everyone involved. In the face of these conditions, the question of justice becomes ever more prevalent within the academy as ultimately there will be cultures, histories and politics that will be dominant, and other groups who insist on equal treatment. Cutting through the nuance for a moment, we can immediately think about the university encampments<sup>1</sup> for solidarity with Palestine that are currently being organised all over The Netherlands demanding universities boycott, divest and sanction Israeli partner organisations or companies supporting the genocide. Even KABK, an institution I have known to insist on neutrality, has come out and cut ties<sup>2</sup> with Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem. Regarding the latter, the very active Student Union at the KABK deserves a lot of the credit in getting the institution to move on this issue. On the 25th of April, they organised an assembly on this question together with management which I also attended. I was extremely moved by it as a very hard discussion was facilitated between students and management in really a spirit of nonviolence. This meant it didn't become a kind of nonsensical circus of personal attacks, and given the decision of the board two weeks later to meet the demands of the student union, it proved to also be effective. Furthermore it seemed to signal that even inside institutions that have gone through so much turmoil in past years, justice is sometimes possible, however small in scale it might be.

I must say that I often wish school administrators would feel the value of internationalisation and diversity with a little more enthusiasm. Especially as, aside from its capacity to generate international solidarity (something which we are in our increasingly polarised, nationalistic and isolationist world desperately in need of) these dynamics also have a direct impact on the quality of education, and by virtue, the quality of the art or design that is produced as a result of that education. It's not entirely clear to me why that is, perhaps it has something to do with the traditional idea that within an educational context, notions of identity, ideology and cultural background are to be suspended for the sake of study and focus for the subject matter. Such ideas, as they are described by Jan Masschelein and Maarten Simons in their book "In defence of the school" certainly circulate with quite some popularity amongst administrators that dabble in educational philosophy, but show no intrinsic love for education. It might also be that many of these programs were switched from Dutch speaking to English speaking as an experiment, without fully realising how transformative of a decision it would be and thus without taking any other steps to really prepare to facilitate that diversity, or to love that diversity. Especially given the fascist ideologies that currently dominate Dutch political discourse, we have to find a language to defend this diversity. But to do so, we must first learn to love it.

<sup>1</sup> [Pro-Palestinian student protests spread across Europe. Some are allowed. Some are stopped](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Suspension of exchange partnership](#)

Acutely, bell hooks concludes the chapter "heart to heart" by providing an example of how one of her former students reflected on love within education:

"When I asked one of my students, now a law professor, if my love of her created a climate of favouritism in the classroom, she laughed stating: "Are you kidding? The more you loved us, the harder we had to work." There can be no love without justice."

I want to pick up on that last sentence, "There can be no love without justice." The notion of justice is a heavy burden to put on education without first explaining what it means in my view. Justice within education is for me not the same as justice within society as a whole. Even if there is justice for marginalised groups within education, this says nothing about whether or not there will be justice for the same individuals or groups outside of education. Of course it's great that KABK takes a stance to be in solidarity with Palestine and respect human rights, but it does almost nothing for the situation in Gaza. So justice within education is justice within a vacuum. However this too is misleading, as education naturally does not exist inside a vacuum. There will be no justice for international students around say tuition fees, as that choice of discrimination is made elsewhere<sup>1</sup>. Schools can advocate for justice on that issue, but they're unable to provide it themselves. So justice within education, is realistically speaking only an attempt at actions within education that we would also like to see outside of education. Although were we to materialise such an education, this might already be a radical act. It might create the conditions necessary for the art academy and provide vulnerable people with refuge from the harshness of the world. The search for justice, though, is always part of education. The art academy can try to provide refuge from the injustices of society. Here, I would like to connect back to our earlier conversation about social safety. When we consider education to also be a space for justice, the first imperative would be to recognise that it is also a space that can replicate injustice. And sometimes, it can do so under the guise of social safety. Boards will rightly claim that they have a responsibility towards all students to feel safe. To illustrate how such a position may have an entirely opposite effect however, we can turn to Dr. King's sermon "When peace becomes obnoxious." He delivered this sermon in March of 1956, after the first black student, Autherine Lucy was accepted to the University of Alabama.

"A few weeks ago, a Federal Judge handed down a verdict which stated in substance that the University of Alabama could no longer deny admission to persons because of their race. With the handing down of this decision, a brave young lady by the name of Autherine Lucy was accepted as the first Negro student to be admitted in the history of the University of Alabama. This was a great moment and a great decision. But with the announcement of this decision, "the vanguards of the old order began to surge." The forces of evil began to congeal. As soon as Autherine Lucy walked on the campus, a group of spoiled students led by Leonard Wilson and a vicious group of outsiders began threatening her on every hand. Crosses were burned; eggs and bricks were thrown at her. The mob jumped on top of the car in which she was riding. Finally, the president and trustees of the University of Alabama asked Autherine to leave for her own safety and the safety of the University. The next day after Autherine was dismissed, the paper came out with this headline: "Things are quiet in Tuscaloosa today. There is peace on the campus of the University of Alabama."

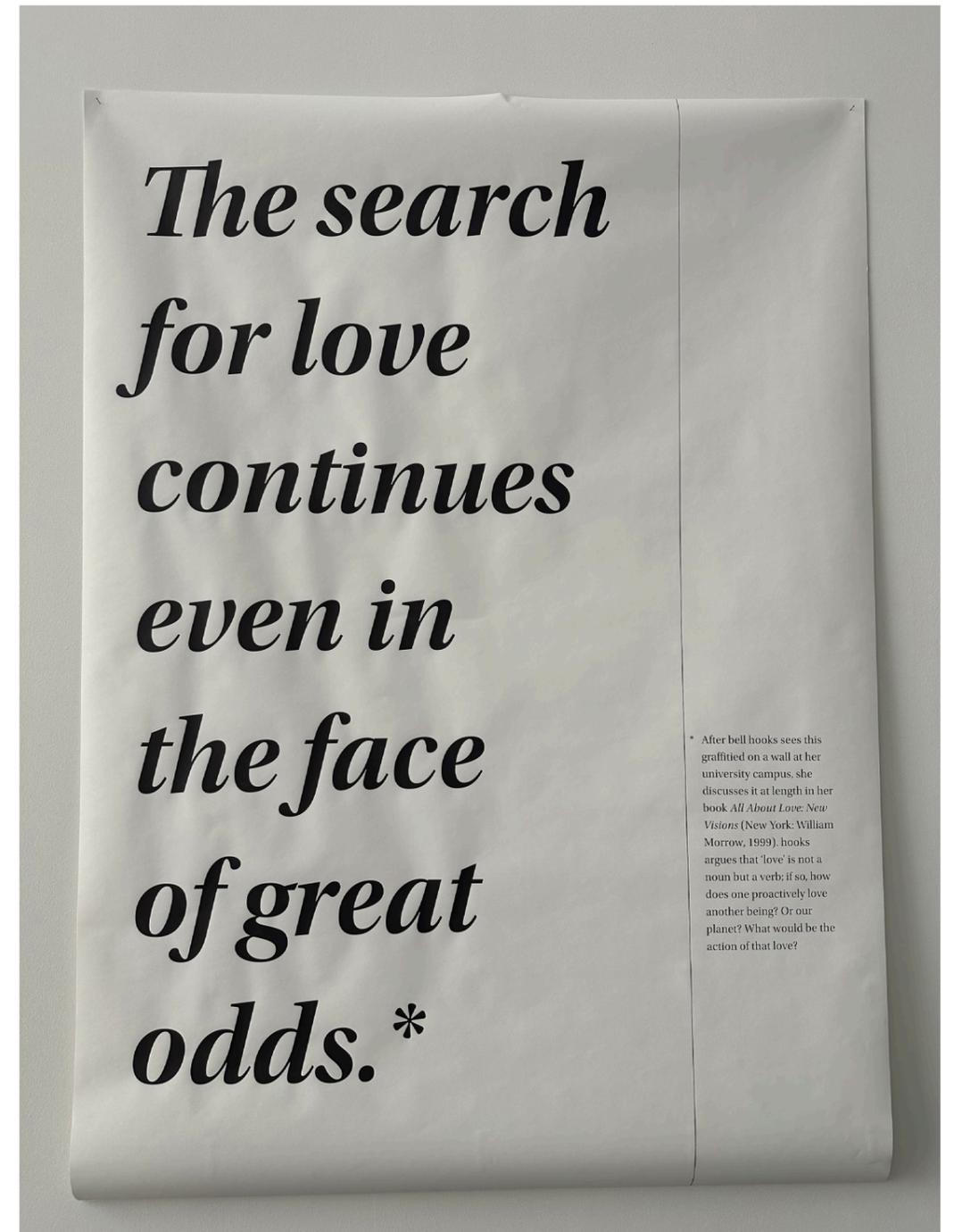
<sup>1</sup> The Dutch government subsidises the tuition fees for EU students but does not do so for non-EU students, meaning that schools usually set higher tuition fees for non-EU students. Although it should be noted that even the non-EU tuition fees are usually not as high as the subsidies that the schools miss out on from the government. Often times, schools don't do a very good job at providing transparency in this area which actually generates quite some misdirected critique towards the schools.

<sup>2</sup> [When peace becomes obnoxious, sermon by Dr. King](#)

The struggles we encounter within educational contexts today are of course different. Even the harshest institutional critics would have to admit that schools today are institutionally more inclusive structures than they used to be in the 1950s. What hasn't changed however is that they are still a space of activism. We still occupy university buildings and organise within, from and against them. We still disrupt the peace. Because this peace, as Dr. King pointed out in the next minutes of his sermon, is not real peace. He said that "peace is not merely the absence of tension, but the presence of justice." Aside from the acts of protest I already discussed, I also want to, with some hesitation draw a parallel here to how we talk about social safety in today's university. By doing so, I would like to claim that safety within education is not merely the absence of harm, but also the presence of love. And love is the position from which we start to generate justice. In whatever form it might be necessary in today's contemporary world. It's important to note here that the love expressed here is to be first enacted by the "institution." By that I mean, by teachers in the classroom and as colleagues to each-other and with all our interactions with students. We cannot ask or expect students to love us. We might not even always have to tell them explicitly that we love them. But we have to realise that the kind of culture that we generate within education, is a choice of our own. Students will follow our lead or resist where they feel necessary. But as educators, we choose how to begin. And so I suggest we start with love.

As well as choosing how to begin, we also choose how we react. For example, when students at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague occupied the academy building as a response to Ranti's firing, we as educators, staff, and management had a choice<sup>1</sup>. We could demonise them, be annoyed by them, try to manipulate them in tactical negotiations about the way forward together, or we could choose to listen and learn from them. Analyse the path that had gotten us to this point, the decisions we had made which had resulted in such an act. If we love our students, and if we believe in the principles of Kingian nonviolence as they are beautifully made accessible to us by Kazu Haga, we start to little by little eradicate the conditions from which it was possible to generate injustice in the first place. But we have to realise that our collective humanity, our collective interests have to come before our individual agendas. Justice can never come at the expense of somebody else, either it exists for all of us or it exists for none of us.

<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, at the time of the occupation students demanded the board at the KABK to write a self-reflection about their role and reasons for Ranti's firing. It was never done.



A poster seen in the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. The note on the side reads "After bell hooks sees this graffitied on the wall at her university campus, she discusses it at length in her book All About Love: New Visions (New York: William Morrow, 1999) hooks argues that 'love' is not a noun but a verb: if so, how does one proactively love another being? Or our planet? What would be the action of that love?"

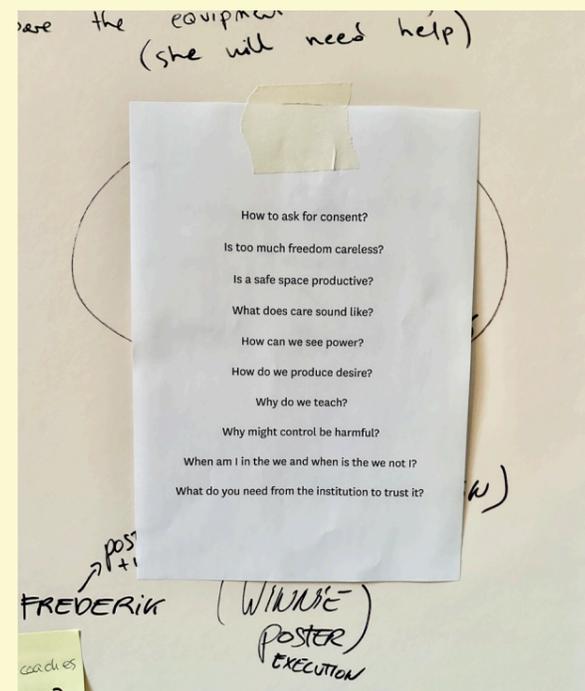
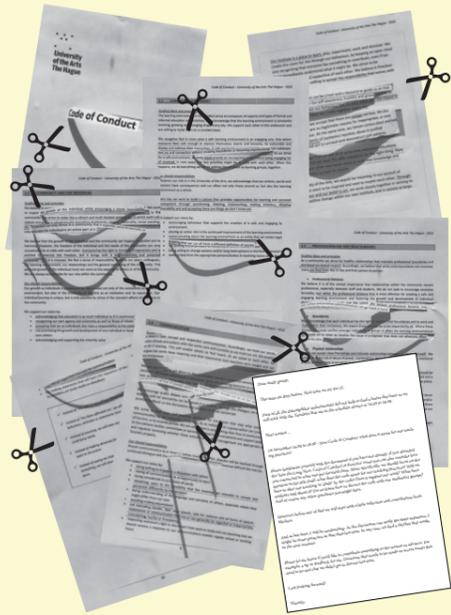
\* After bell hooks sees this graffitied on a wall at her university campus, she discusses it at length in her book *All About Love: New Visions* (New York: William Morrow, 1999). hooks argues that 'love' is not a noun but a verb; if so, how does one proactively love another being? Or our planet? What would be the action of that love?

**6. Critical thinking is key, but it's often confused with oppositional thinking.** The achilles heel of a critical thinker is that they become so good at analysing the weakness or hypocrisy of any given argument that they will always fail to see the possible merit. Here, the critical thinker becomes an oppositional thinker. Oppositional thinking traps us in a cynicism that isn't able to provide hope or generate solidarity. It becomes about propagating a rigid oppositional viewpoint. The critiques offered by oppositional thinkers may well be merited, but the oppositional thinker doesn't have the capacity to seek common ground. Only from such shared ground can coalitions start to emerge to address the subjects of our initial critique. Organising naivety then is about recognising the difference between critical and oppositional thinking. This is not to be confused with compromise. It is not about compromise. It's about refusing dead-end binaries.

In the beginning of the academic year 22-23, a new Code of Conduct was launched at the KABK. This caused different reactions, some very critical, some even perhaps cynical and questioning the sincerity of the document. From this came an idea to start a study group to look into the pedagogic implications of this policy document and see if there are ways to turn into something from which new educational possibilities can start to emerge. I'm not sure how successful we were in institutional terms, but as a process it was very inspiring for those involved. In this spirit I touch on questions of solidarity and collective study within the next section of the thesis.

# Study Group: Safe & Engaging Learning Environment

#1 01.Nov.2022 KABK Study Group: Safe & Engaging Learning Environment  
Code of Conduct: dissections



Questions that Leon and myself were seeking answers to within the Study Group

As already mentioned a few times throughout this thesis, the question of social safety was often a palpable one at the KABK. After a new institution wide Code of Conduct was created and various policy changes, reporting structures and the like were implemented it was still not clear to me how any of this actually enhances the education teachers and students experience in the classroom. I also didn't have a clear answer to this doubt so I proposed that we create a Study Group around the topic of a "Safe & Engaging Learning Environment." At the time Ranti was still around, and with his blessing it was quite easy to organise. I wrote a small open call and encouraged a few teachers I knew would be able to contribute to the topic to apply. Quickly, a group of eight teachers all from different departments of the KABK came together to move the question of social safety being one of policy and structures to one that is fundamentally a pedagogic question.

I was lucky enough to be able to facilitate this group for a period of about eight months. Most of the time, we met on Tuesdays from 16:00 to 18:00 every other week. Always over some tea, coffee and the best food the canteen could provide. I had prepared a programme which also had enough empty space to be filled in by the participants (more on that later). Quickly it became clear that while we convened the study group to ask questions about what social safety means in the classroom, the study group became much more than that. It became a small community and a support structure for each other. For me, as a policy adviser working in between management, teacher and students it became such a rich resource to understand how teachers experience their work at the KABK. This directly informed the advice I was able to give to the directorate, for example about what other kind of support structures are needed for teachers and for students. For example, I vividly remember one conversation about whether or not teachers should also be care workers. We all recognised the importance and necessity of care work, but some teachers felt they were not in a position to provide that kind of care, while others were willing to do so sometimes at the expense of their own wellbeing. Being able to hear and then surface these kinds of stories meant that my work as a "policy" adviser became much more concrete. I often described my position as dancing between the periphery of education (boardroom) and the centre of education (classroom). Looking back, it's quite shocking that this experience was so profound. It's possible that it was my own lack of knowledge about what it means to teach, but I don't think so because I didn't learn these stories until I was with teachers in this study group. These stories weren't circulated in management meetings. So it says something about how we run our academies, and how little we sometimes understand about the way in which students and teachers experience the classroom.

So in that sense, while we encountered many topics and workshops during our time together as a study group, it was for me also a profound example of how different sections of the academy, in this case management and teachers, can be bridged and connected to start generating a collective understanding of where we are. I cannot say we managed it perfectly at the KABK, it was only a group of eight. But I believe completely in the power that group work like this can have, given the conditions whereby knowledge generated in these groups can also be received by the institution. Much of the knowledge generated in the study group was very local, so not all relevant for this research. In the next pages however, you are able to see some of the thematics we encountered, exercises we created as well as a particular workshop that touched me very deeply as a practitioner.



These are the teachers of the Study Group "Safe and Engaging Learning Environment". From left to right: Christoph, Aref, me, Leo, Emi, Leon, Michou & Ingrid. Winnie didn't make it this day, but she too was an inspiration.

#2 15.Nov.2022 KABK Study Group: Safe & Engaging Learning Environment the 'we', as addressed in the code of conduct

Collage of documents and text. Includes a letter starting with 'Dear all,' and a list of 'between' relationships: between students and the class as a group, between empathy for other cultures and identifying with your own, etc.

#3 29.Nov.2022 KABK Study Group: Safe & Engaging Learning Environment Directorate as educators, what support is needed: working session with Ranti & Fenna

Hand-drawn diagrams and notes. A central diagram shows 'EDUCATOR' with arrows pointing to 'STUDENTS' and 'CARE'. A list of 'between' relationships is provided at the bottom.

#6 21.Feb.2023 KABK Study Group: Safe & Engaging Learning Environment Education as a Commons: how do we serve?

Collage featuring books like 'Teaching Community' and 'The Designer as Educator', a microphone, and a video frame showing a person speaking.

#7 14.Mar.2023 KABK Study Group: Safe & Engaging Learning Environment Active listening workshop: with Sekai Makoni

Hand-drawn diagrams and notes on a whiteboard. Includes phrases like 'Body language', 'cultural norms', and 'number'.

#4 13.Dez.2023 KABK Study Group: Safe & Engaging Learning Environment meeting Huug de Deugd chair of the Executive Board of the University of the Arts

Organizational chart of the University of the Arts. Shows the hierarchy from the Supervisory Board down to various faculties and departments.

#5 7.Feb.2023 KABK Study Group: Safe & Engaging Learning Environment Care at the academy & new ways of thinking about safety

Collage with a building image and text. Includes questions like 'Why might control be harmful?' and 'How do we teach?'. A central diagram shows 'care' and 'safety'.

#8 21.Mar.2023 KABK Study Group: Safe & Engaging Learning Environment Emancipation through embodied learning: with Ola Lanko

Collage of hands and arms in various poses, some holding papers. Includes the name 'Ola Lanko' and a question 'How will I care tomorrow?'.

#9 18.Apr.2023 KABK Study Group: Safe & Engaging Learning Environment Engaged Pedagogy / Embracing Change: with bell hooks

Collage featuring a book cover 'Teaching to Transgress' by bell hooks and a large hand-drawn diagram with arrows and text.

These were all the sessions we organised within the study group.

On these page, you find exercises that all of us as participants brought to the Study Group, some that we have borrowed from our previous experiences, and some that we came up with ourselves. Although they are most often short exercise, many of which we used as check-ins, they all focus on tuning in with eachother, or on a more meta level, they attempt to flatten the hierarhcy of the group each time we meet. For example, with exercise #5 which was shown to us by Ola Lanko, I was paired with a former teacher of mine. I had always felt a certain uneasiness with facilitating that group because of my lack of experience at the time, but with her I felt specifically awkward because she was a teacher that I admired and respected as a student. Through the exercise and the chat afterwards I was able to surface these feelings and found that she hadn't thought about this at all, as the working process felt very natural. I was quite relieved by this, it brought us closer together and gave me a renewed confidence to facilitate a group of teachers with much more experience than myself. In that spirit, all the exercises are about tuning in with eachother and forming the collective anew through different ways and means.

#### Exercise #1 Circle drawing

Take an empty page.  
Draw a circle  
Put a line through the edge of the circle at 12, 3, 6 and 9 o'clock  
Put a line through the edge of the circle in between the existing four lines  
Choose a word for each each line you have put through the edge of the circle  
Make a dot in the centre of the circle  
For each word, place a dot in between the edge of the circle (the word) and the centre of the circle depending on whether you feel close to the word or far.  
Connect the dots you have just placed.

#### Exercise #2 Walking with eyes closed

Make sure you have a clear straight path from one side of the room to the other  
Position yourself on one side of the room  
Close your eyes  
Start walking with your eyes closed  
Stop when feels good  
Repeat with every participant  
As one walks, others observe

#### Exercise #3 Hearing you say this...

To be done in a pair

One person starts with "At this moment, I feel..."  
The other person reacts with "Hearing you say this makes me feel..."  
Back to the first person who also responds with "Hearing you say this makes me feel..."  
Repeat for an agreed upon period of time.

#### Exercise #4 Sensational check-in

Play a song  
Ask participants to write ina flow about the sensations (taste, smell, touch etc) that the song evokes in them  
At the end of the song, ask participants to share if they feel comfortable

#### Exercise #5 Drawing check-in

Take 5-10 minutes to draw on your page your:  
Origins  
Important Influences  
What matters most to you

#### Exercise #6 Listening

In pairs:  
Work through three questions with a partner  
First one speaks for 5 minutes, the other listens, then switch  
Repeat this for each question

The questions are:  
When did you feel listened to?  
How did you notice that you were listened to?  
How did this make you feel?  
When were you misunderstood or not listened to?  
How did you notice that you were misunderstood or not listened to?  
How did this make you feel?

#### Exercise #7 Gifting ritual

Create a rotation whereby each participant brings a small gift to the meeting each time  
Start off your gathering by sharing this gift.

#### Exercise #8 Invisible gift giving

Works best in a circle:  
Pass an invisible/pretend gift to the person next to you  
The person who receives it decides the shape, size, weight of the invisible object and what it is  
The receiver shares with the group what they received (most of the time it is something they need right now and it doesn't have to be a real object - can also be an idea)  
Do this until the circle is completed and everyone has received a gift.

#### Exercise #9 Collective reading and annotating

Print out a text on A3 papers and hang them on the walls of the room  
Ask participants to walk around to read the text  
After that, invite participants to highlight or annotate parts of the text that they resonate with  
Use the most highlighted areas as a starting point for a group discussion

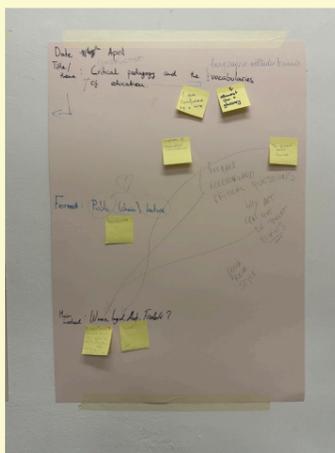
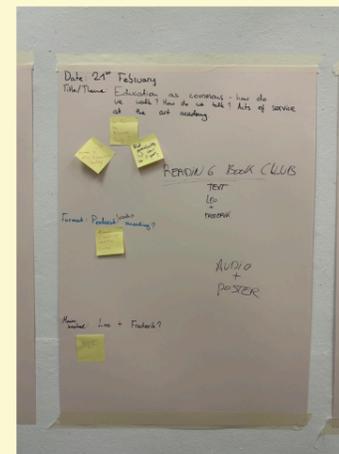
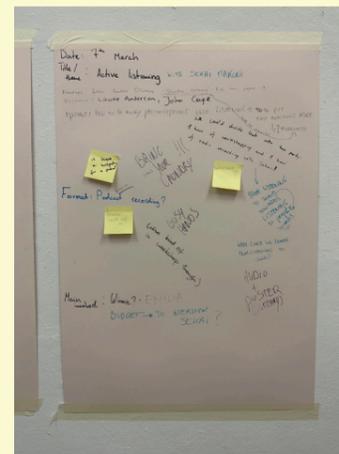
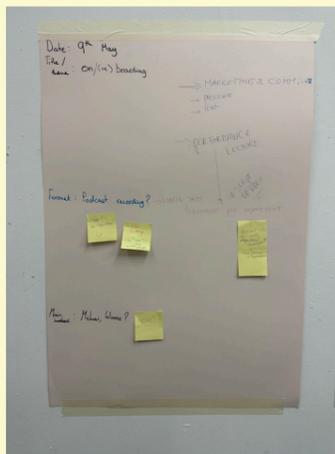
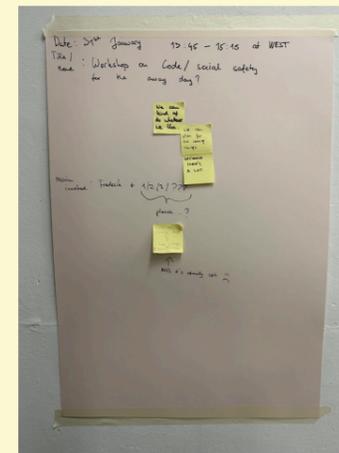
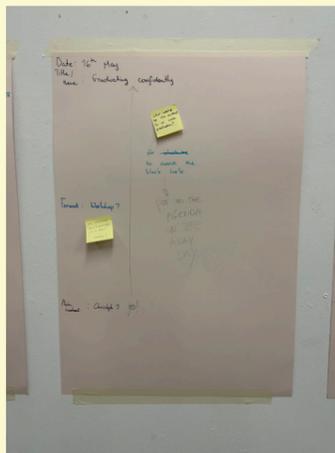
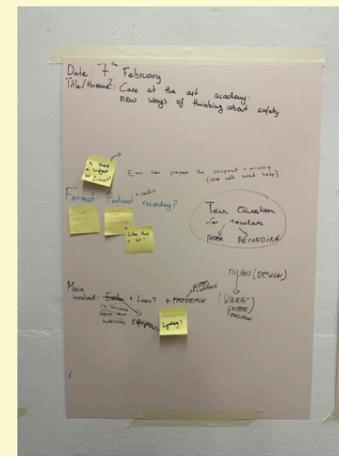
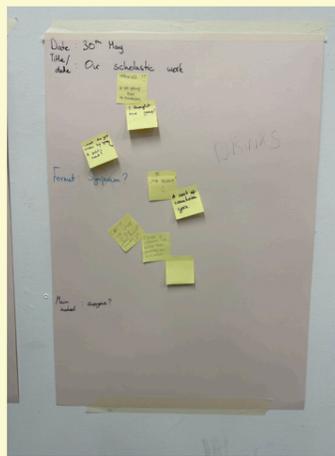
#### Exercise #10 Music as time keeper

This can be useful for reflection moments, feedback writing or anything that can be done alone.

Play a song  
The duration of the songs dictates how long participants take for their activity  
Multiple songs can be used

#### Exercise #11 Object circle

Works best in a circle  
Everyone chooses/brings an object  
Sit in silence  
Pass the object to the person next to you  
Study the object through your hands, get familiar with its texture  
Pass the object to the person on your left and repeat  
Do this until your object is returned to you



**Exercise #10 Music as time keeper**

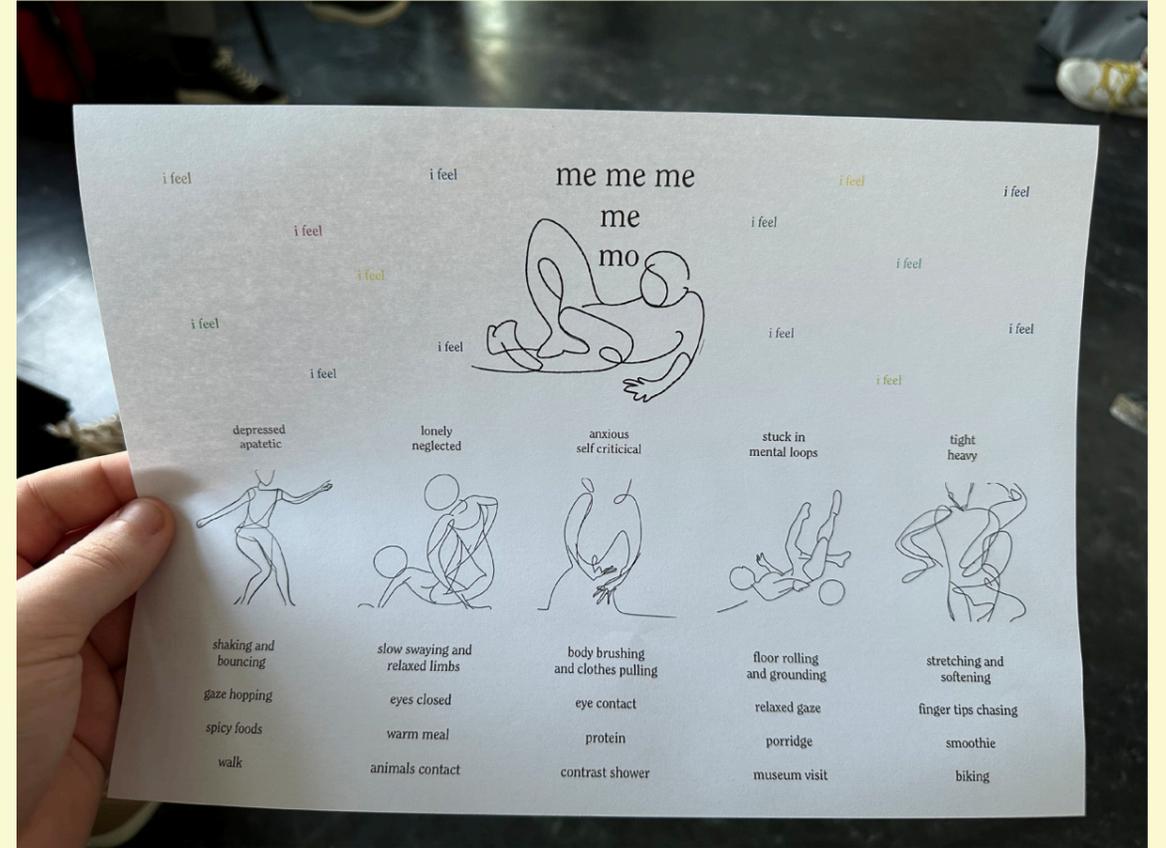
This can be useful for reflection moments, feedback writing or anything that can be done alone.

Play a song  
 The duration of the songs dictates how long participants take for their activity  
 Multiple songs can be used

During the middle of our Study Group sessions it became clear that our interests as a group started to become different than the initial programme I had prepared. Although there was plenty of flexibility designed into the original programme, we decided to just start fresh with all of the questions and interests that had come out of our earlier sessions. Using music as a time keeper, I hung big papers around the room only with dates of the sessions and very general titles on them (which were based on our previous discussion) and asked participants to move around the room and fill the papers with their ideas. This is how for example we decided to do one whole session on bell hooks and invite guests like Sekai Makoni for a workshop on active listening or Ola Lanko to take us through some exercises for embodied learning. We prepared an ambitious programme, most of which we also completed with some aspects that continued to change throughout our process. This is certainly not a very revolutionary way of organising group work, but nevertheless it taught me about flexibility and how to always find ways to adapt, even when working within a rigid institutional framework.

#8

21.Mar.2023 KABK Study Group: Safe & Engaging Learning Environment  
Emancipation through embodied learning: with Ola Lanko



One of the workshops that ended up being particularly transformative for my own educational outlook, was one that Ola Lanko facilitated with us on the theme of “emancipation through embodied learning.” As someone that I think for most of my life has been fairly alienated from my own body, this workshop opened a whole new learning path for me personally about the bodymind cohesion and/or separation and its place in pedagogy. For example the experiments with the dance form of contact inspiration started in this workshop, when Ola asked me if she may demonstrate an exercise based on this technique with me. We only tried it for maybe 15-30 seconds, so extremely briefly, but later she told me “your body knows this language.” I was very surprised to hear this, as I didn’t think of myself as someone who communicates much through the body. This small remark however broke down so many doubts and hesitations I had about being more open to somatic or embodied learning and set me on a course where I am now trying to learn more and more through small experiments and sometimes a little bit bigger workshops.

There was another remark, or gesture rather, that impressed me during this workshop. In one of our earlier sessions we had talked about how it’s not only about asking consent, but rather also the more difficult question of how to create an environment where consent can be asked? When Ola asked Leo if she may demonstrate another exercise with him, she asked the very straightforward question of “May I touch you?.” Without thinking, Leo immediately agreed,

to which Ola replied “Are you sure, where can I touch you, everywhere?.” It sounds provocative written out in text, during the workshop it was just something that prompted Leo to think about whether or not he is actually consenting, and if he is, what specifically is he consenting to. Perhaps it was here that I saw our earlier conversation playing out in reality. With Leo, Ola was able to create an environment which insisted that consent be given in an informed way, not as an automatic response based on hierarchy, or just being worried to hold up the group process. Through very simple sentences, Ola was able to teach Leo about taking the space to really consider this question of consent.

Ola also shared with us a small A4 guide that you see above that helps us decide what kind of exercises we can play with to attune to our bodies depending in our mood at the time. Sometimes I refer back to this sheet when I’m experiencing a mood or emotion that I feel overwhelmed or burdened by. The more you try these exercises, the more you also start to notice what kind of patterns or behaviours can be helpful for your particular body and situation. For example I know that when I get overwhelmed during busy periods and many thoughts are racing in my head at the same time, I can only think clearly when I go for a walk and try to organise the mess in my head while moving around. It’s a personal habit, which presumably doesn’t work for everyone. But if we attune a bit to our bodies, we all can find out our own ways of caring for our bodymind connection.



The overall experience of the Study Group was a very informative one for me. I learned so much from the teachers that participated and the guests that joined us along the way. Much of my pedagogic values started to be formed during the meetings of the Study Group. For example, my views on social safety and how it should never come at the cost of a loss of connection with students. Or the insights into embodied practice or what it means to hold a group like this for a period of an academic year. Perhaps more important than my personal learnings however, is that a Study Group like this was also for me an example of how institutions make room for teachers to generate their own support structures for themselves. Although we are always working with people, namely with students, teaching can sometimes be a lonely profession. Teachers often have to carry the responsibility of their work alone without much structural support from their colleagues or the institution. Study groups like this one are not only a way to generate new knowledge or experiment with new pedagogic methods, but also to build community, solidarity and love amongst and between teachers.

In that way, the Study Group was also an example of what can happen when the institution agrees to provide certain resources, but then also leave us a little bit alone. Not in the sense that my colleagues at the KABK were not interested in what we were doing, they definitely were, but more in the sense of trusting us to also find our own path and priorities. Trusting us to ask for help when needed, but not insisting on accountability for bureaucratic reasons. I believe it was only because of this freedom that we had, which made it such a rich experience. There were many moments along the way where we didn't quite know where we were going or what we were going to conclude with. A certain amount of wandering if you will and trusting in our intuition that the dots will connect in the end. For example, when we decided to focus on embodied learning, it was not immediately obvious to me what the connection was to social safety. The same when we decided to do a whole session on Education as Commons. After engaging with these topics however, it was obvious that these are the things which a safe environment can bring about, which meant that we started to generate a very positive idea of what social safety can do within education instead of what we cannot do because the classroom has to be safe. But we were only able to build such ideas through exploration, wandering, dwelling and trusting each other in the process. I will be forever grateful for this experience.

7. **Never forget that the body is the true governor of your freedom.** This idea does have a certain predicament of privilege. Only for those who are already free does the body govern freedom, we could say. But were we to set aside its immediate faultiness, there is something to be said about the power of the body. Of course there are rules, laws, restrictions, confinements, but for many of us there is also a choice in how to engage with those forces. It is possible to love without a contract, be friends without a code of conduct and resist without a job description. Our choices can and will have consequences, but it's possible to live life on our own terms. Especially when we offer our support to one another. Our own body, not the legislative body, is the governor of our life. And if we acknowledge this, then no matter what the legislative body does to us, we will always be free. Because our freedom is not something granted to us, it comes from within. Be it unemployed, in poverty or in prison, it is impossible to take our freedom. Dignity of course, is another matter.

Through the last principle of organised naivety, I discuss the part of my practice that is in some sense most new to myself and therefore something that I am still getting to know through small experiments. It's an ongoing practice of learning but more and more I start to implement aspects or values from these somatic quests into my pedagogic practice.

Good education is charged with the capacity to move us. Literally as well as spiritually. The journey to be moved, and to move (with) others, is also a journey to rediscover our wholeness. Firstly the wholeness within our individual selves, but more importantly the wholeness that we all belong to together, as groups, collectives and people.

Various bodily practices, often appropriated from other cultures, have become trends in the west in recent years. Practices like meditation and yoga have become commonplace both in and outside of market mechanisms. Yet often these practices seem to be used not to transcend the dominant narratives of individualism, discipline and self-improvement that neo-liberal has taught us, but precisely to reinforce and enhance them. In that sense, it appears that the market has also discovered the power of embodied and somatic practices. What I am referring to, is something different.

When I speak of embodied practice, I mean the physical body in the fullest sense of the word. By that I mean, it's not only about feeling or sensing the body itself, but it's about including a variety of bodily mechanisms into spaces which we might in the west normally think of as "intellectual." That means that we bring to the table our histories, our cultures, our lived experiences, our aspirations and our emotions. It's about existing as a full human and always in relation to others. This is not to say that our full selves are to be exposed, sensed by others and inform our every interaction. It is only to say that we feel comfortable with the potential that this may happen. It is to say that we are always ready and willing to make space for the humanity of people. In their book "Embodied Activism" Rae Johnson writes about how the west has traditionally considered the body and mind to be separate entities:

"Developmentally, the loss of uninhibited sensory engagement with the world often occurs through child-rearing practices that focus on self-control of the body. Although learning how to walk, talk, read, and write requires the development of a range of sensorimotor skills, the way in which this learning occurs often emphasises repetition and discipline rather than play and discovery. As we get older, many of us encounter the restrictive and regimented social norms imposed during our schooling - sitting quietly, inhibiting movement, listening to the teacher, and keeping our eyes on our work."

Coincidentally I've been lucky enough to be friends with a number of people who are or have in the past been dancers. And even with those people who no longer practise dance on a daily basis, I've always admired how a certain sense of freedom has been totally ingrained into their bodies. The way they sit on a chair is never just the conventional posture, there is always a creative twist of the leg or a spectacular bending of the spine. The way they sit in the car, walk down the road or run through a field. There's always a certain lightness to it. And perhaps I am romanticising, and I certainly don't have any evidence for the following claim, but I often feel as though they are able to carry that flexibility, fluidity and relationality into other parts of their lives. That ability, whether it comes serendipitously through a background of dance or whether it is learned intentionally, is so important when trying to shake those "restrictive and regimented social norms" that Rae Johnson refers to. So in that sense, to learn through an embodied practice is equally about those small acts as it is about more intentional practices. Flip your shoes off every once in a while and feel the floor beneath the board room table, take walks, speak from the chest, cross a red light every now and again. Whatever you need to remind yourself that despite the systemic and structural restraints of our world, there is plenty of freedom to be found in the body. On the next page, Rae Johnson continues to write specifically about the mind/body disconnect:

"In contrast to Indigenous and Eastern conceptions of the bodymind, the Western intellectual tradition has historically separated body and mind, devaluing the body and its perceptions as unreliable and illusory. In a philosophical legacy extending from Plato and Socrates through to Descartes, the physical senses are regarded as imperfect instruments in perceiving the objective truth of external reality. Only the mind is considered capable of accurately discerning and understanding the true essence of existence. In fact, bodily experience is thought to inhibit and impair our attempts to understand the true nature of reality."

Which is absurd because is it not exactly that the most real things are the bodily functions and needs that we have, the emotions that we feel and the connections we form with others. The products of the "mind" are for me much more artificial and abstract. Although separating the two is really only possible through words anyway, as we are always experiencing our body and mind together and at the same time. We may sometimes feel more in touch with our body, or other times alienated from it when we are engaged in rigorous mind labour, but both are always there and in constant flux, dialogue and relation. When looked at from this perspective then, it becomes quite troubling how sidelined the body is in education. Or at the very least, it is not hosted with intentionality. Within arts education we are constantly asked to position ourselves, but we almost never consider the physicality of that request. Positioning becomes about myself, as an artist or educator, an abstraction of my real self. It's about defining my individualism. We come back to that at the intersection of all those things "the only person you find is you" logic of Afonso Matos that we discussed earlier. I believe that turning to a more embodied way of learning, a physical way of learning, can be a way of moving away from that individualist script to a more collective and relational experience. I have myself practised and experimented with the form of contact improvisation as a way to feel the body through another body and to physically experience that relationality and connectedness with others that we are always part of. Pushing, pulling, receiving, giving, holding, leaning. Contact improvisation for me has been a way to feel collaboration, partnership and collectivity on the skin. And feeling something on the skin is a powerful way of learning, of understanding what exactly these concepts feel like when sensed with the whole body, not just the mind. I'm not a religious person by any stretch of the imagination, but I believe that at the end of the world there is a cafe, where we will all one day meet<sup>1</sup>. I believe in our common humanity and I think education should also be about introducing us to that feeling of feeling through others. This idea is described perfectly by Fred Moten & Stefano Harney in *The Undercommons* as "Hapticality, or love". They arrive at this thought in the last part of the last chapter, *Fantasy of the Hold*:

"Hapticality, the touch of the undercommons, the interiority of sentiment, the feel that what is to come is here. Hapticality, the capacity to feel though others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you, this feel of the shipped is not regulated, at least not successfully, by a state, a religion, a people, an empire, a piece of land, a totem. Or perhaps we could say these are now recomposed in the wake of the shipped. To feel others is unmediated, immediately social, amongst us, our thing, and even when we recompose religion, it comes from us, and even when we recompose race, we do it as race women and men. Refused these things, we first refuse them, in the contained, amongst the contained, lying together in the ship, the boxcar, the prison, the hostel. Skin, against epidermalisation, senses touching. Thrown together touching each other we were denied all sentiment, denied all the things that were supposed to produce sentiment, family, nation, language, religion, place, home. Though forced to touch and be touched, to sense and be sensed in that space of no space, though refused sentiment, history and home, we feel (for) each other."

....

"Who knows where Marx got this inheritance of the hold, from Aristotle denying his slave world or Kant talking to sailors or Hegel's weird auto-eroticism or just being ugly and dark and fugitive. Like Zimmy says, precious angel, you know both our forefathers were slaves, which is not something to be ironic about. This feel is the hold that lets go (let's go) again and again to dispossess us of ability, fill us with need, give us ability to fill need, this feel. We hear the godfather and the old mole calling us to become, in whatever years we have, philosophers of the feel."

One of my dearest friends, Kärt recently told me "you know Frederik, it's never going to be possible to organise socialism with the people who choose the most ripe mandarins in the supermarket." Even in that little act of setting aside certain mandarins over others, we look out for our individual interests. Even in this small example, we are alienated from the feel of others. I realised that what I want from education is for it to be "immediately social." And for that we have to reclaim all those aspects of our lives that are designed to un-socialise us from each other. When relating this to the body, we have to reject the ways in which the body is either politicised for the purposes of discrimination and division

<sup>1</sup> This is also a title of a song by the Estonian band "Vennaskond" meaning brotherhood. It's one of the most poetic lyrics I have ever come across.

or made docile for the purposes of order and control. To feel through others, for others to feel through you, for you to feel them feeling you. To become philosophers of the feel. To feel comfortable, content even with the knowledge that I am one of many, existing in relation to other beings, moved by them while simultaneously moving them and through others myself. For this to happen, we have to reclaim social life as central to education.

The good news is, that I know for a fact that this is possible, I have been part of that kind of education myself. Here, I have to think back to some of my most memorable moments at the Royal Academy of Art in The Hague. Before Ranti, the director at the time was ousted by the board, we were initiating one great plan and structural reform after another. For sure for many we were going far too fast. I remember many evenings pacing up and down the Ranti's office together with him, thinking of ideas for the future, debating about decisions for tomorrow, dreaming about what the academy can mean for the students. We made practical strides too. As the institution-wide Diversity & Inclusion Officer had decided to resign at the end of the previous academic year, we redistributed the resources that otherwise would have gone for her salary to the Blue Office, which consisted of students as well as teachers who set the "DEI" (read justice) agenda together with us as management. We helped students start a Green Office, which is now a structural part of how the academy and the space from which sustainability initiatives are generated, also utilising the resources available through the institution. We invited new teachers to contribute their own ideas to the academy's interdisciplinary IST (Individual Study Trajectory) programme, ensuring that the educational offering remains new and contemporary. I worked together with teachers on a Study Group for a safe and engaging learning environment, where we explored many of the ideas which I have described throughout this thesis. I also managed to work closely with student representatives from across the academy and bridge the distance between them and management. I suppose what I'm saying is that there was a brief period of time at the KABK, after a period of chaos and before another period of chaos, where I experienced a radically different approach to governance. Perhaps the fact that Ranti was ultimately fired means that such an approach is unfit for the institutional context, but I personally choose to believe that it just didn't work out at this particular academy, but in fact a more collaborative approach is possible. And what's more importantly, it comes so naturally to people once even a little bit of trust is generated. I acknowledge that it was not perfect and we did not manage to include everyone as well as we should have. A different approach also created tensions and people that were perhaps used to certain ways of working through no fault of their own might have suddenly felt excluded.

This idea of embodied learning might paradoxically also allow us to see ourselves from outside of our body. I have to think of how Mihkel Mutt described the character of Estonia's 1st President after re-independence, Lennart Meri. He described Meri as having that uncanny ability to imagine himself, in whatever situation he was in, from above, to see himself as a kind of fly on the wall. Unusual, given that politicians seem to often be obsessed with themselves. Whether it was true of Meri or not, I like that idea of being able to imagine yourself from the sidelines. Not to be alienated from your mind, body, yourself as a human, but just to notice the humour and the absurdity of our experience. And also to use it as a way to observe our collective interests and step away from the individual agendas we may have. And perhaps I'm here an extremist, either be in the body, the whole body, feel through the body and mind. Or imagine as if you didn't have one at all and look at yourself as a fly on the wall. In both cases though, we should recognise that we are part of a common humanity with others. Education then, could be proposed to be a site of collective rehearsal for the kinds of worlds we want to enact outside of education. This brings us partly back to our earlier conversation about justice. Justice takes many forms, but as a pedagogic form, thinking through rehearsal can offer ways to shift our perspectives and again connect to the question, for what is education for?



My friend Naomi, who is also a dancer, running through a field when we were travelling through France in 2018

Throughout the past year, I have regularly tried to experiment with more somatic or embodied ways of learning and facilitating. On the next pages, you will find three examples of this.

The first is a workshop which Emma Nantermoz and I facilitated for our peers at MEiA called “Not all who wander are lost.” The second is somewhat of a habit (although we don’t practice it often enough) of contact improvisation that Emma and I have started. The third experiment is me reading the whole of “The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study” by Stefano Harney & Fred Moten aloud. For each experiment, I will share briefly what we did and how this has informed my practice.

## Not all people who wander are lost.

26th May 23  
Emma & Frederik

We (Emma & Frederik) are two artists with artistic practices on hiatus. We explore the failures of institutions, and research how they create opportunities or barriers for pedagogical experiences. Frederik explores this mostly regarding the management of an art academy (KABK), and Emma through climate activism (XR) and its connection with the legal system/police. As a duo, we wander in this common ground while also delving into the clear differences in the ways our practices operate. We are seeking artistic approaches to develop new connections between our current, past, individual and collective position(s).

“Not all people who wander are lost” is intended to explore familiar concepts (senses, touch, contact) in an environment which we strive to facilitate in a safe way, while recognising that formal education is often hostile towards such practices.

We use movement and touch as a way to explore, communicate and understand oneself and inform connection with others. Inspired by the dance technique of contact improvisation, we form a collective body. We experiment with exercises that each emphasise a different aspect, for example, balance, weight, tension and resistance. By using your body to explore these terms, you experience your partner’s body as a continuation of your own, instead of being a stranger. This gives a different awareness to space, your own weight, centre and makes way to explore how notions of consent, safety, comfort/discomfort relate to each-other in an educational context.

We therefore want to experiment with different approaches to pedagogy: experiential, embodied, collaborative and reflective learning. The pedagogical aspect is in the experience of the participants and how they reflect on it rather than directly in the exercises offered. It is also a way for the participants and us to reflect on non-hierarchy and improvisation, and thus a more horizontal approach of experiencing bodies as equal, that is contrasted by the focus on gravity. It’s also a way of experiencing directly the consequences of our movements, the repercussions it has on the other and collective, and how to deal with it. In a world where we have become increasingly alienated from the consequences of our behaviour, this is in part also a political act. Our goal is for the participants to find ways to relate to these ideas, in a way that is not only intellectual but also experiential.

“Not all people who wander are lost” is a gesture which tries to offer an alternative for the ways in which we relate to each-other and our educational space within MEiA.

Images/drawings (front & back) courtesy of Rijksmuseum archive  
Front image: Matthijs Maris  
Back image: artist unknown



Pictures from the "Not all who wander are lost" workshop

"Not all who wander are lost" was a workshop facilitated by myself and Emma Nantermoz in May 2023 with our peers at the MA Education in Arts at the Piet Zwart Institute. Inspired by the dance form of contact improvisation, we together participated in a series of exercises. As a facilitator, it was quite powerful to observe how the dynamics of the group are transformed by the introduction of such intimate and physical exercises within a context that usually does not facilitate that type of learning.

The movements and exercises are inspired by the dance technique of contact improvisation. As is often the case with me, I am here again facilitating workshops where I cannot claim to be an expert or authority figure on the subject matter. Briefly though, contact improvisation is something to be done mostly with a partner (although as you see on the left we also did it with more people) and as the name implies, it is about staying in contact through physical touch. Through this touch you communicate with each other about how you want to move, both in terms of space and speed. It can sometimes be very energetic, almost reminding me of some kind of martial art or very slow and intimate. In the way that we have experimented with contact improvisation, the energy of the moment is often decided by what you want to explore with your partner. It can be a concept, a feeling and of course also just purely intuitive. In the case of the latter, being in contact like this surface quite a lot about your states of mind, or the dynamics between the two of you during that moment.

As with most somatic work, we begin quite gradually, in the workshop we did this by only engaging through contact with the other person through the arm and nothing else. Once we started to feel comfortable with this language of communicating, we started to do more elaborate exercises that for example involved the whole weight of the body or were less predictable in terms of what kind of movements, tensions or paradigms are explored. This is largely also a choice for the participants and what they feel comfortable with. Although I enjoyed when sometimes with me Emma would say "don't be so polite." In that sense, these kinds of experiences are also about challenging yourself to find where the boundaries are by getting quite close to them, but not crossing them. It's within this space that learning can happen.

During the workshop the exercises were the main point of attention for us, but the reflection round after was also very important. Coincidentally we had quite a difficult morning in terms of group dynamics before our workshops. We had arranged one group work assignment in a way that a few of our peers felt excluded and we didn't manage to resolve that tension. In this sense, our workshop started with a certain uneasiness in the air. Working with our bodies though seemed to get us away from our previous thoughts and emotions and helped us find our common humanity again. During the reflection round, we felt how the mood was again lifted. We sat by the water in front of the academy and discussed our experiences of the workshop, and then quite naturally the conversation flowed to life more broadly. It was a moment in which I felt connected to the whole group and it remains one of the most positive memories of our time studying together.



Pictures of Emma and I experimenting with the dance technique of contact improvisation

I find it very hard to describe through words the learnings that I have found through my experiences of contact improvisation with Emma. But if I were to try to synthesise something from these experiences then poetically I would be compelled to borrow the words of Stefano Harney and Fred Moten:

“No, when Black Shadow sings “are you feelin’ the feelin? he is asking about something else. He is asking about a way of feeling through others, a feel for feeling others feeling you. This is modernity’s insurgent feel, its inherited caress, its skin talk, tongue touch, breath speech, hand laugh. This is the feel that no individual can stand, and no state abide. This is the feel we might call hapticality.

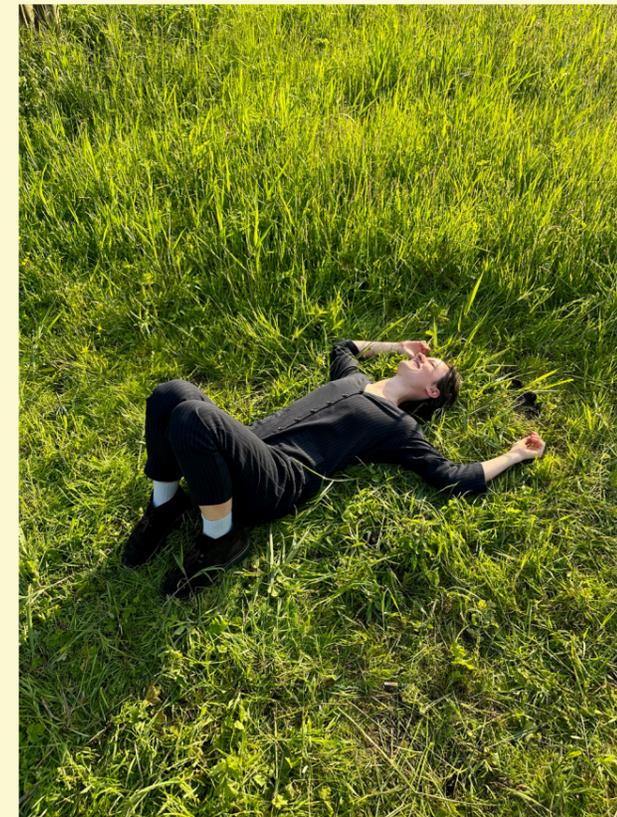
Although if I was completely honest with you, I don’t understand what this sentence means, I just know that what I feel through it moves me in the same spirit as the practice of contact improvisation. This is the poetic version then. Although the ethics of appropriating this quote from paragraphs that are trying to come to grips with the trans-atlantic slave trade are also not lost on me. Slightly more distinctly however, I would say that these experiences have been powerful for me because it’s about being in a situation where you feel complete trust with another person. There’s intimacy, love, care, but none of it is romantic or sexualised as these things often are in our society. Steve Paxton, who is widely considered as the pioneer of this dance technique says that contact improvisation “is a game that takes two people to win, so it doesn’t create losers; it ignores gender, size, and other differences. It’s about attending to your reflexes in a touch communication—faster than words, faster than conscious thinking.” And is this not exactly an example of what the safe space as a pedagogic philosophy should make possible. I suppose having experienced this on the body in a safe, controlled context, I carry that knowledge around with me when I think about or am involved in education.

Something else that I always have to think about after one of these sessions is an interview by Fred Moten<sup>1</sup> where he says

“I just always wanted to be in an ensemble and work with other people. Everything I’ve ever done is a collaboration. I’ve never felt that the idea of single authorship is anything other than a con. You’re always in conversation and collaboration with other people.”

I think we all find ways to connect to that feeling, and certainly teaching and working with people at the academy is one way for me, but contact improvisation is another. It always makes it so palpable for me what those words really mean, and how we are always interconnected and interdependent on others, feeling through others and feeling others feeling you if you will. There’s also something grounding about this practice in the sense that it reminds me of the existence of my full body. Learning too has to be an experience in which the full bodymind, not just our intellectual side participates. I realise this is all rather abstract, nor are these thoughts particularly new or insightful, but this is how I get in touch with this knowledge. So in that sense, the practice of contact improvisation is perhaps not about the practice itself, but rather what it can make space for and how it changes how we look at and engage with the world after these experiences. Perhaps for you, another practice will work better, or maybe you would like to try contact improvisation. Whatever the case, I encourage everyone to think about how we prime our bodies to engage with others as whole beings.

<sup>1</sup> [Interview with Fred Moten](#)





On the pictures on the left, I can be seen reading out loud the whole of *The Undercommons* by Stefano Harney & Fred Moten. *The Undercommons* is a book that stayed quite impenetrable for me until I read out loud. It was then that I realised how lyrical this text is and how it has such a capacity to move me (physically and metaphorically). While parts of the text are still a puzzle for me, I feel engaging with it in this way has brought me closer to the spirit of the text. The emotional undertones of it, if you will. And perhaps that can sometimes be more important than the precise content and meaning of a word or paragraph.

Having experienced this on my own body, I am now incorporating such practices also into my teaching. You could call it performative, and in some sense it does come across as such, but there's no acting involved. When I read a text like this to others, it just comes out with whatever energy the text itself was originally charged with. Perhaps it sounds a bit hokey-pokey, but it's about operating as much on the emotional level as we do on the intellectual level, what I referred to in the beginning of this thesis. And of course, also with such tactics am I a complete amateur (in the sense that I don't have a background in performance art, spoken word or anything like that), which means that I'm again able to utilise these ways of learning and make them a shared collective process of learning and thinking together and through each other.

# Conclusion

In the art academy I learned about the soil we stand on and the seeds that we plant to grow our food. I also learned about the fertilisers we use to grow more of that food faster than it naturally can. Much like natural food production, the work of education is a slow process. It's a work of generations. We may never see the results of much of what we sow now, but half the fun is in the trying, the other half, in knowing that you have tried. I will refer once more to Kazu Haga's book "Healing Resistance: A Radically Different Response to Harm."

"Years ago, my friend and fellow trainer Matt Guynn told me he heard that Japanese companies build five-hundred-year business plans. He later met a Japanese businessman at a conference and asked him if this was true. Hearing this, the businessman laughed in his face. "That's ridiculous," he said. "I've never heard of a business plan longer than 250 years!"

Inspired by this, East Point Peace Academy is working on developing a 250-year work plan, because we understand that this is the work of generations, not of election cycles or five-year nonprofit strategic plans. We need to remember that we are in a relationship with the wisdom of those that came before us and the lives of those who will come after."

While I'm not necessarily saying that we should all start writing 250 year institutional plans, I am saying that part of the power of using these principles, and the approach of organised naivety, might be that it can free us from only moving from one day's problems to the next day's problems. When we are naive, we start to try and do things that are impossible. We are in some sense, destined for failure. But perhaps if we consider that we are doing the work of generations, then maybe we can let go of those expectations of success and anxieties of failure to just commit ourselves to a process of slow food production.

And as the ethical farmer needs to attune to the composition of their soil, the quality of their seed, the weather, the biodiversity that surrounds and lives on the farm, we too have to recognise that we are part of an organism at the art academy. In that spirit, what underpins all the principles we have discussed is a practice of listening. Listening as that kind of intense curiosity towards another person, their story, perspective, personal legacies and narratives. Listening not only to individuals, but also to the heartbeat of the whole that constitutes an organism, an ecosystem. When we think of the academy as an ecosystem, we can start to attune to its needs, consider what can enter, what needs to be kept out. We can start to nurture it to good health and consider what might be needed to heal its wounds when it is damaged.

My own practice and this research has attempted to practise that listening in multiple contexts. First in the rather stable and familiar surroundings of the KABK where much of my passion and love for education started, and later on, after leaving the academy subsequently to much institutional turmoil in new formal and informal contexts. That change of contexts has in some sense forced me to improvise, perhaps it has made the research more eclectic than it otherwise would have been. At the same time though, it has also allowed me to learn and construct an educational practice outside of any institutional expectations. Ultimately I recognise this as a very fortunate and privileged opportunity, and I am grateful for all the friends, colleagues and participants that have helped me along the way.

I don't know if I am a good listener, certainly I know I can interrupt people during a conversation because I also have things to say. I know however that when I feel I didn't quite do a good enough job at any given moment, then in more cases than not it's because of a lack of listening, a lack of really tuning into the needs and aspirations of the people and conditions around me. Whether or not I am a good listener I will leave for others to judge, but I'm sure that the key to the work of critical education is in listening. People have within them so much knowledge and experiences to share. We can activate all that when we listen and be left with so much rich material to work with. Listening allows us to become carrier bags, like Ursula le Guin might refer to. Not sticks and stones, but containers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In her essay "Carrier bag theory of fiction" Ursula le Guin says "we've all heard all about all the sticks and spears and swords, the things to bash and poke and hit with, the long, hard things, but we have not heard about the thing to put things in, the container for the thing contained. That is a new story. That is news."

It's also listening and tuning in with each other that will ultimately make it possible for us to make the world anew. I described previously in the thesis why I believe in the academy to be such an important political site, a transformational site even. It's one of the few places in the world where I have felt a sense of hope that a different world is in fact possible. For this reason, while we critique the academy, organise within the academy, perhaps also against the academy, it is also important to remember to celebrate the academy. As I engage with new institutional contexts, I take these principles with me to also protect the academy from becoming dull, still, uninspiring. I humbly propose these principles, and the general spirit of organised naivety as one way to sustain the academy, to sustain critical education and to generate a culture of hope and solidarity.

The process of writing this thesis has also started to change how I interact with others around me. I've noticed that I've become more positive, recognising that it is also a privilege to do this work. I'm experiencing more and more how this positivity, belief, whatever you might call it, compels others to act as well. In a field where many educators or students often suffer burnout or where feeling overwhelmed is part of the norm, negativity is easily generated and often justified. So in that sense, asking myself every now and again whether I'm still working from a position of love has been an informative process. I haven't always been but as with nonviolence, it's not something to become but rather something to keep practising.

The other side of the coin is that working from this position is arguably even more precarious, even more vulnerable. Certainly I have noticed that when I receive back negativity, I have started to become more affected by it than I previously might have been. Within institutional settings for example, it's quite normal that when you go to someone with a new idea, then first you are told all the reasons why it cannot be. When my enthusiasm is met with this kind of critique, I naturally get discouraged, so now I've had to learn to identify these patterns, notice this information but not hold onto it. I've had to develop the trust in myself to recognise when it's more about a person's own state of mind, than it is about what I have brought forward. So while love is so central to my thesis, I also have to think about that phrase "hurt people hurt people." There's plenty of harm that goes around in our world, so I don't judge anyone if they don't want to or don't have the capacity to carry love with them. I certainly always haven't nor do I always right now. But as with anything worth doing, half the joy is in the trying.

And naively then, I specifically propose the art academy as a site for this trying. The art academy is unique in the sense that it is a container, or a carrier bag to again refer to a phrase from Ursula K. Le Guin. It's a space through which different knowledges, cultures, histories, values and identities flow. It's subject of interest goes far beyond the disciplinary loyalties that titles of departments or faculties might allude to. Students of the art academy concern themselves with vast array of world affairs. And so I propose that the art academy can become an interlocutor, or an intermediary space in which interdisciplinary, cross-generational, multi-ethnic coalitions can start to form. Only through such coalitions, can we start to address the current complexities of the world. In this spirit, the arts becomes a kind of mediator of how we comprehend our past, present and future, and the art academy not only a place of artistic quality, but one that sets the cultural and political discourse. Such dynamics of course already exist in the art academy, but again are not always recognised as such. The need for qualifications, credits, assessment and accreditation force the narrative of the art academy to be slick, clear, concise and marketable. And so the dynamism of the art academy, is subjugated to, as Fred Moten and Stefano Harney would describe, its undercommons. The place in the academy where those on trial for naivety have escaped to seek refuge. The space of most possibility, and precisely the space which the institution tries its hardest to eradicate, always to its own eventual demise.

In the face of these conditions, organised naivety becomes a process of coalition making. Of seeking to be and being in solidarity with others. It's about collectivity, cooperation, resilience, passion. In many ways, organised naivety for me is what it means to be more than professional. More than about the self. In education specifically, to be professional is to be individualistic, competitive, market oriented and expedient. Professionalism is when we choose to become volunteers in a system that is against

our own interests. As Miriam Bestebreurtje reminded us “professionalism perpetuates professions.” So I claim we don’t want professions, we want to be naive, we want to be *philosophers of the feel*<sup>1</sup>. And so, we should unite. Only when art academies become internally united, can they be strong and prominent influences on the politics that happen outside of the academy. And here I propose that when we unite, we should do so not through the cynicism we may have for the present order, but through the naivety we share for the future. It is exhausting to be radical, it comes at a cost. Radicality, like a natural resource, is finite. In this spirit, organised naivety can be thought of as an outlook on the world which tries to be empathic to its current conditions while staying absolutely radical about our desired futures. Empathic about the present, because we need that to build coalitions. Radical about the future, because we need that to balance out the grip that despair has on our current politics. This is how we turn around the crisis of imagination that has infected our institutions. Organising naivety is a much more attractive proposition than managing decline.

<sup>1</sup> As proposed by Stefano Harney & Fred Moten in “The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study”



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“Movements are born of critical connections rather than critical mass.”

- Grace Lee Boggs, *The Next American Revolution: Sustainable Activism for the Twenty-First Century*

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*The end*