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PERFORMATIVE APPROACHES IN ARTS EDUCATION

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Anna-Lena Østern and Kristian Nødtvedt Knudsen

ROUTLEDGE

8 Inhabiting practice

Performative approaches to education and research as art

Tormod Wallem Anundsen and Helene Illeris

Introduction

Over the last 20–30 years, European universities have increasingly modelled their teaching to respond to an ideal of education as *production*. Following neo-liberal views of state institutions as competitive players in the global market of education and research, the implementation of the Bologna process has, combined with the adoption of New Public Management (NPM) models of administration, led to an exhaustive practice of measurement on every level (Štech, 2011). In Norway, 'quality assurance systems'[1] have been established in order to control the efficiency, quality and output of each course, requiring university lecturers to describe in detail what students should learn in standardized formulations of 'learning outcomes', and to measure the same outcomes in the exams. In this goal-oriented logic the student is viewed as a consumer and the university as a service provider.

It should come as no surprise, then, that these structures shape the realities of what they describe, and that, as time goes by, we have gotten used to the fact that as university employees, a significant part of our job consists in 'feeding the system'. Michel Foucault's (2000) much quoted term *governmentality* may thus describe how we, through our daily actions, continuously reproduce and recirculate the very same techniques of power and submission that we ourselves are subjected to. In this way the 'truths' created by NPM are not external to us, but *become* us, in such intimate ways that they govern not only our position as teachers and researchers, but to an extent also our feelings and our values.

With this backdrop it has become imperative to us, the authors of this chapter, to ask in which ways we can create and embody alternative understandings of how knowledge is created and what counts as value. In our case, a possible path to follow could be found within our everyday practices: we teach prospective artists, art teachers and researchers, and a main focus for our teaching is contemporary, socially oriented art forms that aim to offer alternative ways of performing collectivity through experimental interventions in societal structures. So, why not respond to our conditions by looking at our teaching and research performatively as a social arts practice? And why not turn this entire manoeuvre into a living, practice-led inquiry together with students and colleagues, in trying to form alternative conceptions of what education could be?

Methodology

Following these ideas, in 2015 we decided to begin a collaborative research project, which we titled *Art as Education/Education as Art*. We wanted to adopt a performative research methodology, aiming at interweaving the phases of planning, doing and reflecting into practice-led, non-representative processes, where data "not only expresses the research, but in that expression becomes the research itself" (Haseman, 2006, p. 6). Our initial research questions were thus open, beginning not with asking the critical 'why?', but rather with the performative 'how?' and 'what happens if?' (Foucault, 1982, p. 786). Tying to combine elements and perspectives from art as social practice with our own education and research practices, we formulated the overall question: *What happens if we consider the educational practice in which we take part a social arts practice?*

To support our methodology, we adopted Irit Rogoff's (2016) slogan *Starting in the middle*. We also acknowledged her previous stance that an educational practice, rather than being studied from a critical distance, should be a site of lived-out inquiry, or: "a way of teaching in which you *inhabit* a problematic rather than *survey* it, *analyse* it, *know* it" (Rogoff, 2006, p. 18, italics as in the original).

We chose the concepts of *practice* and *inhabiting* as key approaches to our research, and decided to begin our inquiry not from an elaborate problem statement, but rather through an extended performative and practice-led process of *just doing*. Following Staunæs and Bramming (2011), we decided to define the material we generated through our inquiries not as data, but as *creata*, in order to emphasize that documentation always entails the creation of new, independent, creative and non-representative realities that interact with us in ways that are often unimaginable in advance (Vannini, 2015).

Social arts practice

As our educational inspiration we drew on sources from critical pedagogy such as Paulo Freire (1970) and Henry Giroux (2011) combined with contemporary educational thinkers and philosophers, mainly Gert Biesta (2013) and Jacques Rancière (2009, 2010).

We also relied on publications by scholars in art education who have been working with inquiries somehow similar to our own, for example Nora Sternfeld (2010), Rita L. Irwin and Dónal O'Donoghue (2012), Nadine M. Kalin and Daniel T. Barney (2014). In addition we relied on our own previously published research on contemporary art practices and education (e.g. Anundsen, 2015; Illeris, 2015, 2017).

As our artistic source of inspiration, we looked at the broad contemporary art current, which, among many names, is defined as *social practice* (Bishop, 2012, p. 1). In short, what the projects included in this current have in common is that they are performative, processual and participatory. By *performative* we mean that their focus is on art as a form of doing rather than as form of representing, and that this doing, whatever it might be, is framed as an art form. By *processual*

we mean that the 'outcome' of the project is more to be found in the quality of the processes enacted than in some kind of final result or product. By *participatory* we mean that the audience is not meant to be spectators of the activities of the project, but to be active partakers, and sometimes even initiators of whatever goes on within the framework laid out by the artists.

Since our inquiry was based on what happens when considering an educational practice a social arts practice, our theoretical focus in this chapter will be more on art theory than on educational sources. As art educators we are painfully aware of how easily verbal constructions like 'education as art' can be reduced to an empty slogan, where both concepts remain generic and open to a multiplicity of common-sense interpretations. For this particular inquiry we aimed to explore the idea of education not as 'artistic' in itself, but *as a social arts practice*. It was thus imperative for us to adopt a critical use of concepts from leading scholars in the field of social arts practice, more precisely from Miwon Kwon (2004), Nicholas Bourriaud (2002), Claire Bishop (2004, 2012) and Grant H. Kester (2011). Following this decision, our focus here will be on the following questions:

- When trying to inhabit our educational practice as art, how and when do the connections between education and social arts practice appear in our inquiry?
- From a performative point of view, how can *inhabiting practice* encounter, negotiate and potentially change the conditions of an education practice?
- What happens with the positions and roles among the participants when the very understanding of what a study programme is and does is challenged?
- Where do these approaches encounter resistance, and how do the experiences of resistance relate to the conception of education as art?

The chapter is structured around the analytical concepts of *the sensuous*, *the relational*, *the metafictional*, *the antagonistic* and *the durational*, which, each in turn, connect to our explorations of space, togetherness, performance, conflict and negotiation. Before going deeper into these aspects, we will offer a short presentation of our education practice and of the inquiry that we carried out as part of the project. Along with descriptions and more theoretically based analyses, we present glimpses of project experiences and personal reflections throughout the text by asking ourselves, retrospectively: How do we experience these events now, more than a year later?

Our education practice

The education practice that we inhabit in our daily life as university lecturers is the master's programme of fine arts at the University of Agder in Southern Norway. It is a two-year graduate programme open to students with BA (undergraduate) degrees in music, performing arts and visual arts/design, and to school and pre-school teachers majoring in the arts. The programme is *trans-aesthetic* in the sense that we teach across art forms, and *trans-disciplinary* in the sense that it

includes and intertwines the three practices of art production, art education and arts-related research. From the outset in 2011, a special focus of the programme has been on contemporary, socially oriented art practices, with an ambition to teach in ways that are explorative and experimental, trying to question or even break down the conventional borders between theory and practice and between art, research and education.

In terms of structure, the first year of the programme consists of four courses, each of 15 ECTS-credits, while the second year is entirely dedicated to the 60-credit course *Master's Project*. Regarding our positions within the programme, Tormod has been heading the programme as such and in 2016–2017 was also leading the two courses *Trans-disciplinary Arts Project* and *Artistic Research*, while Helene was leading *Research Methods and Theory* and *Arts Education*. With regard to the *Master's Project*, we have had a shared responsibility for the course.

In our daily teaching practice, we work closely with colleagues and invited guest lecturers, with whom we continuously discuss and carry out our shared practice. At the outset, an important ambition for *Art as Education/Education as Art* was to involve as many colleagues and students as possible in order to form a research community where we could all engage in both education, research and art.

HELENE: Talking about 'our education practice', we have to admit that heading most of the activities and conducting our research as part of the programme has meant that the two of us have been strongly identified – for better and for worse – with much of what has been going on. The idea of inhabiting has led us to spend many more hours than our colleagues with the students, and to shifting – or sometimes floating – between the participatory roles of organizer, teacher/artist, researcher/observer and student/participant. Not only did we inhabit our daily practices related to the programme, but the practices, in a certain sense, also came to inhabit us: through our physical presence and through the continuous exchanges between the two of us on and off campus, it became almost impossible to separate our lives as teachers from our research, and our research from our teaching.

Our inquiry

As a stage of the research project, we decided to carry out an inquiry integrated in the courses during the first year of the Master's programme from August 2016 to May 2017, by beginning to consider the programme itself to be a social arts practice. This would imply that we, alongside our institutionalized roles as teachers, would experiment with taking on the roles of researchers and/or artists in this context. The students would then not only be trained in these roles through assignments and exercises – as they usually were – but be encouraged to carry out these activities as a research and arts practice shared with their teachers.

We introduced our ideas at the beginning of the semester, first to our colleagues, and, during the first week of the courses, to the new group of students. We proposed that those who were interested could participate by generating and sharing *creata* throughout the semester and by participating in monthly exchanges

of experiences. In addition, participants would be free to adopt other ways of engaging in the inquiry and would, upon request, have full access to all creata, so that they could decide to use them in their own art and/or research projects.

Out of 15 students, nine chose to be full participants in the inquiry, while four chose that we could ask them to share creata, and two chose not to participate at all. Along with other issues, this of course gave rise to a number of ethical considerations, most significantly about how to protect the privacy of those who did not want to get involved in the inquiry. One pragmatic measure was to guarantee not to publish any material related to the inquiry (such as this chapter) without sending it to all participants in advance.

Other challenges became, not surprisingly, related to issues of power. While as researchers/artists we actively tried to promote participation based on a presumed equality among all participants, as teachers we still had the authority to define much of what was going on. Also, we knew that we would, in one way or the other, and at some point, participate in assessing some of the results of the students' academic performance in cooperation with external examiners. Alongside moments of collectivity and togetherness, these inherent contradictions of the framework gave rise to many questions. Even more, as the inquiry proceeded, the framework gave rise to problematic feelings such as suspicion, insecurity, vulnerability and anger (Illeris, 2018a). Formally, these problems were partly 'solved' by preparing detailed written rules for data protection and having them approved by the participants and NSD,[2] but, more importantly, they were dealt with through continuous explanations, negotiations, considerations and changes to the shape of the inquiry, even in periods and at moments where this felt troublesome and laborious. Our insight from taking the time and recognizing what we could do better without dismissing the whole project, is that the most important aspect of ethics is to see, meet and negotiate difficult situations in the moment, rather than referring to rules and declarations (Helguera, 2011, pp. xiv–xv; Illeris, 2018a, p. 30).

In the following sections we will go deeper into the questions we posed in the introduction. We will explore some of the ways in which we tried to use performative elements inspired by social arts practice to inhabit our education practice, including planning, implementing and evaluation of the workshops, and to inhabit our research practice, including our way of writing this text.

The sensuous: exploring space

The most visible and tangible alteration that we made during the first semester was to relocate major parts of the course activities to the old scenography workshops of an abandoned, rundown theatre building downtown (Figure 8.1). Following the logic of our problem statement, we tried to look at a problem: the programme not having proper working space on campus, from an artistic point of view, by asking ourselves,

> But why confine ourselves to campus? Why not just find any vacant space, preferably one that is a public one, so that we can also relate to a larger public or a realm outside the institution, like an artistic practice would?

Figure 8.1 Working in the scenography workshops in the rundown theatre building of Kristiansand.

Source: Photo by Helene Illeris

HELENE: So we found ourselves in these enormous, almost empty two-floor open spaces, which we were more or less free to organize and furnish in the way we wanted. The most impressive, though, was the immediate bodily experiences of the rooms: the sounds, the temperature, the surfaces. From an aesthetic point of view this was stimulating, rough and romantic, cruel and poetic. It attracted a phenomenological, sensory approach of exploring experiences of presence.

The art historian Miwon Kwon (2004) uses the term *phenomenological/experiential* to define the sensuous relationship to place, which is fundamental to site-specific art forms:

> [T]he space of art was no longer perceived as a blank slate, a tabula rasa, but a real place. The art object or event in this context was to be singularly and multiply experienced in the here and now through the bodily presence of each viewing subject, in a sensory immediacy of spatial extension and temporal duration . . . rather than instantaneously perceived in a visual epiphany by a disembodied eye.
>
> (p. 11)

During the inquiry the sensuous relationship between our bodies and the suggestive space of the workshop halls became central – for good and for bad: sometimes the space was experienced as open and inviting; other times, when it was cold and noisy, we became painfully aware of its less friendly sides.

Relating to the idea of sensuous presence, one of the first experiences that we had with the participants was related to the qualities of the new place by performing an exercise aimed at sensing the space in different ways. Then, still as part of the exercise, sitting on the floor or somewhere else in silence, we wrote down our impressions, listening to the room.

Helene wrote:

> It feels like being outside. A kind of garden?
> *Intense* silence, knowing that people are all around me.
> The pleasurable feeling of whispering feet.
>
> (Extract from notebook, August, 2016)

By performing a number of such sense-based investigations, we collected a wide range of experiences concerning the place we were in. We experienced things like how it felt (temperature, sounds), where the friendly and unfriendly nooks were, the creative vibes, etc. And we succeeded in evoking different and intertwining elements and atmospheres concerning our relationships to this new room, substituting the functional, 'striated' space of the scenography workshop with a sense of the room as 'smooth', as a *space of becoming* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 486).[3]

The relational: exploring togetherness

In social arts practices the sensuous dimension is often directly connected to everyday forms of interaction like cooking and eating a meal together, feeling the smells and taste of the food, or working together, building with leftover materials, exploring their possibilities and resistances (Illeris, 2017). Nicolas Bourriaud (1998/2000) uses the concept *relational aesthetics* to talk about art projects dominated by downplayed, loose and non-committal forms of staying together. In Bourriaud's preferred projects,[4] art is used to create *micro utopias*: small pockets of alternative social and material presence that work as a form of bodily experience and physically situated societal critique.

TORMOD: From the relocation I particularly remember the satisfaction of building things together – like the walls we set up to create different activity zones. In such situations, time passes, and we just . . . keep doing. For me, it is a sensed metaphor of what education could be like: not something given or described, but something we create, or build, together.

HELENE: I also like when many different things happen in the same physical space, creating different, but still overlapping zones of activity. It adheres to our dream – borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari – of 'smooth space', in contrast to 'striated space'. I guess what I like about these moments is a feeling of just drifting around, observing, leaving my teacher responsibilities behind. While you like to be physically active and 'handy' with skills, I like to be anonymous, just drifting. . . .

The metafictional: exploring performance

Another approach was to introduce *the metafictional* as a central methodology for stimulating collective attention towards education as a staged and performed activity (Rancière, 2010). Following this idea, the first assignment that we gave both to the students and to ourselves in August 2016 was to individually prepare and stage a performative self-presentation for the rest of the group. The assignment introduced the double focus of the sensuous and the performative, on the one hand by asking everyone to employ 'sensuous materials' such as objects, sounds, pictures etc. On the other hand, we directed attention towards how these materials, in conjunction with their own bodies and other components such as location, position of the audience etc., could somehow reflect the idea of the performance as a staged event. In this way we tried to stimulate the typical double gaze of contemporary art forms, where you, as audience or participant, are immersed in a sensory and/or social experience. At the same time, you keep a reflective distance, knowing that 'this is art', even if what you are doing seems quite ordinary – such as when you are actually just presenting yourself to your new classmates during the first days of school. Using concepts from performance theory, one could talk about *iterability* (Butler, 1993) or *twice behaved behavior* (Schechner, 2002, pp. 28–29), where you, through performative repetitions, refine your everyday behaviour in order to make it presentable in more and more advanced ways.

TORMOD: I remember the presentations as very intense, quite passionate and personal, and I think we all had a sense of knowing each other well after just a couple of days. And now, at the time when we are writing this, these students have their final exams, and many of these urgencies are still very present.

HELENE: Yes, I think this was an important beginning, something that many students refer to in their master's theses as crucial for their personal choices during the programme. For me, and a couple of others, it was also political in the sense that I wanted to deal with a sense of contemporaneity, not at an abstract level, but very concretely, like, for example, how we experience our daily life within a university system dominated by NPM-values.

The antagonistic: exploring conflict

Another performative approach was introduced during a two week workshop in September 2016 led by a guest teacher, the Danish performance artist Gry Worre Hallberg (Illeris, 2018b). While Gry's workshop was a part of the course *Trans-Disciplinary Arts Project*, Helene asked the students to write a short autoethnographic statement about their experiences from the workshop as part of the course *Research Methods and Theory*. Rather than collecting the texts, they would be read out loud in front of the whole group as a performative event, and students should therefore write the texts in a way that would allow them to perform it.

TORMOD: I remember when you asked all the students to perform their autoethnographic text, just get up and read it, without any comments or discussions or evaluation. The room was vibrating, because the texts encompassed so many critical observations and tense experiences, and I guess everybody just wanted to discuss those. But they did, just in a performative way, and by sticking to the format, I think it demonstrated something interesting or crucial about moving between educational and artistic optics.

HELENE: Well, that exercise really made some of the participants angry. Some were angry about the format, others expressed anger with the parallel artistic workshop – and some did both. Cynically, I believe that it took the form of an antagonistic art project, although that was not my conscious intention. However, looking back at the event, it was probably a kind of unconscious intention, because when you ask people to write a piece and just perform it without giving anyone the chance to comment on it, this piece becomes a statement, an untouchable, physical presence in the room, and that is very provocative. Together with the artistic workshop, which also had many such uncompromising elements, the exercise fuelled whatever was already smouldering beneath the surface. Looking back, I consider this a typical art strategy of staging people in more or less awkward situations – without any particular intentions, just to see what happens.

The term 'antagonistic art project' refers to the British art critic Claire Bishop (2004), who, inspired by the political philosophers Ernesto Laclau and Claire Mouffe (1985), applies the term *antagonistic* to social arts projects that are characterized by inner contradictions, and which, consequently, open up for experiences of discomfort and alienation among the participants. In contrast to relational aesthetics, which Bishop sees as promoting a weak feel-good kind of social aesthetics, it is, in Bishop's view, important that the audience leaves the safe environment of the gallery space and encounters a social reality shaped by contradictions and paradoxes. Moreover, many of the projects that Bishop uses as her examples are not community-oriented but marked by a relatively hard, top-down organization.[5]

Following this argument, one could say that by giving the assignment of the performative autoethnography to the students, Helene used her authority as a teacher in much the same way that an artist could have used the audience, namely as a kind of 'material' for an antagonistic social arts practice, elevating societal issues of power and submission to art by modelling and exhibiting them in subtle ways.

A number of students experienced that, along with the artistic workshop, the performative ethnography generated doubt about our intentions as teachers/researchers/artists, doubts which were very clearly stated some weeks later, when we had our mid-term evaluation. Uncertainties associated with the project as 'the teachers' research' were clearly addressed. Some students questioned our floating roles between researchers, artists, teachers and even 'students'; some aired frustrations with the relocation to the old theatre (it was too cold, had terrible

acoustics and the budget for improvements was insufficient), and some clearly questioned whether this work was really in line with the study programme as specified in the course descriptions (for a more detailed analysis of the mid-term evaluation, see Illeris, 2018a, pp. 30 ff.).

TORMOD: I remember the frustration of the mid-term evaluation very well, where discussions on the research project turned towards 'us' researching 'them', which was so far from our intentions of shared exploration. It was a positioning we did not want. But it also clarified that, to a large degree, this inquiry was based on our urgency, our needs for exploration and that we needed to take the responsibility for that and justify our exploration more explicitly in relation to the study programme, plus involve students more based on where they were.

HELENE: It was very tough, because there was a lot of anger, but it was also clarifying in many ways. It really made me realize how challenging it was to simultaneously inhabit a social space both as art, research and education. Looking back on our idea of 'just doing', it was quite arrogant of us to sort of overlook how precarious the students' situations were. In spite of all our explanations, collaborative initiatives and good intentions, we were not sensitive enough to the experience of some of the students, who felt turned into 'objects of research' or even 'artistic material'. From that moment the project became less ambitious yet much more precise, although there was a sadness to it, a feeling of loss on our side.

The durational: exploring negotiation

In the second semester, after the happenings above, we introduced a new form of event called *Master Thursday*. On the one hand, Master Thursdays were an integrated (and compulsory) part of the spring course *Artistic Research* and contained activities that we would normally do throughout the semester. On the other, the event was open to the public, with special emphasis on seeing it not as a *presentation* of the study programme, but *as* the programme. The following is a recollection of the first event:

> *From 3 pm invited guests started arriving at our space in the theatre and were guided to the mingling space for coffee and pastries. After about 15 minutes of free mingling the group was led on into the 'tent', a corner closed off by black stage curtains, and now lit with stage lighting and filled with sofas and chairs facing a screen. Then the artist Pelle Brage was introduced, and he began an approximately one hour-long presentation of some of his artistic projects, focusing for the most part on how he was collaborating with local inhabitants and devotees in Jutland, Denmark, protesting against a commercial windmill development and promoting an alternative project that would imply local ownership. Pelle stated that: "If there is anything the visual artist knows how to do, it is to draw attention to things that could be different".*

Subsequently, the crowd was invited back into the white cube, to surround an improvised musical performance by a drummer and guitar player. The performance grew from a quiet, ambient start to a dynamic finale; most of the focus was on the guitarist experimenting with sounds, shifting between pedals and sound effects, grinding two guitars together, and then, finally, perhaps in homage to Hendrix, cutting the strings one by one with a loud noise. With the performance coming logically to the end and applause, the crowd went back into the mingling area, where some remained for a while to chat.

From these recounted memories, it is clear that this event slipped somewhat into presentation mode rather than just opening the programme to the public. Still, it introduced a different implication of seeing education as art. As in Joseph Beuys' *Freie Internationale Universität* from 1973 and in Pelle Brage's artistic projects,[6] the idea was to invite everybody to participate in a practice that is not confined by institutional definition. Instead of the university's closed environment, open only to admitted students who fulfil the application criteria, we wanted to run classes as an open event, open to whoever wanted to come, invited or not. In other words, through a reframing not only of location but also of organization and perspectives, we wanted to use our inspiration from social arts practice to question and challenge everyday practice within an educational institution.

Moreover, the example demonstrates the development of the inquiry in the second semester, where we – after negotiations of space, time, levels of involvement, and programme foundations – had to consider how to work with education as a social arts practice in a manner that would be more condensed and less all-encompassing on behalf of the participants we involved. We scaled the events down to three *Master Thursdays* during the semester and gave three groups of students the assignment to curate one gathering each.

TORMOD: When I introduced the idea of the Master Thursdays, it was basically just a stubborn way to ask "What can we keep from this?" I did not want to give up our perspective that we could explore the idea of seeing the practice which we share with our students as an arts practice. And I wanted us to reclaim the space of the theatre. We just needed to make things a lot simpler, something we could do easily, and without reconceptualizing everything we do, just some of it, so that we did not require a deep, long-term obligation or involvement from participants who had not opted to do so. It came out of a sense of loss, and the realization that since we embody our institutional structures, we cannot easily shake them off in our roles as teachers: the students still recognize us as part of a system that they are relating to, are subjected to, are depending on.

In order to understand the implications of *Master Thursdays* in relation to social arts practice, neither Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, nor Bishop's focus on antagonism will do. Instead, we need a third perspective that more clearly emphasizes the pedagogical values of art practices that unfold over time and that imply

an insistence on the artistic values of dialogues and extended negotiation. In his theory on social arts practice, the American art historian Grant Kester (2011, p. 9) focuses on "site specific collaborative projects that unfold through extended interaction and shared labor, and in which the process of participatory interaction itself is treated as a creative praxis". Kester criticizes Bourriaud and Bishop for avoiding the real ground of community: compromises, negotiation and renegotiation, the toilsome staying together over time, which he defines as *labor*.

In light of our experiences, as we see it, a common characteristic of both education and research practices is exactly this kind of extended and often unglamorous and laborious interaction, where challenges and solutions evolve over much longer time spans than are common in projects inscribed in the fields of the arts. In the words of art educator and critic Nora Sternfeld, seen from the perspective of the art field, educational projects

> are not always as focused and critical as we would like them to be. To some extent they are open processes and the unexpected results they produce can be productive. These results are not always presentable and are sometimes embarrassing, often beside the point. Sometimes, however, just such results can lead to very interesting considerations, questions concerning foregone conclusions, reformulations, and spaces for action. Sometimes there is no result at all.
>
> (Sternfeld, 2010, p. 11)

What we are trying to suggest is that *Master Thursdays* should not be understood as isolated events but as moments in a long and tedious and mostly unglamorous process. As Sternfeld further notes in regard to the arts-driven educational project *Trafo K*: "we . . . realized that regardless of the actual outcomes, it was the very ability to take part in such uncomfortable discussions – that is through the process rather than the result – that underpinned the project". And she concludes: "Perhaps the recent curatorial discourses that have begun to emphasize the productivity of knowledge can learn from the quiet, laborious, unpresentable processes of the educational" (Sternfeld, 2010, p. 10).

From these perspectives *Master Thursdays*, although on a much more minor scale than Kester's examples, can be seen as moments of this kind of extended interaction, that, according to Kester, take place outside institutions and are "produced instead in conjunction with local communities, neighborhoods, or sites of political resistance" (Kester, 2011, p. 9).

When we see *Master Thursdays* in the light of the whole study programme *as* art, with a focus on the extended interaction, shared labour and continuous and tedious negotiations of positionings, physical spaces, activities, etc., one sees how they become important events. Not only because we invited the students to incorporate the idea of the social encounter into their explorative artistic processes and to use these open events as a way to learn about and reflect on the public and social dimensions of artistic exploration and work, but even more because, as a result of the endless negotiations during the first semester, we managed to scale

the activities to match ambitions, time and resources. Thus, instead of embodying the role of the 'heroic artist' (which occasionally hit us as an obligation – and which we partly urged the students to do as well), and without completely letting go of our ideas, we managed to make a feasible compromise.

Conclusions

In the introduction we characterized arts as social practice as performative, processual and participatory. These are qualities which also came to characterize both our educational practice in the master's programme and our research practice, although not always in the ways that we expected. Trying to inhabit the whole experience of our inquiry *as* art took us into much more complex situations than we had imagined. While we had some quite idealistic visions of living out the educational potentials of contemporary art forms, our *just do it* and *what happens if* attitudes set many things into play in ways that challenged our expectations.

Our initial visions of inhabiting practice were mostly inspired by ideas of the sensuous and the relational as theorized by Kwon and Bourriaud, yet our actual experiences related more to Bishop's and Kester's ideas of the antagonistic and the laborious: entering misunderstandings, negotiations, compromises. It is, then, perhaps in this 'compromise' that we are closest to the ideas of how social arts may inform educational practice and vice versa, realizing, like Kester, that these negotiations in themselves actually contain the dimensions of labour that might be considered valuable as a form of dialogical social arts practice.

These experiences also relate to our desire to challenge our conditions through inhabiting our practices in new ways. While we saw the idea of *inhabiting* as an alternative to the demands for production inherent in NPM-systems, this idea sometimes spurred questions and confusion among our students, particularly at moments when we did not confine ourselves to the given role of being educators, but instead entered different positions as researchers and/or artists and invited them to do the same.

An experience that we gained from our inquiry was that there is a fine line of negotiation between being perceived as *occupying* a practice and *inhabiting* it. Occupying means taking the power of definition over a shared space, which may make things much clearer, but we wanted to inhabit it, being open about our confusion, our lack of clear-cut questions, and our experimenting, seeing ourselves as in a constant learning process. Making the distinction clear requires a constant dialogue to allow all parts to find their own way of inhabiting, to discover what they themselves want or need to explore.

It also seems evident that an *inhabiting*-approach enables a dislocation of perspectives within the institutional framework, which may reveal structures of power, institutional 'truths' and what our expected positions and roles are. Concretely, the values of NPM that we have found ourselves embodying are also present in student expectations towards what a study programme is and what our defined roles and positions as, respectively, students and teachers/researchers should be. As this project has sought to use *creating* realities as its language and

expression rather than taking the critical approach of unveiling and defining reality, it also experiences how this type of dislocation stirs up and provokes existing truths and expectations from the institution and its members.

So, why, given all these obstacles and impossibilities, try to inhabit educational practices as art? In spite of – or perhaps because of – the many challenges and compromises, our project also indicates that framing education as art gives access to different approaches to teaching than the everyday of higher education normally does. Our inquiry discloses some potentialities to elaborate on, both in our daily life as teachers and in further research projects:

- A capacity for exploring the potentials of inhabiting a common landscape, valuing the quality of the immediate experience rather than the critical/analytical distance of 'a problematic'
- A more sensuous approach to educational activities, stimulating 'presence' through immersion in the sensuous and affective qualities of the immediate situation
- A freer approach to roles and positions offered by moments of relationality/togetherness: for example, moments of working together in different and more equal positions than those offered by the given positions of teacher and student
- Access to a more distant 'metafictional', aesthetic gaze, trying to look at everyday educational activities such as lectures 'as if' they were art: for example, looking at the whole practice as a 'performance'
- A redefinition of the durational qualities of extended labour and of the tedious, the disagreeable, the compromised, as having aesthetic value

The dimension of negotiating expectations and taking all the participants' perspectives and needs into account is a far less glamorous and more time-consuming and mundane way of carrying out critical inquiry, yet one that may be more efficient in the end: practicing criticality by doing something else. In this respect, the artist Pelle Brage's statement from the *Master Thursday*, that *if there is anything the artist knows how to do, it is to draw attention to things that could be different*, may very well describe the potential of the approach that we are elaborating.

Returning to our urge to *inhabit* our educational practice, it is then also a matter of entering the tedious and unglamorous everyday of negotiating what the questions and topics of this practice are. What becomes clear, though, is how the ambition to inhabit, to place ourselves and our own questions, ambitions, desires, frustrations or needs for exploration as a driving force of practice, is also a way of turning this practice into a much more intense space, both in terms of agency and risk, but also in realizing that everyday practice contains fundamental questions and the potential to transform and relate to discourses in and beyond its context.

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Notes

1 Such systems are officially implemented in Norwegian higher education (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2010), as well as throughout Europe.
2 Norwegian Centre for Research Data, www.nsd.uib.no/nsd/english
3 Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of striated and smooth space are introduced in the 14th text in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). In contrast to *striated space*, which is defined as a partitioned field constructed in order to organize open space into specific places or sites for defined (human) activities, *smooth space* is defined as an environment, a landscape (vast or microscopic) in which a subject operates (see also Illeris, 2017, p. 12).
4 Bourriaud's preferred example has been artist Rirkrit Tiravanija and his projects from the 1990s, in which he erected provisional field kitchens to prepare and serve food – such as green curry or soups – to the audiences in art galleries and museums.
5 Among Bishop's preferred artists are Santiago Sierra, who in a number of works pays homeless people or refugees to be part of installations, for example in a piece from 2000 called *Workers who cannot be paid, remunerated to remain inside cardboard boxes* (2000); and German Thomas Hirschorn, who, assisted by local citizens, builds his 'monuments' in vulnerable residential areas, for example in the work *Bataille Monument* from 2002.
6 See www.pellebrage.com for an overview of Pelle Brage's recent art projects, which tend to involve communities and invite broad participation, and critique institutions.

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