

# ARTS PLURAL

## Arts Plural

ELIA Biennial Conference 2024

## A Reader on Artistic Intelligence

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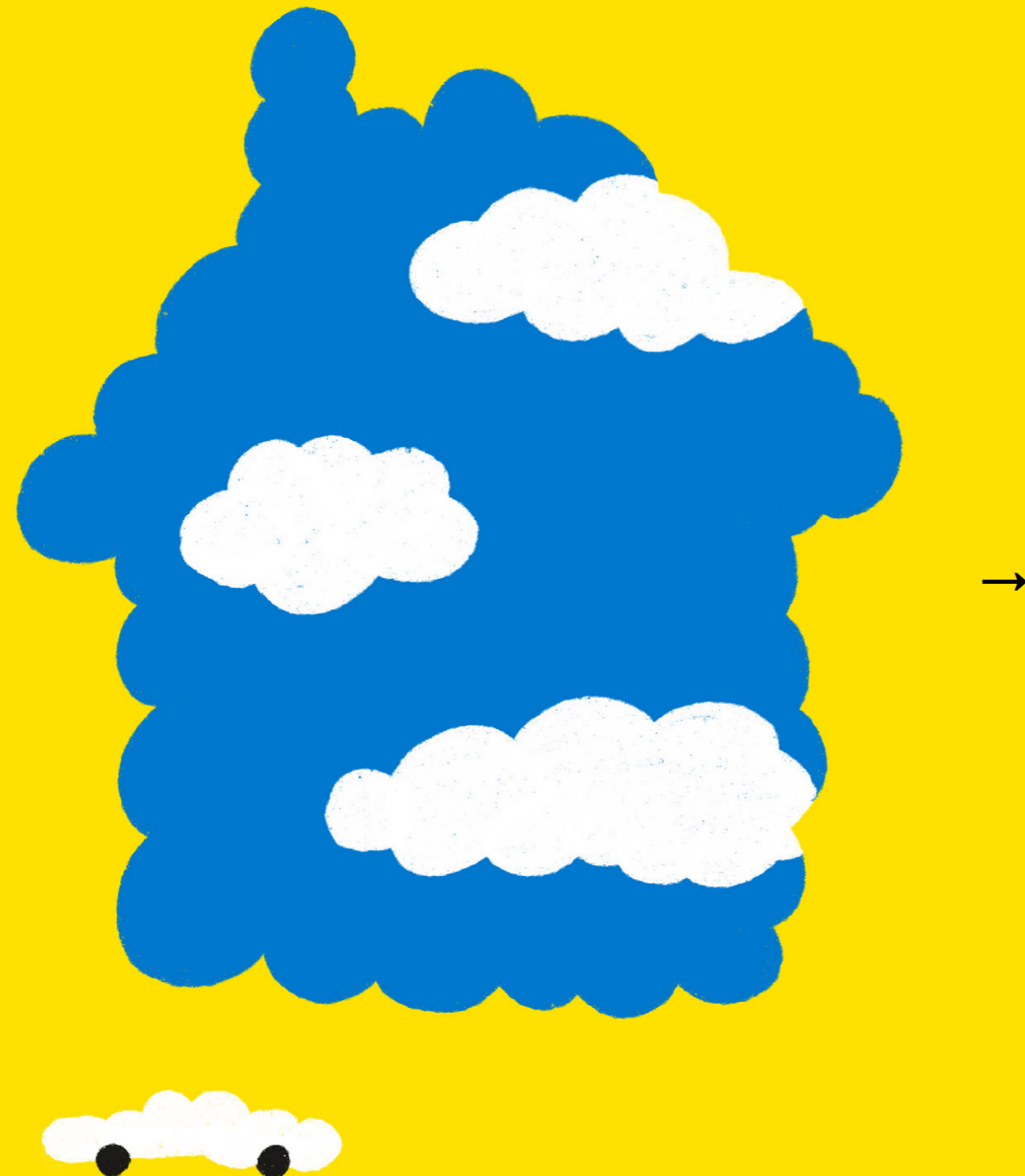
## **About ELIA**

ELIA is Europe's leading multidisciplinary network in higher arts education and research.

Powered by our members, we are a globally connected knowledge community for peer-learning, international collaboration, and advocacy.

We provide a dynamic platform for exchange and development: a space where artists, educators, leaders, technical, administrative staff, and students from every arts discipline can share knowledge, spark collaboration, and enhance the value and impact of the arts and artistic research in society.

[www.elia-artschools.org](http://www.elia-artschools.org)



# Preface

Over 500 participants travelled to Italy from across the globe to attend over 70 presentations, workshops, keynotes, art exhibitions, and mobile visits responding to the theme set out in the conference brief:

## ARTS PLURAL

“Artists and designers possess a particular form of intelligence. Although considered powerful in certain circles, artistic intelligence is frequently ill-defined or misread. However, as a system of capacities for perception, insight, sensing, creating, and decision-making, it has been driving human evolution beyond boundaries for centuries. But how do we define artistic intelligence and its possibilities in a contemporary context?”

ELIA Biennial 2024 *Arts Plural* celebrates artistic intelligence. It questions how artistic practitioners, designers, students, and educators can be recognised as agents of change, innovation, and evolution. It asks how arts education can contribute to society in a more pluralistic way.

What structures are necessary for artistic intelligence to play a role in addressing planetary problems?

Hosted by NABA, Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti, ELIA Biennial 2024 invites participants to come to Milan, a city famed for its vibrant art, history, design, architecture, and extraordinary fashion and culinary scenes.

Open your mind to new ideas.

Experience, experiment, and extend your vision of what art and design can do, as together we find new ways to influence transformation in politics, ecology, ethics, technology, and sustainability to build inclusive futures based on plural voices.”



This reader is merely a glimpse and extension of what happened on those inspirational days in Milan. It gives a taste of the trajectories the conference followed: looking at differences in perception and position while trying to frame or define artistic intelligence; how artistic intelligence can exist as a fundamental feature of arts education pedagogy, but like all fertile grounds it needs maintaining and nurturing; and how the dawn of Artificial Intelligence has set the arts education sector in a spin, and the choices that need to be made on how we utilise new technological imaginings. It also showcases practice and making processes in action as well as the artistic works themselves, and the multitude of positive effects the arts bring to the sector and beyond. These are just some of the trains of thought to be found and enjoyed between the pages that follow.

On behalf of the ELIA Team and ELIA Biennial Steering Group,

we hope these papers, articles, workshop notes and essays spark new pathways for your own investigation and we encourage you to reach out to those who contributed, should you wish to pursue their research further.

— Derville Quigley  
and Janja Škerget

# Introduction

## Artistic Intelligence: Plural Ways of Knowing

An Interview with Helen Yung and Mark V. Campbell

— Derville Quigley

We have met already in person. Helen Yung and Mark V. Campbell from the [Laboratory for Artistic Intelligence](#) were invited to deliver opening and closing keynote addresses at the ELIA Biennial Conference in November 2024 in Milan. Fourteen months later we are sitting in different rooms, in different buildings, in Amsterdam and Toronto, connecting on Zoom. At least technically connecting. Helen needs to rejoin as she can't hear us at first. But then suddenly it's working. A lot has happened since the ELIA Biennial on the international stage and in world news, sadly much of it not to our liking.

But the atmosphere in our virtual room is warm and through tone of voice and curious, meandering conversation that strives to dig deeper, answering difficult questions through sharing and responding, we get to know each other better as

we attempt to define and explore what is artistic intelligence.



We agreed that this would be a collegial conversation, left open to follow whatever paths seemed appropriate. We also quickly decided to put my preprepared questions to one side and see where our collective thoughts on the topic would wander and land.

We are **Helen Yung (HY)**, founder and Chief Artistic Officer of the Laboratory for Artistic Intelligence; **Mark V. Campbell (MC)**, researcher, founder of the Northside Hip Hop Archive, DJ, curator and scholar; and **Derville Quigley (DQ)**, Communications and Marketing Manager at ELIA.

**DQ:**

I suppose the big question is what is artistic intelligence? Can you, or we, define it?

**HY:**

Artistic intelligence is the curatorial application of and creative working with artistic knowledges for social change. We are called the Laboratory for Artistic Intelligence because we are focused on the practice of bringing artists and artistic methods to address complex public and social challenges. We work with *diverse* artists and practices from a range of traditions and perspectives to reframe and respond to a problem space in generative ways.

**MC:**

...What I've noticed in how people seem to respond to Helen's framing of artistic intelligence, is that how you define as artistic intelligence has a lot to do with your relationship to and your definition of art. What you see, what you've known, what you've been trained to view as art.

**DQ:**

I see what you mean. If I may ask, Helen, how do you view art and how does this influence the way you define artistic intelligence?

**HY:**

In Canada, in Toronto particularly, we are blessed with talent and traditions from all around the world. And beyond the talent that resides here, there was a time when Canadian companies were able to access cultural funding on a regular basis to bring in Master-level artists from around the world to perform, give class, or offer a lecture demonstration or workshop. There is cultural richness here, if you seek them out.

Take our restaurant scene, we have everything from the most traditional and authentic versions of cultural cuisines to the most contemporary distillations, experimental interpretations, and reimaginings of culture-specific food traditions crafted together to create a new dish. And similarly, I believe that our artistic scene is like that...We could debate whether our artistic products are reaching the zenith as often as we'd like. But the processes, the practices, are very much there. The people are there, which is so important. And so, with Indigenous people, and with artists from long artistic traditions like South Asian classical music or Chinese opera, my experience is that the notion of 'artistic intelligence' makes sense to them because it speaks to something that they know in every cell of their body. Artistic intelligence exists, separate from their other ways of knowing whether they are a doctor, lawyer, scientist, or schoolteacher; they have a way of perceiving the world that is not getting described even within formal Western artistic education, because it isn't *their* formative education.

**DQ:**

So, do you think the act of defining perhaps limits the power of artistic intelligence?

**HY:**

I resist the decoupling of value from the value creator. At the Lab, we work hard to ensure that the method moves with the artist, never without them. Our simplest definition is that artistic intelligence = artists and artistic methods.

Artistic intelligence taps into subtle, embedded and embodied knowledges that can only be transmitted in practice, over time, in co-practice, in presence, or in poetry.

For me, artistic intelligence is not limited to what is taught in European art schools. It is much wider than that. When you look at Indian arts, these forms emerge from South Asian ways of understanding the world, from Vedic metaphysics. Chinese martial arts and dance have roots in Chinese Taoism, which is another metaphysics that doesn't stop at philosophy, it is a way of thought that descends into our bodies and our metabolic systems.

I'm not a scholar in these traditions so I am generalising, but I speak from practical study learning some of these forms, and listening to master artists and those in training. When we continue working within these artistic traditions, we are keeping those knowledge systems alive, and we are allowing those knowledge systems to interact with other knowledge systems.

That's what's deeply moving about the arts in Toronto. For a South Asian classical Bharatanatyam dancer or a Hindustani singer or a Carnatic musician to exist, to present their work and to continue to develop their practice in a Canadian context, they are having to reinterpret, connect with diverse audiences who come with other knowledge systems, make it meaningful and resonant for these audiences, and yet maintain the integrity of what they know, what has been transmitted to them as artists. They're simultaneously reinventing and reinterpreting at all times, and also holding true to what is true to that knowledge system, that worldview, that way of seeing and perceiving, sensing the world and reinterpreting the world.

**MC:**

The arts do that so naturally throughout the entire process from creation, iteration, imperfection, reflection, critique, creation again.

**DQ:**

Do you think Western educational frameworks are doing artistic intelligence a disservice?

**HY:**

I think when it comes back to what artistic intelligence is, this desire to extract it and place it in this abstracted realm of verbal language and definitions is doing violence to ourselves. While I enjoy theory and the different ways of knowing that scholarship creates, as an artist, I feel resistant about naming and defining artistic intelligence in a way that stands separate from experiencing it first-hand. The moment we strip or pin it down into something language-based, bounded by non-poetic text, we've done violence to the thing itself. And breaking down everything we know about artistic intelligences into written language makes it possible for artificial intelligence to then ingest that language, and through chatbots, pretend to speak to artistic intelligence without a felt-sense of the work.

**MC:**

And this is what's so difficult for people. The arts demand that if you're going to continue doing art, you have to reflect on what you created. You can't *not* reflect on it.

And oftentimes that reflection is not part of a public discourse, but the learnings are in the process. It's in the doing and the failing and the redoing and the seeking of advice and the re-measuring and the redoing and the failing. All of those pieces are there. That's what art-making is. So it becomes really difficult to convey that to people who aren't willing, or don't have the lived experience of *doing* art.

**DQ:**

You both have a very open and wide perception of artistic intelligence. It makes me think we have so much still to learn, discover and remember. In terms of teaching and learning, it's a complicated global trajectory to form or follow. What do you think?

**HY:**

In China, it is generally considered the pinnacle of excellence when someone is trained in both Traditional Chinese Medicine and Western medicine. But Western science, and really, Western knowledge institutions insist that everything must be understood and validated through Western frameworks. That's the dominant value system. Other knowledges either don't exist or they're not useful or worthy until they can be proven within *this* discipline, *this* world view, within *this* particular knowledge system. Whereas in the East, my experience with Asian cultures is that if you can take the best of multiple knowledge systems and bring them together to form an informed opinion or an insight, an innovation, more power to you. They believe in that. They really do.

**MC:**

Let's add the South to that too, because many of the African knowledge systems in Brazil and Cuba are multiple, especially when it comes to religion. Everything is synchronised. I feel that one of the things you're gesturing at, Helen, is that most civilisations outside of Western Europe deal with multiplicity. They deal with multiple knowledge systems and they have to hold them together.

Which is why artistic intelligence is so important for Western innovation and transdisciplinary research right now. What the arts actually do is they have to hold multiple knowledge systems together in order to create art. Some of those systems are about visual perception. Some are about tactile, experiential knowledge. And those things all come together in the creation of a play, a theatre piece, all of those ways of knowing.

The benefit of it is not its documentation, but its lived experience. This is why artistic intelligence is so difficult for people to wrap their heads around, because it's a practice. It's a practice of doing and reflecting. It's a practice of holding multiple knowledge systems at the same time. And it's not linear, but oscillating moments that collide.

In other parts of the world, because of colonialism, communities have become adept at retaining or reinventing their precolonial heritage and languages and practising these things in secret, as is the case with Brazilian Capoeira. Just because one knowledge

system has dominated the world through violence doesn't mean others are not balancing multiple ideas at the same time to live their life in its authenticity or in its pre-colonial knowledge.

**DQ:**

This brings up for me the current revival that's happening around the Irish language in Ireland and how it relates to ecology because the etymology of the Irish language relates very much to nature. It's an observational language that's very visual, and its poetic depth is very strong. This decolonising movement comes from researchers, travellers and story-driven revivalists working with Indigenous peoples around the world, and coming home knowing the importance of reclaiming our land relations through language, through myth...

**HY:**

Yes, I've heard other colleagues speak to this. It's very beautiful.

**DQ:**

Do you think the solution for education then might be a mycelium of learning pathways that speak to plurality or a multiplicity of knowledge systems?

**HY:**

Could be. I think of it like harvesting wild yeast. In every place, you can 'catch' or cultivate different yeast, different bacteria, different cultures. We've been talking about working with universities or different groups to cultivate the specific set of artistic intelligences for consulting and applied research that are unique to your culture - what you have in that land, in that site, in that locale... situated knowledges. The Laboratory for Artistic Intelligence could also introduce some other cultures, other knowledges that might help strengthen what's already there or create new hybrids.

**MC:**

I completely agree. Bringing other voices into the university is deeply important, but the university also has to move away from a couple of things.

First, we assume that the university is a neutral space, so that if we add something to it, it will make it better. The university in and of itself must decolonise itself. It has to move away from its histories of extraction and thinking about knowledge in a commodified, Cartesian form. Knowledge is understood as cognitive over everything else. It is not emotional, physical or experiential.

Second, the questions are already insufficient because the questions are reflecting the dominant ideas. People want to know, how can artistic intelligence be universalised? How can it be put into curriculum, etc.? How can it answer some of the biggest problems in the world? Part of the problem in that line of thinking is that it's not just about making the arts work for the rest of society, but that in wanting to talk this way about artistic intelligence, we're not allowing it to *do* the work. We're not allowing artistic intelligence to ponder, to meditate, to reflect on, to be curious, to wander, or to undo us in ways that lead us to a different set of relations.

If you develop a siloed university system and expect people to be creative when difference is not let in in an equitable and horizontal way, you will always reproduce the same kind of thinking and the same kind of people. Policymakers are unable to come up with new questions because they've moved through a world not practising an artistic or creative outlook, but utilising the university to get good grades, to apply to good schools, to get a great job with a pension. So, when you sit at a policy table at the EU dealing with major world crises, your ability to practise creative thinking has already been gutted by your training. You didn't wander, you weren't curious, you couldn't create and fail, and you didn't have critique sessions in horizontal ways with other creative thinkers.

**HY:**

I agree with much of that, except maybe the last part. We know there are many creative people who enter public service and are in education. You're one of them, Mark, in education. And we have other colleagues at the Lab who work in public service. But the machine is bigger than the person. Well-intentioned creative people go to work in institutions wanting to change things. But institutions are cranky systems, and so it takes more than just one person or even one method to change something so immense, and so invested, as you say, in its own survival.

**DQ:**

As founder and Chief Artistic Officer of the Laboratory for Artistic Intelligence, Helen, what can you offer?

**HY:**

For individuals, we offer a different way of working within and adjacent to institutions. For organisations, solutions. The Laboratory



for Artistic Intelligence methodology brings artists and researchers into institutions and problem spaces to effect change as consultants. This gives us *latitude*, and it ensures that there's a high degree of buy-in, at least among management, for what we're doing. Artistically, I still root myself in independent practice. But consulting is invited in as an intervention on systems... I think there's so much *possibility* in this. We've collaborated across sectors and society with people working in astronomy, physics, psychology, medicine, immigration, mental health, the social sector, information sciences, education, and the list is still expanding...

Lately, we've turned more attention to ensuring that individuals who are curious about working in this way can access resources and find likeminded collaborators. We're offering practical residencies for people to learn and develop a felt-sense of how to work with artists and artistic methods in ethical, generative, mutually beneficial ways.

For organisations or leaders looking for solutions to complex challenges, the *definition* of artistic intelligence won't solve their problem, but the *practice* of artistic intelligence can.

The Laboratory for Artistic Intelligence framework enables us to draw from many imaginations, global wisdoms and multiple knowledge systems. Practicing other ways of knowing, being and seeing within institutional policy and innovation spaces is necessary for creativity and balance - for whole systems innovation that can hold the whole. So that we can stop doing things in the same self-limiting ways that lead to metacrisis points.



And there our conversation ends for now, pointing forward to a myriad of strategically imaginative solutions, while acknowledging the web of crises we find ourselves entangled within. I recommend that you watch the recordings of Helen and Mark's keynotes and seek out Helen's description of the Lab's conceptual project, *What Art Can Offer Immigration*, as an example of how it is possible to move across sectors and society in multidimensional ways, beyond the concept of human as an exploitable resource in the workplace,

to the artist-consultant creating, demonstrating and reflecting upon new possibilities of what the human could become.

As you move through the chapters of this reader, you will encounter artistic intelligence as an ever-evolving kaleidoscope of artistic concerns, perceptions, sensing mechanisms, pedagogies and practices: ways to understand the space that surrounds us; ways to mobilise desire as a productive force; ways to design reciprocity and invite multidimensional dialogue; to give voice to forming rather than transforming; ways not to outpace artificial intelligence but to remain in friction with it; ways to learn through vulnerability and evolve through difference; and ways to hold safe what is transmitted through the body (human and non-human).

What has struck me through this process of gathering, reading and assembling academic papers, workshop notes, articles and documentation of artistic process and pedagogy, is how important it is for us, as the higher arts education and research community,

to remain steadfast in our resolve, and ever courageous in protecting the openness of our artmaking practices and the embodiment of artistic intelligence as we collectively respond to, and aim to discover new ways of knowing.



# PART I

## Framing Artistic Intelligence

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# ARTISTIC INTELLIGENCE AND OUR AESTHETIC RESPONSE TO THE WORLD

Jan van Boeckel

## INTRODUCTION

At the ELIA Biennial Conference: *Arts Plural* in Milan (2024), I gave the following presentations: ‘Being present, in the present, to what presents itself’ and ‘Encounters with emergence’. There I contrasted two sets of approaches to contemplating the relationship between humans and the more-than-human world.

One (e.g., informed by posthumanism) aims at ‘decentring the human’, and the other, instead (e.g., on basis of phenomenology) *foregrounds* human presence, embodiment, and corporeality.

I asked myself: “What happens if we *start off* from the givenness of our human presence and from there explore the myriads of relationships we have with an other-than-human cosmos?” I engage with this theme in the context of an exploration of what possible affordances artistic intelligence may offer through practicing or facilitating art-driven, aesthetic, and embodied processes.

Thereby, I am not only interested in what art can bring when we try to navigate the field of connections with the more-than-human world but also when we seek novel ways of engaging the complexities and uncertainties of our current era.

To make a first attempt at unpacking this, I start by taking a closer look at the very notion of that type of intelligence that is informed by art.

## ARTISTIC INTELLIGENCE

There is a telltale sign of when someone is truly applying artistic intelligence in a given situation. It is the moment that the person concerned, when asked to please define what it in essence might be, before anything else, *evades* giving a neat and straight answer. With manifestations of artistic intelligence, it is perhaps a bit like it is with the behaviour of quantum particles: their presence can only be inferred from their interactions and the ‘tracks’ they leave in detectors, rather than through direct observation. Through registering the effects of artistic intelligence on the world we can perchance begin to start grasping some of the workings of this ability in action.

Intelligence, according to the *Oxford Dictionary of English* is, in a very basic sense, the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills. Transposed to the concept of *artistic* intelligence, it would follow that in principle something can be distinguished, identified, or singled out as a specifically *artist’s* way of attaining and subsequently employing new knowledge. But to me, such a conceptualisation has a too static ring, for it assumes one can readily isolate and foreground something immaterial—knowledge—that can be acquired from our artful or art-informed interactions with the living world, and that such knowledge can then later be released again—applied—back into it. British sculptor

Antony Gormley would rather want to shift the focus from knowledge to the notion of understanding. When I asked him in 2010 if he would agree with me that art, as a mode and process of engagement or learning, can potentially provide us with forms of knowledge that no other endeavour can, he responded like this:

*I am worried about that notion of 'knowledge'. Eliot said: "Where is the understanding we have lost in knowledge?" 'Knowledge' suggests defined quantities, whilst 'understanding' suggests a degree of uncertainty, of not-knowing, and indicates an open-ended process. I think that art can absolutely be a catalyst for a process of understanding and, through engagement, maybe even of empathy, too (A. Gormley, personal communication, 1 February 2010).*

In my presentation in Milan, I began by showing images that for me epitomize how we in the modern world, through a centuries-long process, have grown apart from the rest of the living world. One image was that of crawly creatures on the bottom floor of Noah's Ark by Jan Luyken, in a book by Wilhelmus Goeree from 1690 (fig. 1 & 2). The publication presents a print series with several cross sections of the ark. The prints can be read as a kind of 'ladder of nature', *scala naturae*, rising from the 'imperfect' forms of life (below) to the most 'perfect' (at the top). The bottom floor is where the four-legged animals are housed, and at the very bottom is the 'stinking pit into which the beasts relieve themselves of their piss and ordure'. Crawling in this filthy basin are 'all manner of vermin' such as snakes, toads, lizards, centipedes, snails, spiders, worms, and beetles.

Another visual I showed was the short film *The Acrobatic Fly* that British naturalist and filmmaker F. Percy Smith made in 1910 of a pinned fly glued upside down to a matchstick (fig. 3), only 22 years after Louis Le Prince shot the first motion picture ever, in 1888. The response by audiences at the time was a mix of amazement at the technical achievement and amusement at the anthropomorphic, circus-like performance, but some viewers were also repelled by the perceived cruelty to the fly.

To me, both representations are graphic for how we have distanced ourselves from the rest of nature.

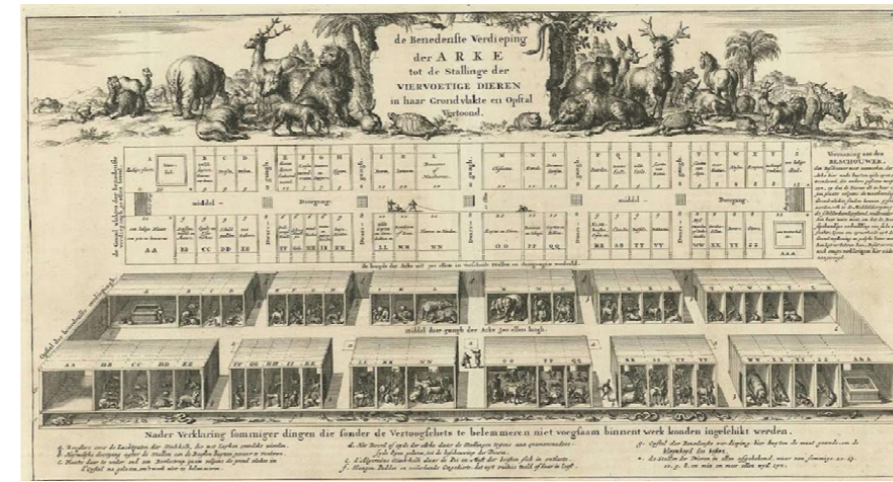
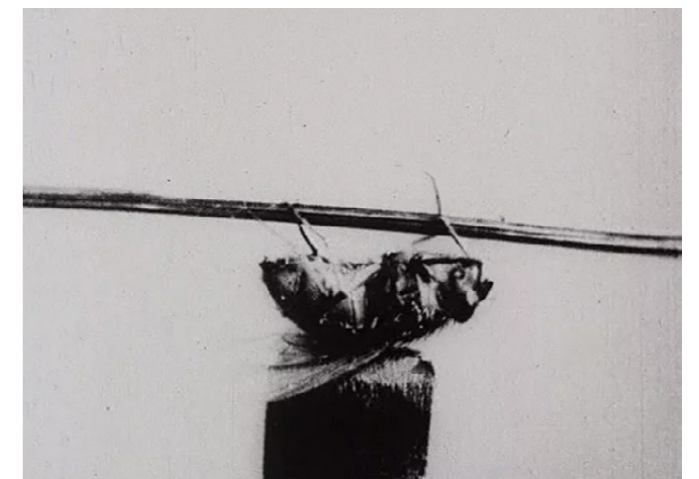
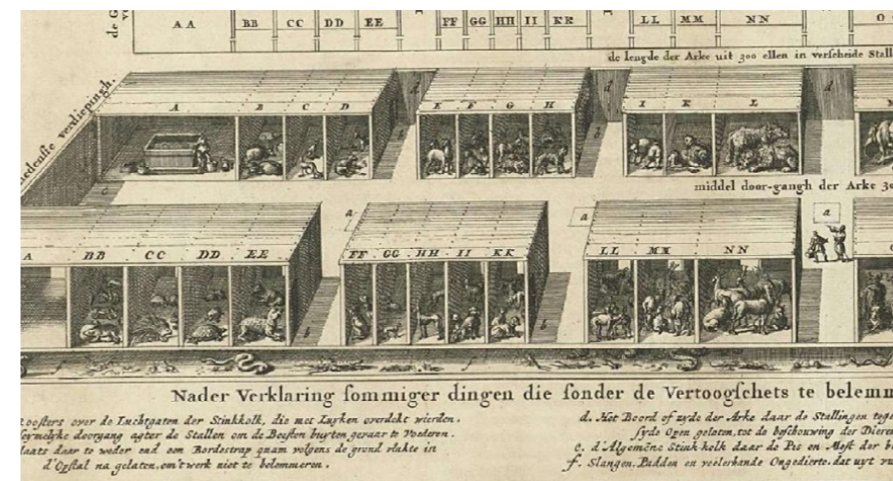


Fig 1. Jan Luyken, (the third of) *Three Storeys of Noah's Ark*, in Wilhelmus Goeree, *Voor-bereidselen tot de bybelsche wysheid, en gebruik der heilige en kerkelijke historien* (3 volumes), Amsterdam 1690, vol. 2. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.

Fig 2. Detail, with crawly creatures from the bottom floor of Noah's Ark.

Fig 3. Screenshot from *The Acrobatic Fly* (1910) by F. Percy Smith.



Gregory Bateson (1904–1980) famously stated—though the source of the quote has never been detected in any of his work according to his youngest daughter, Nora Bateson—that “the major problems in the world today are the result of the difference between how nature works and the way people think.” How have we grown so out of touch with the rest of the living world? I suggested in my talks that this may be due to an atrophying of our sensorial ability to connect to the natural world, a point of view that is eloquently argued in David Abram’s *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1997). Could it be that the ecological crisis is at its root an aesthetic crisis of our perception of the world?

This very point was made by the late psychologist James Hillman (1926–2011), as he voiced a strong plea to bring back deeper attention to the dimensions of beauty and love in our world. First, Hillman said, it is through sense perception that the world gets to us; the Greeks called this *aesthesis*. He believed that when we suppress and no longer trust our aesthetic responses, we leave the world to itself and isolate ourselves from its plight. Usually, in our time, the word ‘aesthetic’ is employed to mean only pretty, decorative, and quite free of moral and ethical value. When he goes back to the roots of the word ‘aesthetic’, Hillman then also connects it with ethics, and more profoundly with the cosmos itself. Beauty for him isn’t just personal taste, nor is it inherent in the form. In between is something more psychologically instinctual, which he calls ‘the soul’s reaction’:

*I think we have an immediate sense of attraction to things; all people have it—a delight in them. They seduce us and they repel us. It is how we read the world—how our animal nose and ears and eyes read the world. Cultural norms and habits may sway us this way or that, but beneath these social criteria is the instinct—the aesthetic response itself, which makes selections and draws back from ugliness as Plotinus wrote 1,700 years ago; the ugly makes us withdraw, shrink into ourselves, turn away (Hillman, 1996).*

The American depth psychologist takes this up in the context of finding an answer for how we are to respond to the ecological crisis, and he plainly states that ethics alone is not enough to make a change in the

world. Ethics without aesthetics doesn’t hold. Hillman is convinced that we are not motivated to fight for the environment or against climate change simply because we ought to. Intellectually, we may know that we are ethically responsible for our patterns of consumption, but that does not propel us into action. Nor does the mere act of contemplating what we leave for future generations.

*We must first be moved by beauty. For then, love is aroused. When you love something, then you want it near, not to be harmed. [...] What evokes love? As has been said in many places in many ages and felt by any one of us, it’s beauty. An aesthetic perception draws forth our ethical care. First awaken aesthesis, breathe in the beauty of the cosmos—the meticulous crawl of an insect, the heave of the frosted earth as winter yields its grip, observe the composite complexity of an ordinary stone, the eddies in the sand as the tide recedes, or hear the early morning bird call. Beauty astounds and pulls the heart’s focus toward the object, out of ourselves, out of this human-centred insanity, toward wanting to keep the cosmos there for another spring and another morning. This is the ecological emotion, and it is aesthetic and political at once (Hillman, 1996).*

The ecology movement, Hillman argued, is going to miss it, as long as people imagine it as a movement primarily focused on health or as a scientific field of interchange, an ‘-ology’. Rather, it should be imagined as well, or especially, through beauty: “A lot of the mess of the world is because we don’t regard it as beautiful. So therefore, why not litter it? The feeling of beauty makes things already sacred and the messing it up as [an act of] desecration” (Hillman, 1997).

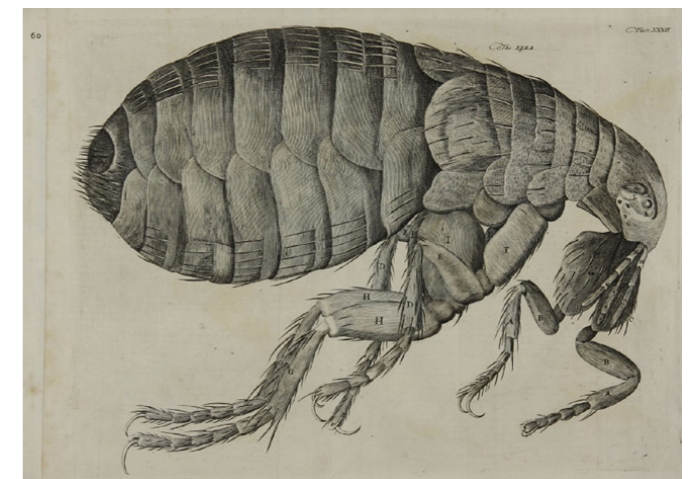
## WIDE IDENTIFICATION

Somewhere on the slopes of Hallingskarvet mountains in Norway, philosopher Arne Næss (1912–2009) had a self-built cabin. Once, he was sitting at the table, with a microscope in front of him. Besides having worked a lifetime with such diverse themes as language logic, scepticism, and deep ecology, Næss was also an amateur chemist. He had just put together two drops of different liquids on a glass plate, and now he was observing how they reacted to each other. As it happens, a lemming crawled around on the same table. By a strange coincidence, a flea (fig. 4) jumped out of the fur of this small rodent and landed into the mixing liquids. Slowly, the flea drowned and there was nothing that Næss could do to save it. He could only bear witness through his microscope, he later professed, to the death struggle of the insect, which lasted ten full minutes. Næss was astonished about how much the contracting limb movements of the flea reminded him of the way human beings would move when they suffer from pain. For him this was a moving example of what he had come to term ‘wide identification’—that is, to recognise part of the Self in another living creature. To him, this was of high importance, because such identification makes a person more inclined to act on behalf of fellow creatures.

Næss was weary of efforts to engage people through pointing out their supposed guilt. In a similar vein to James Hillman, he believed in another course of action,

by moving the ground from ‘ethics’ to ‘aesthetics’. In this, he was inspired by Immanuel Kant’s distinction between a ‘beautiful act’ and a ‘moral act’. An act is moral if it is in accordance with your ethical duty: you have an obligation to do something, and you do it. Often, this may go against your inclinations, against what you want to do. For Kant, a beautiful act is an act where we act *with* our inclinations, so that it is what we *want* to do. Næss held that through spiritual or psychological development we could learn to identify with other humans, with animals and plants, and even ecosystems. We could come to see ourselves in these other creatures, and in that way, they become part of our being. By identifying with the natural world, we *want* to protect it; we are not acting against our inclinations (Næss, 2005).

Fig 4.  
Robert Hooke’s drawing (1665) of a flea observed through a microscope.



## AESTHETICS AND THE PATTERN THAT CONNECTS

In his book *Mind and Nature* (1979), Gregory Bateson suggested a different way of understanding and relating to nature—not by taking it down to its tiniest bits and analysing those, but by going in the other direction—by studying relationships and patterns. He would ask rather unorthodox questions, like, “What is the pattern that connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose, and all four of them to me? And me to you?” (2002 edition, p. 8). In his search of this pattern that connects all living creatures, Bateson was very interested in the contributions art can make. He believed that the purposive, logical mind needed correction from dreams, art, and poetry. Expression through the arts was considered by him to be the most honest and pure form of human communication, his daughter Nora Bateson recounts in her documentary film, *An Ecology of Mind*. And she adds, “It’s easy to forget that when we find meaning in a story or enjoy the beauty of a piece of music, we are engaging in the realm of thinking that is most in sync with nature. Metaphor is the language of relationships, the language of natural systems, in which there is room to communicate in spectrums of possibility, instead of tightly defined cul-de-sacs” (Bateson, 2010).

Gregory Bateson asked, “Why do schools teach almost nothing of the pattern which connects? Is it that teachers know that they carry the kiss of death which will turn to tastelessness whatever they touch or teach anything of

real-life importance? Or is it that they carry the kiss of death *because* they dare not teach anything of real-life importance? What’s wrong with them? Bateson claimed that aesthetics, ultimately, is the sensibility to the ‘pattern that connects’ (2002 edition, pp. 8, 118). This sensibility—which in some sense could be seen as an expression of artistic intelligence—is the ability to perceive connections, commonalities, or shared properties between different elements of reality and different levels of reality, at different levels of abstraction.

## MINDFUL SCHIZOPHRENIA

Novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald famously suggested a test for what he called ‘first-rate intelligence’ (1936). Its trial, he held, was “the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.” One should, for example, “be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise.” A little more than a century earlier, the Romantic poet John Keats came to a similar idea, which he called ‘negative capability’, in a letter he wrote to his brothers in 1817. Asking himself what quality went to form a ‘Man of Achievement’—such as, for example, Shakespeare—he came to realise that such a man is, first and foremost, “capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason” (Keats, 1899). Basically, it is the ability to accept that not everything can be resolved. Keats had a high regard for receptive intuition, for which the intellectual self could stand in its way. Negative capability can be understood as an ability to contemplate the world without the desire to try to reconcile contradictory aspects: embracing uncertainty and ambiguity and being willing to live with mystery. What this requires is being able to remain in a state of restlessness without at every instance impatiently looking for additional information.

One of the most-needed capacities perhaps of artistic intelligence in our time is the ability to practice what I have called ‘mindful schizophrenia’ (Van Boeckel, 2021). Embracing the concurrence of a multiplicity of two or

more distinct or even contradictory voices can perhaps be appreciated as a form of mindful schizophrenia (understood not in its clinical meaning of a mental disorder that is characterised by significant alterations in perception, thoughts, mood, and behaviour, but in its—now defunct—original meaning of ‘a split mind’). The mindfulness consists of accepting being engaged in situations and practices that are (or appear to be) in contradiction with each other, but to do so with one’s full awareness: exercising the practice of deliberately bringing one’s attention in the present moment without judgment: to be concerned with beauty, with aesthetics, and to *simultaneously* be able to look into the abyss of the mounting meta-crisis in which we find ourselves, and to not turn away from it.

Fig 5.  
An image of mindful schizophrenia:  
Baron Münchhausen pulling himself  
out of a mire by his own hair. Etching  
by Gustave Doré, ca. 1862.



This is often regarded as an ‘either-or’. Either you withdraw from the world and embrace a romantic illusion of purity, an unspoiled beauty, or you become a full-time eco-activist, totally absorbed by and preoccupied only (albeit for good reasons) with this urgent horizon. The idea is that one cannot embrace both positions. However, James Hillman personified that one in fact may seek to inhabit the paradox by engaging the ecological crisis as—in its roots—an *aesthetic* crisis. And his point of departure is revisiting what it means to ‘take in’, or breathe in, the world. For beauty, to Hillman, in essence means “the form of what is presented, that which is breathed in, *aisthesis*, and by which the value of each particular thing strikes the heart, the organ of aesthetic perception, where judgments are heartfelt responses, not merely critical, mental reflections” (Hillman, 2021, p. 37).

*This link between heart and the organs of sense is not simple mechanical sensationalism; it is aesthetic. That is, the activity of perception or sensation in Greek is aisthesis, which means at root ‘taking in’ and ‘breathing in’—a ‘gasp’ that primary aesthetic response. [...] What is it to ‘take in’ or breathe in the world? First, it means aspiring and inspiring the literal presentation of things by gasping. The transfiguration of matter occurs through wonder. This aesthetic reaction, which precedes intellectual wonder, inspires the given beyond itself, letting each thing reveal its particular aspiration within a cosmic arrangement. [...] The aesthetic response saves the phenomenon, the phenomenon that is the face of the world. (Hillman, 2021, pp. 35–36).*

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*Where are we?*

Ways to understand  
the space that surrounds us  
through artistic intelligence

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Susana Mendes Silva  
and Beatriz Cantinho

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## Introduction

***"Where are we? Ways to understand the space that surrounds us through artistic intelligence"*** is a document built as a narrative script – both visual, aural and written – about the performative workshop that Mendes Silva and Cantinho presented at ELIA Biennial Conference 2024 in Milan. We believe that it is almost impossible to translate what really happens in a performance, as live art is only available to those who experienced and lived it with their bodies and souls, however there are always ways of experimenting with documentation as an iteration. The walk we proposed around NABA is a reflection of how one can understand space through artistic intelligence.

*This text is a written and photographic account of our session. It started at 9 a.m. on the cold and sunny morning of 22 November in room T4.1 of the T building at NABA.*

### 1.

*Beatriz introduces us with a calm voice.*

We are Beatriz and Susana.<sup>1</sup>

"Where are we?" is a performative workshop and it will be important to slow your body and to enjoy every minute.

"Where are we?" is about how we can create connections with the place where we are, how we can unveil lost, forgotten, or erased stories.

Our territory is the Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti di Milano and its surroundings. And we want you to experience its landscape, its soundscape and our own bodies, from a situated perspective.

1 - We have different backgrounds, as Beatriz is an artist and researcher working within the areas of movement as extended practice, and Susana is a visual artist and performer who has been lecturing in the Landscape Architecture MA since 1999. But it was precisely this encounter of diverse artistic ways of understanding, experimenting and discovering space that startled our artistic collaborations.

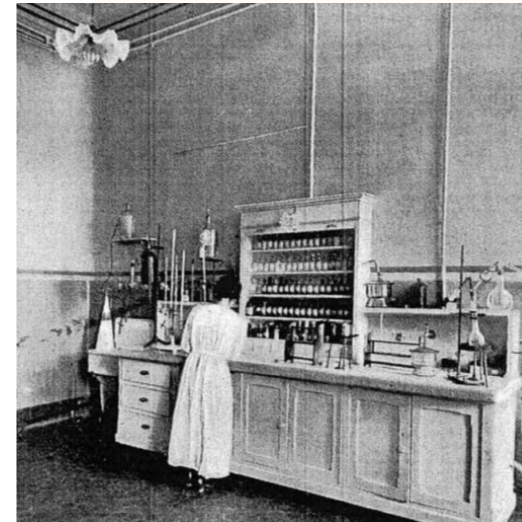
That perspective will derive from a script and instructions that we provide the group with, guiding you through this journey.

### 2.

*Susana shows historical images and presents what we discovered during our research time, when we were looking, in Italian, for traces, for ghosts, for dust.*

NABA's campus area is part of a large complex that housed the **Istituto Sieroterapico Milanese** (Milan Serum Therapy Institute) founded in 1894 by the immunologist Serafino Belfanti. The Institute

quickly became a centre of excellence for research, not only in Italy but internationally because some of the most important **vaccines** of the time were developed here, making a considerable contribution to eradicate major diseases of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from diphtheria to the Spanish flu. They also had a vibrant publishing activity, disseminating scientific knowledge both medical and veterinary.



Unfortunately, the Institute faced a financial crisis that led to its downfall. In 1991, it experienced a financial collapse, and in 1992, the Court of Milan filed for bankruptcy due to 150 billion lire in debt, largely attributed to the lack of Italian state funding for scientific research.

***In 2003, NABA started to move to this campus.***



3.

*Susana finishes the introduction and says:*

Please bring your coat, phone and headphones. We are leaving the room through the main stairs. Follow Beatriz!

4.

*We stopped on the ground floor in a triangular shape glass room near the water feature to listen to this sound file:*

\_\_\_\_\_ [Listen here](#) \_\_\_\_\_

5.

*Afterwards, Susana says:*

Please follow Beatriz to the garden!

6.

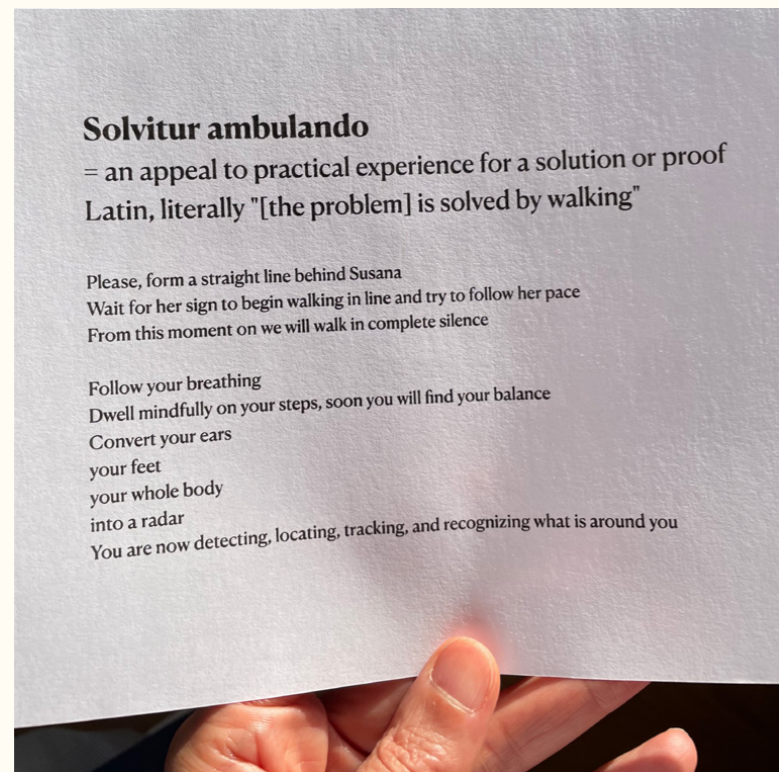
*Once in the main garden, we provide a link to a sound file. Everyone puts on their headphones and listens to it synchronously:*

\_\_\_\_\_ [Listen here](#) \_\_\_\_\_



7.

*We then hand out a card.*



*We walk towards the canal in silence  
 and at a slow pace through the busy road.*

**8.**

*Once at the Naviglio Pavese we stop in a quiet  
 spot just on top of the canal.*

*We listen to a sound file on a bluetooth speaker  
 that recreates the aural landscape when the  
 canals were navigable and busy with water  
 traffic.*

*Susana reads to the group:*

This is Naviglio Pavese.  
 It was conceived as a waterway connecting  
 Milan to Pavia.  
 'Pavese' means precisely from or related  
 to Pavia.

The canal travels from the Darsena  
 in the direction of Pavia for 33 km  
 and then flows into the Ticino River.

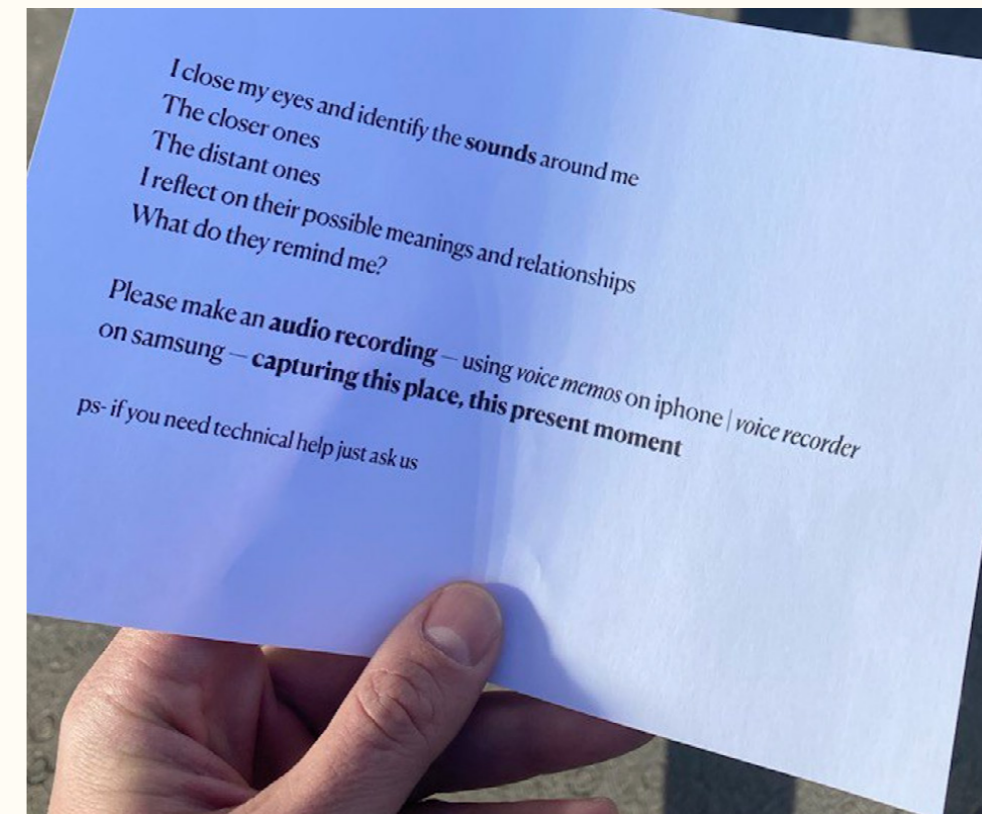
After its inauguration in 1819, the volume  
 of traffic surpassed that of the Naviglio  
 Grande in quantity, with a bustle of  
 convoys transporting food and building  
 materials like marble for the Duomo.

The Navigli—the waterways—represent a  
 significant part of the city's history,  
 characterised by a network of artificial  
 canals. Like an arterial system that gives  
 life to the city.

The Navigli played a crucial role in  
 the lives of Milanese people for over  
 800 years, but most of them were covered  
 between 1929 and the 1960s.  
 Today there is a project to reopen them  
 in the near future and connect the city  
 to a large European waterways network.

**9.**

*We hand out another card.*

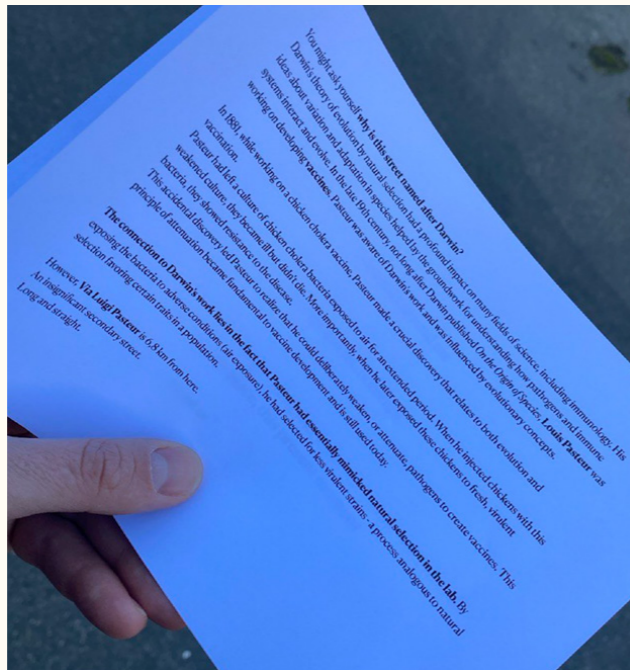


10.

*We continue to walk and record until the crossing with Via Mario Pichi.*

11.

*At the crossing between the end of Via Mario Pichi and Via Carlos Darwin, Susana gives the last card.*



*On the card, you could read:*

You might ask yourself **why is this street named after Darwin?**

Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection had a profound impact on many fields of science, including immunology. His ideas about variation and adaptation in species helped lay the groundwork for understanding how pathogens and immune systems interact and evolve. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, not long after Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*, **Louis Pasteur** was working on developing vaccines. Pasteur was aware of Darwin's work and was influenced by evolutionary concepts.

In 1881, while working on a chicken cholera vaccine, Pasteur made a crucial discovery that relates to both evolution and vaccination.

Pasteur had left a culture of chicken cholera bacteria exposed to air for an extended period. When he injected chickens with this weakened culture, they became ill but didn't die. More importantly, when he later exposed these chickens to fresh, virulent bacteria, they showed resistance to the disease.

This accidental discovery led Pasteur to realise that he could deliberately weaken, or attenuate, pathogens to create vaccines. This principle of attenuation became fundamental to vaccine development and is still used today.

**The connection to Darwin's work lies in the fact that Pasteur had essentially mimicked natural selection in the lab.**

By exposing the bacteria to adverse conditions (air), he had selected for less virulent strains—a process analogous to natural selection favouring certain traits in a population.

However, **Via Luigi Pasteur** is 6.8 km from here.

An insignificant secondary street.

12.

*We walk back to the room in silence.*

13.

*Once there, we sit in a circle.*

*First, we ask each person in turn to play their sound file.*

*Afterward, we all press play simultaneously, building an unexpected but beautiful collective soundscape. The sound of the neighbourhood resonating and multiplying.*

14.

We remain seated in circle and build a conversation with the group, starting with these questions:

What did you retain in your memory?

How did you feel?

In your listening, was there a sound that surprised you?

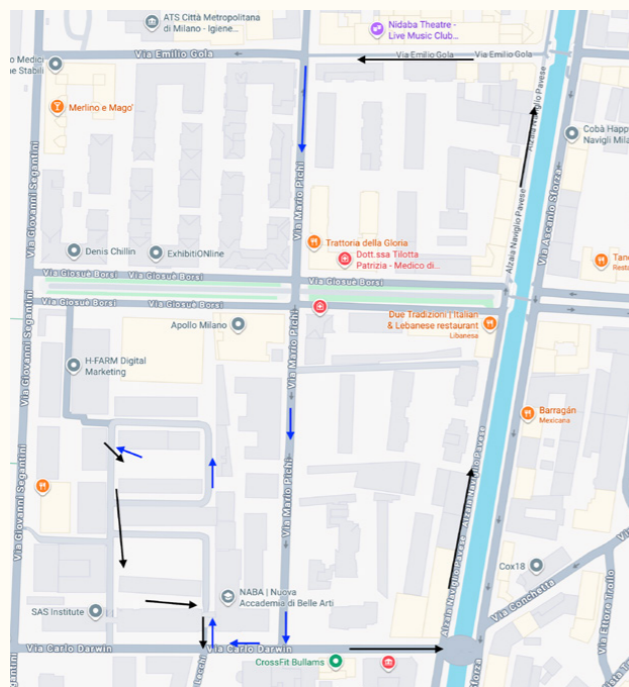
What made it surprising?

What distracted you from listening?

What did you do about it?

What did you notice about your awareness or self-awareness?

Did you learn something new?




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**Image credits:**

Susana Mendes Silva: Pages 41, 42 44, 48

Ivan Nebesnyk: Pages 43, 45, 46

**"Where are we?  
Performative strategies of encounter"**

Performance workshop by Beatriz Cantinho (UÉ/DT+CHAIA) and Susana Mendes Silva (UÉ/DPAO+CEIS20/UC)

22 November 2024, 09:00 - 11:00 CET

"Arts Plural" ELIA Biennial Conference 2024,  
NABA, Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti,  
Milan, Italy

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# How to share thinking-in-the-making? An invitation towards further imaginations

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# (Introduction)

*How to Share Thinking-in-the-Making* explores embodied, material, and situated processes of thinking within the fields of art education and artistic research.

Through imaginative recollections of participatory workshops at the ELIA Biennial Conference *Arts Plural* in Milan, it shows that to ‘think-in-the-making’ requires dwelling within uncertainty, unlearning habits of mastery, and cultivating the conditions for exchange, resonance, and difference.

The question of how such situated practices can be shared is further explored through poetic reflection, while selected quotations expand the text into a wider space of resonances.

The essay concludes that collective practices of thinking-in-the-making are highly relevant for addressing complex issues, as they foster situated communities of practitioners who weave differences into shared imaginations.

The following text builds on reminiscences from two of the sessions I attended at ELIA Biennial Conference 2024: *Thinking through Making*, hosted by Bridgette Ashton and Mel Brown from Arts University Plymouth, United Kingdom, and *Parliament of Lines*, hosted by Sarah Kolb and Jutta Strohmaier from the University of Arts Linz, Austria.

It intertwines these imaginative recollections with poetic reflections drawn from my own practice in the contexts of art education and language-based artistic research.

Selected quotations, whose sources are listed at the end, extend the text into another layer of resonance:

***‘challenging the boundaries of reflexive textualities; relieving writing of its obligations under the name of “textuality”; shaping, shifting, testing language. Practicing language. Performing writing. Writing performatively’ (Pollock, 1998).***

# (01)

Imagine entering a room filled with chairs and tables in archipelagic formations. Two women welcome you at the entrance, handing you large colourful sheets. You sit down and read the instructions on the sheet you’ve received: they lead you to the materials displayed on the table, cardboard, wool, tape, different kinds of rope, yarn, pencils... You observe, touch, pick up a thread, follow it, reach to a piece of paper. The materials start to meet, aggregate, agglutinate, and as you bring them into a provisional assemblage, you realise how long it has been since you last thought with your hands.

— *At a certain point in your writings, you discuss what that writing means for you as a place to share thinking as a process, to witness that thinking in its messy and poetic burgeoning rather than in a final state.*  
— *Yes, exactly.*<sup>1</sup>

As an artist-writer engaged in the context of art education and artistic research, I am familiar with formats that encourage the sharing of practices rather than the display of knowledge. Yet, at the ELIA Biennial Conference *Arts Plural* in Milan, I was surprised to experience such a wide range of practices of thinking-in-the-making within a conference setting. The different sessions I attended invited participants to take part in a variety of processes that involved sensing, drawing, listening, touching, listing, confronting, reading, writing, weaving, assembling, imagining, experimenting... These various modes of relating with materials and through bodies were all addressed as ways of engaging shared processes of thinking.

Imagine. Once your object has found a satisfactory shape, you are invited to describe it in words. There is dedicated space for this on the colourful sheet. You start observing the assemblage with a new attention, change perspective, look for appropriate terms, transpose an encounter of materials in a concatenation of words, suspend a sentence in an attempt at mirroring the unstable state of the thing you are holding. A textual composition begins to emerge, which—just as the assembled object itself—escapes ready-made categories.

1.  
Cotter, L. (2024).

*That's the basis from which I started working: between matter, materials, and research. And so, within those two shores, how not to crash into either Scylla or Charybdis and pass through this isthmus in a worldly way, in a process of what I call 'worldling'...*<sup>2</sup>

The next step of the process is announced by one of the hosts: participants shall exchange their written descriptions among each other and produce a new assemblage on this basis, without looking at the object in which the received description originated. As you catch the look of the woman on your right, she smiles back, and the gesture by which you exchange your descriptions turns them into scores.

As soon as you start reading, questions begin to flood in: How will you be able to interpret this poem as a score? How do you move from words to paper and thread? You feel pressured. What would be the correct way to proceed? In a fraction of a second you wonder how to fabricate an object that resembles closely enough the source you have not seen, how to proceed *correctly* to create the *right* assemblage. Then you breathe. Release your shoulders. Remembering what you tell your students when they ask for more guidance, you try to discard the pressure of fulfilling expectations by adhering to established frames. Instead, you embrace the score-poem as an invitation, as an incentive, a point to start with and depart from.

*Looking at other forms of what you might call knowledge.*<sup>3</sup>

Thinking-in-the-making involves entering a movement of unanticipated displacements. It cannot be planned in advance by a set of fixed rules, though it does not happen by chance either. Rather, thinking-in-the-making happens in specific contexts and situations. As a material and embodied process, it requires conditions that enable the circulation of thought, the movement of ideas, an openness to interactions between bodies and materials. It's different aspects and dimensions include the setting encountered by the participants, the design of the sequence by the host, and the ways roles and positions are embraced and navigated, shaping various forms of interaction. All these parameters need to be cared for, as they not only delineate a terrain for exploration, they also affect and effect the specific paths and turns that shape the thinking-in-the-making.

2.  
Ibid.

3.  
Ibid.

4.  
See Lowenhaupt Tsing, A. (2015).

5.  
Interestingly, the term "sense" entwines an aesthetic and an epistemic dimension, while also suggesting a direction to follow.

6.  
Alexander, D., Bradford, J., Gannon, S., Murray, F., Partridge, N. Simopoulou, Z., Wyatt, J., McCulloch, C., Naylor, A., and Williams, L. (2018).

## (02)

Imagine you enter a space of white and grey surfaces. On the floor, a series of constellations are displayed, formed by large circular pieces of paper surrounded by bright pillows. They await—Who? What? After a brief hesitation, you join one of the circles and settle down. As you wait for the session to begin, the room slowly fills with chatter and movements.

Imagine all the circles are now complete and the woman hosting the session introduces her nascent research project by recounting a day of mushroom picking in the woodlands with her collaborators. Imagine she then invites the groups to exchange what they know about mushrooms. Do you know anything about mushrooms?

As it appears, engaging thinking-in-the-making might not be so different from mushroom picking.<sup>4</sup> As you enter the field, not knowing in advance what will come next, you push expectations and anticipations aside, and start opening up to the dense variety of single encounters, going on from one to the other, leaving behind the familiar path of thought to dive into the not-yet-sensed—both in the semantical and in the aesthetic sense of the term.<sup>5</sup>

As the manifold dimensions of the process are entered into, attention opens to intricate layers of relations, to the interactions among materials and bodies within which thoughts emerge and combine, to the way ideas relate and deviate as they are exchanged among participants.

*Small pieces of thread and fabric, of selves sharing, reaching out into the spaces between us, between ourselves and our selves.*<sup>6</sup>

One person in the group starts talking, and you notice the tattooed butterfly on their hand as they wave it in the air. A woman with long grey hair follows, and soon all participants join in a lively exchange. You don't really know any of them, but some faces feel familiar from the previous days: you recognise a speaker from a panel, participants in an earlier workshop, the researcher from Stockholm you walked with through the city, from the opening ceremony in an old theatre downtown to the main venue at the art school campus farther south...

Each brings a different accent to the shared language of your exchange, as well as their own singular perspective, honed by age, gender, social and institutional positions, among others. Memories of learning the names of mushrooms from a Polish grandfather mix with critical reminders of how pharmaceutical firms plundered ancestral knowledge of medicinal plants in South America. The stories, originating in different geographical and cultural backgrounds, bounce on each other in a movement of back and forth as bits and pieces of knowledge that you did not know you were having are gathered, collected, confronted, and assembled in hybrid formations.

*Not disorientation but a shift in orientation.  
Elemental transformation. Composition.  
Composure. Compose. Fall into an  
arrangement.*<sup>7</sup>

Far from being an obstacle to the exchange, your distinct situatednesses enrich the soil on which unanticipated thinking burgeons, grows, meanders, and expands away from main roads. While listening and talking, hands pick up coloured pencils and draw shapes on the circle around which you are sitting, words are sketched, pathways written, blanks are filled up, lines intersect, patches join, cross, and overlap, letting patterns emerge at their own rhythms. A meshwork of hybrid knowledge starts to materialise and take shape.

*A celebration of the blurred boundary,  
mixed allegiance, and non-territoriality.  
Unrooted and uprooting.  
Revelling in deviation, hodgepodge,  
mishmash, digression, departure, dispersal,  
coalescence, miscellany, and diversity.*<sup>8</sup>

After a while, the host invites the groups into a last sequence. Everyone stands and gathers in a larger assembly to enter a final exchange. Singular processes of thinking-in-the-making can be shared in different ways beyond the display of single outcomes or take-home messages. While some choose to share their experience of the process, others attempt a synthesis of the topics touched upon or a summary of the issues addressed. Stories are reformulated from a different perspective, paper circles are held out as witnesses, bearing the colourful remnants of what happened, the traces of unanticipated encounters.

<sup>7</sup>.  
Cocker, E. (2018).

<sup>8</sup>.  
Avasilichioaei, O. (2016).

This last round of echoes generates a further layer of knowledge. We have learned about mushrooms along the way, but not only that; we have remembered stories as knowledge, we have woven experiences into the picture, we have confronted points of view, we have taken part in a fungal way of learning and imagined a way of weaving knowledge where object, content, and form mutually shape each other. There was no pre-given method to be followed, but a shared commitment to making room for each other. The previous arrangement of papers on the floor, the invitation to sit around on the cushions, the coloured pencils—all these elements enabled a specific process of thinking-in-the-making, which in turn led to the building of a situative community of differences.

(03)

Processes of thinking-in-the-making do not lead to definitive solutions. They do not produce ready-made answers, and might not even be about finding answers, but rather finding ways of navigating and negotiating questions together. I left Milan with more questions than I had upon arrival, as well as with an expanded sense of the range of possibilities for hosting and holding collective processes, to allow complex questioning, experiment with ways of attending this complexity, of staying with it, making room for different perspectives, making them visible, graspable, and tending to them in their irreducibility, without flattening them.

At the end of the workshop that I was hosting, a couple of participants asked me whether they could reuse the sequence I had proposed in the context of their own practice. This was the best feedback I could imagine. I subsequently began documenting the different workshop formats I am practicing in such a way that they can be adopted and adapted in other contexts.<sup>9</sup> I also adopted and adapted elements of the sessions I had participated in: a particular setting, a sensing sequence, a way to conduct a presentation round.

*I myself like the idea that I can change through exchanging with the Other without losing or distorting myself.*<sup>10</sup>

How to build communities of practitioners from and with distinct singularities? This is one of the questions at the core of my practice as an educator and artist-writer-researcher. The various practices of thinking-in-the-making encountered in Milan made me realise I am not alone in confronting the question and gave me the opportunity to linger with it together with a diversity of other practitioners. When it is carried in the making, thinking both affects and effects how we interact with one another, which might be why it feels so urgent, in the polarised times we are living in, to cultivate such practices, and pollinate them.

*Opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics.*<sup>11</sup>

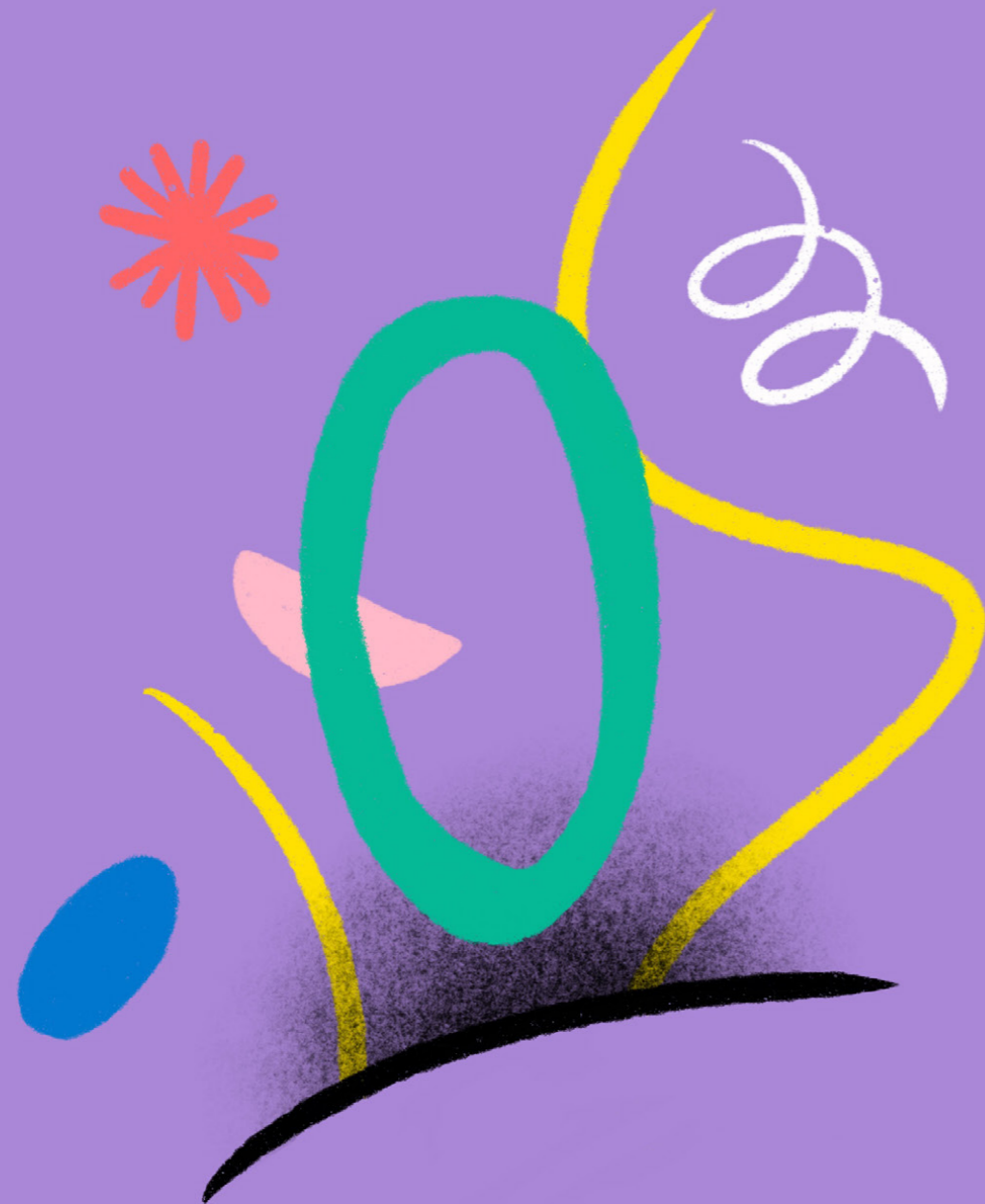
9.  
See Chapuis Schmitz (2025).

10.  
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11.  
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## Learning with Urgencies: Art Schools in the Age of Synthetic Desire

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### <Abstract>

■ This article examines artistic intelligence as a distributed practice that emerges through urgencies, symbiotic pedagogy, and embodied social ecologies, in contrast to artificial intelligence, which increasingly generates machinic pedagogies and recursive regimes of synthetic desire. Drawing on the *Try Out* bachelor programme at ArtEZ University of the Arts, education is framed as an endosymbiotic process: a reciprocal ecology in which students, staff, and institutions co-inhabit urgencies, generating a *body of knowing* rather than a transmissible body of knowledge. This pedagogical orientation is placed in dialogue with contemporary transformations in the ontology of the image under platform capitalism. From the proxy to the contextual and recursive image, synthetic desire reorganises perception and attention, embedding capitalist logics into the very conditions of learning. Artistic intelligence is here articulated as counter-learning: cultivating plural and speculative futures that resist recursive capture and affirming education as a political and ontological force.

## &lt;Introduction&gt;

<“Il faut cultiver notre jardin.<sup>1</sup>”>

■ The accelerating poly-crises of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—ecological breakdown, rising authoritarianism, and widening social inequities—have placed artistic education in a state of urgency.

/ To treat education as if it could remain insulated from these forces is to misunderstand its ecological and ethical entanglement: pedagogical practices are not neutral containers of content but living systems that co-evolve with the worlds they inhabit <Stengers, 2018>.

/ In this light, the question is not whether art schools will be transformed by contemporary urgencies, but how they might respond with practices that generate counter-imaginaries and more equitable ways of living. Among these urgencies—and one of the most immediate in our domain—is the proliferation of machinic pedagogies generated by artificial intelligence and digital oversaturation.

/ Automated systems increasingly structure what is visible, sayable, and thinkable, often without explicit acknowledgement of their influence. The so-called ‘dead internet’ hypothesis <Waugh, 2021> has drawn attention to the ways in which synthetic content circulates autonomously, with algorithmic production and machine-to-machine recognition overshadowing human spectatorship.

/ Within this depleted epistemological ecology, learning itself risks being captured by recursive loops of synthetic mediation, where information is less transmitted than simulated. For the art school, the urgency lies not only in harnessing these tools but also in cultivating a reflexive understanding of their limitations and consequences.

/ This goes far beyond setting up restrictions or guidelines on the use of self-generating tools; it requires taking responsibility for theorising the systemic and pedagogical effects of the newly created ontologies of the <moving> image, as it has been the prerogative of the arts for centuries. To learn with urgencies, then, requires that students and educators alike grapple with the machinic conditions of pedagogy.

/ This entails acknowledging that artificial intelligence does not simply provide new instruments but actively generates environments of attention, desire, and recognition. The task of art education is therefore double: to learn with these infrastructures in ways that produce alternative ontological imaginaries, and to resist being subsumed by their logics of automation and substitution.

/ Here a crucial contrast emerges. If artificial intelligence organises perception by proxy, reducing experience to patterns of circulation and prediction, artistic intelligence operates differently: it draws upon embodied practice, affective resonance, situated experiment, and *having skin in the game* to open spaces of possibility. Whereas machinic pedagogy tends to automate recognition, artistic pedagogy cultivates dissonance, indeterminacy, and relation as conditions of learning.

/ To foreground artistic intelligence is not to reject artificial intelligence, but to insist that their encounter remain a site of friction, invention, and ethical choice. It is within this contested relation that the present article situates itself, exploring how learning with urgencies may become a mode of thinking with desire.

## &lt;“Synthetic Desire and Platform Capitalism”&gt;

■ Human cognition is grounded in embodied experience: perception, affect, and social interaction provide feedback that recalibrates the plausibility of beliefs. Truth claims are evaluated against empirical verification, logical coherence, and communal validation, and are revised when disconfirmed by experience <Clark, 1997>.

/ By contrast, large language models <LLMs> such as ChatGPT generate statements by predicting the most probable next token given its preceding linguistic context <Brown et al., 2020>. Their ‘truth’ is statistical plausibility within patterns of text, grounded in secondary rather than lived experience. Whereas human reasoning integrates counterfactual modelling and embodied consequence, the model’s coherence is constrained by probabilities derived from language alone <Marcus & Davis, 2019>.

/ For humans, coherence is world-directed; for machines, it is text-directed. This asymmetry is not simply technical but economic and ontological. LLMs operate in what Bender and Koller <2020> call the ‘stochastic parroting’ regime: recombining linguistic form without grounding in semantics or reference. Yet this apparent deficiency is precisely what makes them compatible with the platform economy.

/ Like proxy and contextual images, their outputs are designed less to represent than to circulate, optimised for attention, prediction, and recursive reinforcement. In this sense, LLMs exemplify synthetic desire at the level of language: generating plausible sequences that sustain engagement while embedding users ever more deeply in infrastructures of capture.

/ The difference becomes sharper in the case of imaging. For humans, images arise through perceptual coupling with the world—what Deleuze <1986/1989> described as the circuit of perception and affection. Imaging is grounded in sensory registration as well as cultural interpretation. In contrast, generative systems produce images without perceptual coupling.

/ Their outputs recombine statistical traces, appearing coherent only because they borrow plausibility from prior human productions. This parallels what Boumeester <2025> terms the image by proxy: images that do not depict but organise, operating within infrastructures of circulation by outsourcing imaging to humans but with a nonhuman agenda. Where human imaging is tethered to the world, synthetic generation functions through proxy—automated substitution determined by algorithmic patterning rather than phenomenological presence.

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■ To understand artistic intelligence in digital ecologies, it is necessary to consider how both language and the image have undergone mutations under platform capitalism. Just as LLMs generate plausible linguistic sequences to sustain circulation, images no longer function merely as representations; they are infrastructural operators that modulate affect, calibrate desire, and restructure perception.

/ Platform capitalism operates through what Beller <2006, 2017> describes as the attention economy: attention is commodified and converted into value through circulation. Simon <1971> already noted that in an information-rich world, attention is the scarce resource. Platforms transform attention into labour, with each act of perception contributing to value extraction. Zuboff <2019> extends this into surveillance capitalism, where every click, word, and image becomes behavioural surplus to be monetised. The ontology of synthetic desire can be traced through three overlapping modalities: the image by proxy, the image by context, and the recursive image <Boumeester, 2025>.

/ The proxy image designates the techno-social compulsion to produce placeholders within circulatory systems. Social media selfies, tourist snapshots, or TikTok re-enactments function less as expressions than as nodes in metastable systems of reproduction. Their meaning is carried by repetition, fuelling circulation. As Flusser <2000> anticipated, photography displaced representation with automation; proxy images radicalise this by outsourcing production to users who perform the labour of circulation.

/ The contextual image shifts this further. Each prompt conjures a depiction untethered from physical presence, creating an 'in-between' world of possibility. Like dreams, they can be both fascinating and perilous when mistaken for truth. Generated through automated systems, these images bypass conscious cognition, reducing the human to clusters of habitual markers. Their force lies in modulation rather than closure, producing atmospheres of anticipation, yet never nourishing the depth of experience.

/ Desire here operates as what Deleuze and Guattari <1983> call a desiring-machine: sustaining orientation without resolution. The recursive image marks the most radical transformation. Images no longer require external referents; they circulate within algorithmic loops optimised for machinic recognition. Diffusion models exemplify this: systems that generate images from noise alone, legible to machines even when opaque to human eyes <Ho, Jain, & Abbeel, 2020>.

/ Trevor Paglen <2019> has shown how AI datasets teem with images invisible to humans yet are decisive in shaping what is rendered visible elsewhere. Steyerl's <2012, 2017> notion of the poor image captures part of this dynamic, but recursion intensifies it by rendering circulation itself the site of value, independent of human recognition. This resonates with the dead internet theory, which proposes that much of the internet is sustained less by human activity than by bots and algorithmic reproduction <Muzumdar et al., 2025; Walter, 2025; Sommerer, 2025>. The recursive image circulates in an ecology where machinic recognition constitutes the primary condition of visibility.

/

■ These three modalities are not successive stages but overlapping ecologies, each modulating desire differently. Together, they enact synthetic desire: a machinic economy of affect and anticipation that no longer requires embodiment. The political implications of these shifts are profound. Images today no longer simply represent but restructure the conditions of reality and learning itself. As Barad <2007> reminds us, representation is never innocent; knowing is always an intra-active process that materialises worlds.

/ In the age of synthetic desire, images modulate what counts as visible, thinkable, and desirable, embedding capitalist logics into the very conditions of perception. Naomi Klein <2014> and Jason Moore <2015> have shown how extractive capitalism reshapes ecological life; recursive imaging demonstrates how platform capitalism reshapes perceptual life, producing what Brian Massumi <2015> calls a 'power at the end of the economy'—a modulation of affect that operates below the threshold of cognition.

## <Artistic Intelligence as Counter-Learning>

■ If images can now persist, circulate, and generate value without us, what becomes of learning as a process of orientation within the art school? In creative worlds saturated with proxies, contexts, and recursive loops, education cannot rely on the stability of representation or the transmission of established skills alone. It must instead cultivate artistic intelligence: practices that sense, inhabit, and intervene in machinic ecologies through embodied experiment and collective attunement.

/ For the art school, this means training not only in techniques of production but in capacities of perception and relation, able to navigate environments where visibility and meaning are increasingly automated. Learning cannot be reduced to transmissible knowledge or skills but must engage the atmospheres, rhythms, and modulations that shape subjectivity beneath awareness.

/ Synthetic desire is not an abstract horizon but a lived condition: collapsing novelty and obsolescence into a single gesture of emission, converting attention into labour, and modulating desire towards perpetual anticipation. The role of artistic intelligence is not to escape or dismiss these conditions but to develop counter-practices that expose, reconfigure, and redirect them. As Shusterman <2008> reminds us, the body remains an anchor of resistance: perception is not exhausted by mediation but grounded in proprioceptive and interoceptive attunement.

/ Against synthetic desire's machinic loops, pedagogy can reclaim urgency, reciprocity, and embodiment as fragile but vital sources of resistance. By situating education within the ontology of the image, the struggle over learning is inseparable from the struggle over perception itself.

/ To cultivate artistic intelligence today is to cultivate capacities for sensing and acting within recursive ecologies of desire. It is to generate bodies of knowing attuned to transformation without being subsumed by automation. It is to imagine pedagogy not as preservation but as a laboratory of counter-learning, capable of inhabiting synthetic ecologies while opening pathways towards more plural, equitable futures.

/ Under market logics, learning is framed as individual investment: students accumulate credentials as human capital, while institutions compete for visibility within global rankings. Against this view, artistic pedagogy foregrounds the mutual dependence of learner, teacher, and environment.

/ Intelligence here is not a possession but a relation, cultivated through reciprocity and care. This relational ecology has been described as endosymbiosis: a mode of co-existence in which beings develop not in isolation but through reciprocal incorporation. By centring interdependence, urgency, and transformation, such a pedagogy reorients learning from accumulation to collective becoming. Education, here, does not prepare students for stability but equips them to inhabit unstable worlds with responsiveness and care.

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■ At ArtEZ University of the Arts in Zwolle, the *Try Out* bachelor programme was developed from these premises. Rather than treating education as the stable transmission of knowledge and skills, *Try Out* emerged as an endosymbiotic project: an experimental ecology in which students, staff, and institutional structures co-inhabit urgencies, feeding off and transforming one another.

/ The metaphor of endosymbiosis, drawn from evolutionary biology, stresses that organisms do not develop in isolation but through reciprocal incorporation—the mitochondrion being the paradigmatic example <Margulis, 1998>. Similarly, educational practices evolve not by linear innovation but through symbiotic adaptation to conditions of precarity, need, and desire.

/ The guiding principle is that urgency is not an obstacle but a generative force. Students work not from hypothetical problems but from urgencies they define themselves, such as climate adaptation or racial stereotyping. This resonates with Barad’s <2007> insistence on entanglement: knowledge is never abstract but always intra-active, emerging through situated practices that bind subjects, materials, and environments. Here the distinction between a body of knowledge and a body of knowing becomes decisive. A body of knowledge can be codified and transmitted but risks becoming static, external to those who inherit it. A body of knowing, by contrast, is dynamic and participatory: it unfolds as lived orientation, sustained through attunement, relation, and practice.

/ For *Try Out*, this reframes education as an ecology of capacities rather than mere competences. Learning is not mastery but exposure, not accumulation but modulation of perception and relation. In Simondon’s <2022> terms, individuation is not a completed state but a metastable process; learning unfolds as transduction, where new forms emerge through tensions between forces. Within *Try Out*, this transductive movement is amplified by porous pedagogical structures: students are encouraged to think *with* urgencies rather than about them, inhabiting problems as lived conditions rather than abstract case studies. What distinguishes this from instrumental innovation is its refusal of predefined outcomes. As Stengers <2005> suggests, pedagogy can ‘slow down reasoning’, creating conditions where thinking resonates with complexity rather than rushing to closure.

/ Urgencies thus become occasions for collective attunement, demanding care, hesitation, and experimental openness. This articulation of artistic intelligence resists the neoliberal drift towards education as individualised skill acquisition. In contrast, it foregrounds interdependency, shared responsibility, and mutual transformation. Students and staff alike become participants in a distributed ecology, where learning is not measured by accumulation but by shifts in perception and possibility. Such an orientation echoes Deleuze and Guattari’s <1983> vision of desire as a productive force: not lack to be filled, but an immanent energy that couples with the world to generate new forms of life. Within *Try Out*, desire is not channelled towards predefined goals but mobilised as an experimental motor of collective becoming.

/ This commitment to urgency, desire, and a body of knowing situates the programme within broader debates about the role of artistic education in times of crisis. Rather than preparing students primarily for professional markets or creative industries, it recognises the political force of education itself: to cultivate forms of artistic intelligence that can counter the recursive loops of platform capitalism as aggregate of ecological exhaustion and infrastructural inequities. The convergence between the pedagogical ecology of *Try Out* and ongoing research on synthetic desire provides a vantage point for rethinking both education and media ontology.

/ Together, they gesture towards artistic intelligence as a distributed practice of counter-learning, capable of imagining futures otherwise foreclosed.

/

## <Conclusion>

# <“Artistic Intelligence in Urgent Times”>

■ Artistic education today stands at a threshold. On one side lies the machinic recursion of platform capitalism, where images circulate without us, modulating desire for the benefit of infrastructures of extraction. On the other side lies the fragile possibility of cultivating bodies of knowing that can sustain relational and speculative futures

/ The *Try Out* programme demonstrates that pedagogy need not retreat from urgencies but can inhabit them as generative forces. By framing learning as endosymbiosis, by mobilising desire as productive force, and by cultivating a body of knowing rather than a body of knowledge, *Try Out* enacts artistic intelligence as counter-learning. What emerges here is not a defence of art education as it has been, but an invitation to reconceive it as an infrastructure of possibility.

/ Artistic intelligence does not seek to outpace artificial intelligence but to remain in friction with it, staging encounters where uncertainty, dissonance, and embodied risk become conditions of learning. In this sense, the role of the art school is not only to preserve cultural practices but to act as a centre for pluriformity: a provisional gathering place where multiple trajectories of care, community, context, courage, connection, criticality, and counterculture can be rehearsed.

/ Such a centre is never fixed; it shifts with the urgencies that traverse it, and with the bodies of knowing that sustain it. The task of artistic intelligence, then, is not to restore stability but to invent with instability, cultivating capacities for sensing and acting within recursive ecologies of mediation. In doing so, art schools affirm themselves as political and ontological practices: sites where provisional futures can be composed and tested, not by returning to a lost centre, but by going off-centre—creating multiple new and expansive centres of artistic and academic integrity.

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**The Ethical Table:**  
Facilitating inter-institutional  
dialogues on the ethics of teaching  
and learning practices in art and design

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**Abstract**

The Ethical Table is a platform for furthering discussions and developing curricula with a focus on ethics in design at CSM / UAL. The ELIA Biennial Conference 2024 presented the opportunity to open the platform beyond the context of our institution, inviting a wider group of colleagues to sit with us at the table. In this article we reflect on our experiences facilitating this conversational workshop with an international and multidisciplinary group of participants.

The session affirmed our conviction that facilitating structured conversations is the most valuable practice for embedding ethical principles within design curricula, moving away from the notion that practising ethics might be a simple case of ticking boxes and signing off fine print to eliminate or transfer risk. While the overarching concept of artistic intelligence was not addressed directly in the workshop space, we reflected on this throughout the conference and will summarise our thoughts here.

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**Introduction:**  
**The Ethical Table so far**

*“As more decision making within many areas of art and design practice become increasingly intertwined with ethical determination, the positioning of ethics as an aspect of learning development for higher education in design bears reconsideration” (Rendell 2016).*

The Ethical Table at CSM started in late 2022, with Adriana reaching out to Silke to collaborate on establishing this platform, specifically for architecture and spatial practices. We both had common interests around articulating ways to respond to our critical times, when demand for diversity, participation, and collaboration in creative practices is ever more pressing. We had observed that, although many colleagues and students across our institution shared similar interests and/or were working specifically on ethics in design, opportunities for exchanging knowledge, sharing, and collaborating around the subject were limited.

Once we secured funding from the UAL Teaching and Learning Fund in spring 2023, we invited staff and students, predominantly from BA Architecture in the Spatial Practice Programme, to literally sit around a table in one of the design studios and work collectively on sharing common ethical concerns emerging from our teaching and learning practices.

Our aim was to find concerted ways to embed ethical frameworks of practice within design curricula. Extremely valuable material slowly emerged through planned group discussions on ethical dilemma scenarios, which were pre-designed for the sessions and tailored to the specific contexts of our institution and fields of knowledge. This collective approach proved to be effective for establishing a constructive platform for exchanging experiences and enhancing the quality and scope of the material generated throughout. Setting up conditions for co-creation also allowed the group to develop mutual trust and respect during the first meeting, encouraging all to contribute with honesty and authenticity over the course of the project.



**Figure 1.**  
Ethical Table  
at CSM in the  
Spatial Practice  
studio, 2023.  
Photo: Silke  
Lange.

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Some of the questions discussed during the workshops included: a) How do we teach and learn strategies to negotiate between, first, ambitious ideals imagined in response to a design brief, and second, grounding limitations brought about by working in collaboration with specific communities? b) How can tutors help to mitigate students' stress caused by the emotional impact inherent to working on difficult subjects and in community-engaged practices? c) How do we teach and learn to mitigate extractive practices in collaborative and participatory design projects?

Following two sessions of collective work exploring ethical dilemma scenarios, asking and discussing critical questions, participants drafted an ethical guidance document for tutors on how to structure briefs in focusing on socially engaged design. After several revisions, the guidance has been embedded into the teaching support material on the BA Architecture course.

The document *Practicing Ethics: Guidance for Structuring Briefs in Socially Engaged Design* can be accessed [here](#).

## The Ethical Table in Milan: Inviting multidimensional dialogue

The workshop in Milan offered an opportunity to broaden the scope of the Ethical Table beyond architecture towards art and design fields, and to start achieving one of our key aims: to advance our work by incorporating international, inter-institutional and interdisciplinary perspectives within processes of co-creating ethical frameworks and guidance within creative practice, an objective which we consider imperative, in the context of current global crises. We started the session, as we usually do, with Silke establishing a best practice protocol for sharing the space with all participants. After this, Adriana presented an overview of the work the Ethical Table has progressed so far, with a focus on the recommendations emerging from the collective workshops at CSM: a series of actions all participants considered necessary for constituting the guidance. Here is a summary of three key recommendations for structuring and advancing work from design briefs:

### **Planning the assignments**

It is important to prioritise process over results from the early stages of designing the brief, especially when it pertains envisioning engagement as design. This, for example, by 1) visualising timelines and key moments of interaction with collaborating groups; 2) considering other's willingness to participate; 3) creating and communicating common schedules and/or; 4) discussing scenarios that might derivate from collaborating.

### **Communicating with Clarity**

It is crucial to specify the roles of each stakeholder involved and to define real expectations about the project at hand with clear, succinct, and accessible language from the outset. This includes describing the project in detail, including its aims, scope, time frames, and likely outputs, as well as its rationale, including gains and compromises implied for each individual participant and/or organisation.

### **Designing Reciprocity**

It is most valuable to resist extractive practices, including that of knowledge, by embedding the design

of exchange strategies between stakeholders (i.e., students and community groups) within the overall project design. Designing and supporting initiatives derived from collaborative work, for example, alongside crediting and volunteering, are ways to reciprocate through creative practice.

This overview was followed by contributions from Norah and Zeina, both recent graduates of BA Architecture and participants in the Ethical Table project from the very first meeting in February 2023. Through their last undergraduate Design Studio Units, Norah and Zeina reflected on how to embed the co-created ethical guidance for socially engaged design as a transformational framework for their design projects. Their work has been incorporated as case studies for the Ethical Table. Here are some of their design thoughts and considerations:

#### **Accessibility and Integration: A Sensory Nurture,** by Norah Dankwah<sup>1</sup>

“My presentation aimed to critically challenge the ideal of bodily perfection, set as a universal standard that informed the fundamentals of architectural design history. This posed an ethical dilemma in educational practices, which I wanted to address through my design for a library. Having the opportunity to share my values and learning experiences at ELIA with an audience of diverse perspectives is a stepping stone to give voice to marginalised communities and to raise awareness. Although my project is hypothetical, it was insightful to hear the various discussions during the workshop, which can be further integrated into all design aspects, or a project.

Being able to contribute and witness the growth of the Ethical Table has furthered my knowledge in practicing ethics. It has also given me the confidence to explore and adapt my profound interest in the importance of one’s spatial experience for creative practice, spotlighting the emotional and mental effects of spatial design qualities.”

#### **Designing Resistance: On Duty and the Creative and Intellectual,** by Zeina Rady<sup>2</sup>

“During my presentation at ELIA, I explored the duty of creatives and intellectuals with regards to critical spatial practices and Palestine. My thoughts took form through a situated intervention devised within a well-used gathering space at CSM, where I served mint tea to all who attended my call to sit down in a circle on the floor and share concerns about the topic of freedom of expression. Speaking on the panel was a new experience for me and gave me the opportunity to share my insights on protest in academic spaces from the perspective of an international student. To me, ELIA was a space to engage in meaningful discussions with the audience and receive questions about my newfound practice.

I enjoyed exchanging ideas on the guidance framework of ethics in pedagogy, hearing how diverse perspectives shape our individual expectations of an ethical framework, and contributing to a broader understanding of ethics, both in spatial practice and creative practices more generally.

This experience not only reinforced my passion for ethics but also helped my learning of how to speak more professionally about my own practice, teaching me to become constructively critical of my own work.”

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<sup>1</sup> **Norah Dankwah** was a student in BA-Arch 2023-24, Design Studio 07- Destination Library: How would the future of libraries take shape in Shoreditch, London? Tutors: Cherng-Min (Ming) Teong and Dejan Mrdja.

<sup>2</sup> **Zeina Rady** was a student in BA-Arch 2023-24, Design Studio 12 - Growing City: How can spatial interventions learn from growing, as a political act? Tutors: Emma Twine and Chris Storie.

Zeina’s contribution concluded with serving fresh mint tea to participants of the workshop—a ceremony central to Arabic cultures, especially when conversations might address challenging or difficult topics. While participants enjoyed the taste of fresh mint, they were introduced to the next stage of the workshop, which invited individual reflection followed by small group discussions on the guidance and case studies presented, in connection (or not), to their own teaching and learning practices.



**Figures 2 and 3.**  
Serving mint tea  
at ELIA, 2024.  
Photos: Norah  
Dankwah.

Questions used to frame these discussions included:

*What are the three main ethical challenges in your own teaching practice in relation to the cases presented?*

*What ethical principles do you use in your teaching and learning practices?*

*How do you connect to collaborators, students, and participants applying ethical principles?*

*Have the application of ethical principles aided your learning and/or unlearning in significant ways?*

Participants' thoughts and insights were captured on a [Padlet](#), which grew into a resource throughout the session, providing a takeaway for everyone beyond the collective experience in Milan. Some of the responses resonated with many participants and emphasised the need for overcoming institutional structures and cultural expectations that pose barriers to creating a sustained ethical learning environment. One of our participants, for example, shared:

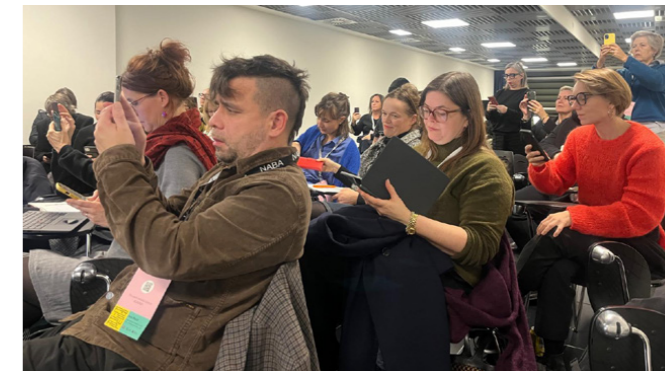
The main ethical challenge to teaching practices in my institution is a culture of reactivity rather than proactivity, with plans for collaborative projects across disciplines (e.g., filmmaking students working with graphic design, costume design, character makeup design, etc.) being last-minute and not shared early enough to be fair, inclusive, and reciprocal.

Their comments were aligned with our ethical guidance, and participants advocated for ethical considerations to be at the centre of discussions. The aim was to seamlessly integrate these into the teaching of creative practices and place them at the core of curriculum design and teaching methodologies. Resources such as [Ethics for Making](#) and the [Good Guide to Creative Practice](#) can support educators to lead on such process in their respective institutions.

The workshop concluded with opening the space for sharing with all participants. Referring to the Padlet, questions, concerns, and critique of context, language, terminology, and application were raised and debated. While opinions on ethical practices, frameworks, and principles varied, there was mutual agreement about the importance of these discussions for ensuring ethical considerations and practices are placed at the centre of creative endeavours and within the educational space devised by artists and designers.

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Post-workshop reflection



**Figure 4.** Audience at ELIA downloading QR code for Padlet, 2024. Photo: Adriana Cobo Corey.

While we presented previous work on ethics developed through the lens of architecture and spatial practice, the open discussion with participants in Milan quickly highlighted the range of disciplinary experiences in the workshop. We had the opportunity to understand complimentary and contradictory ethical dilemmas in art and design practices, as well as foregrounding the importance of case studies for thinking reflexively about ethics and connecting the universal to the specific.

Taking the Ethical Table to an international group of practitioners in art and design has given us a deeper appreciation for the complex relationships between advancement in art and design, ethics, knowledge production, and risk-taking. Moving away from regulatory approaches to ethics which are closer aligned with health and safety risk assessments, our proposition is that continuous reflection on the ethical implications that working with others bring to design practice offers opportunities for creativity and joy, which in turn provide qualitative and critical value to the work.

## What we learned Framing ethical practice in design

+

***“Ethics provides no absolute rule but rather establishes a basis for analysis that arises from the circumstance itself.” (Beshty, 2015, p. 19).***

During our session, it became apparent that framing the ethical guidance we shared within more universal and overarching ethical aims was necessary, before entering the specific ethical concerns of a subject field. One of our participants shared their work on making an ethical guide for sustainable and inclusive creative practice for students, which clearly states from the outset: “Our mission as a community of students is simple: To do our best not to harm people or the planet in our creative work” (N-TUTOR). This comment triggered an important conversation about how to negotiate the framing of ethical practices in design. While it seemed necessary for us, the session’s conveners, to emphasise that we are not working specifically on philosophical nor legal studies on ethics, the conversation with our international colleagues helped us to incorporate a more interdisciplinary and wider anchoring frame for teaching and learning ethics in design, while continuing to work on our approach to relational ethics; that is, contingent to specific situations emerging as diverse people and other entities—nonhuman or otherwise—interact.

## Noticing synergies between art, design and spatial practices

During the workshop, synergies between art, design, and spatial practices emerged quickly. Socially engaged or participatory art practices usually imply working with a broad range of communities in their territories rather than in the artist’s or designer’s studio. These working situations are common to Norah and Zeina’s case studies, and to precedent analyses done by the Ethical Table, where the key guidance actions established by its framework—planning, clarity, and reciprocity—prove equally useful beyond subject specificity. Planning the content, methodology, and process of how to collaborate is crucial for creating spaces where creative practices and social engagement merge.

Practicing ethics goes beyond the ethical responsibility associated with exhibiting artwork in public spaces, art galleries, or museums. We are focusing our interests on creative practices that rely on everyday ethics, the ethical responsibility of the practitioner when working with others; situated in a specific context rather than a universal approach to any guidance. As Pablo Helguera explains, “While we need critical frameworks... to make art, they should not be understood as regulatory mandates that would impose moral or ethical demands on art making” (Helguera, 2011, xiv). Aware of the overarching need to discuss and establish ethical frameworks for practice, we also address the specificities of each situation which continuously emerge from singular projects.

### Artistic intelligence

Throughout the conference, we witnessed many projects and work processes that were diverse and inspiring expressions of creativity in the field of art, sometimes focusing on technology, sometimes interdisciplinarity. By the end of the conference, we felt genuinely aligned with the words of colleague Luca Guerrini (Department of Design, School of Design Politecnico di Milano), who, in his intervention during the closing ceremony, called for the ELIA community to not get entangled in the effort to rename and/or

articulate our creative practices under a new banner—artistic intelligence—but to continue the work at hand.

We intuitively felt that the expression ‘artistic intelligence’, with particular consideration for empathy and emotional intelligence, could potentially act to counterbalance that of artificial intelligence. However, in the context of current concerns about the fast-paced and potentially harmful transformational power of artificial intelligence, we choose to continue with the process of defining and acting on practicing ethics in design and embedding ethical frameworks for creative practice within curricula.

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# PART II

## Pedagogical Practices of Artistic Intelligence

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**Futuring – A Framework  
for Climate Storytelling**  
*From Ritual to Imagination:  
Translating Artistic Research  
into Shared Futures*

Angelica Böhm  
*Film University Babelsberg*  
KONRAD WOLF

Nico Meissner, Ally Bisshop  
Griffith Film School

# *Abstract*

This article reflects on *Futuring – A Framework for Climate Storytelling*, a transdisciplinary project developed by the Art for Futures Lab at Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF in collaboration with Griffith Film School and the Australian Rivers Institute.

The project explored how artistic research, storytelling, and scientific knowledge can merge to imagine climate-positive futures, using the regeneration of Australian mangrove wetlands as a case study.

The article also describes how this research was presented at the ELIA Biennial Conference 2024 in Milan, where a ritual and a guided meditation transformed the documentation of the workshop into an immersive experience. By blending narration, scenography, and embodied imagination, the presentation invited the audience to sense the atmosphere of the original project. The text thus traces two layers of artistic research—the futuring workshop itself and its performative translation into a shared, imaginative space.

## 01. Opening Ritual - 'Come with Me'

*Come with me.*

Behind me, on the LED wall at Griffith Film School in Australia, a mangrove forest glows in shades of green and silver. Mangrove forests are fascinating ecosystems that live on the threshold - between fresh water and salt water, between land and sea. In many cultures, they are considered mystical: places of balance, transformation, and renewal. To open this journey, I invited the audience into a short ritual inspired by the mangroves. As a scenographer, I am licensed to play with props, so I brought a small bowl of water. Into it, I placed a stone for the earth, a shell for the sea, and a small piece of mangrove wood as a symbol of the threshold between both worlds. I sprinkled salt into the water, watching as the mixture grew more and more briny-transforming from river to estuary, from the sweet to the saline.

Then I asked everyone to close their eyes and imagine standing among the mangrove roots, one hand on the heart, one hand open towards the ritual space. Together we called upon the spirits of fresh water and salt water, the guardians of thresholds and protectors of life. We honoured the mangroves that connect land and sea, asking for their protection over all beings who inhabit the in-between. May this place of balance remain protected, a home for those who live between the worlds. May the harmony of the mangroves live in us as well - guiding us towards alignment with nature. This ritual was not a performance, but an *invitation*: a sensorial gateway into the theme of the talk: *how art, science, and storytelling can help us imagine just and sustainable futures.*



(F. 1)

(F. 2)



(F. 3)

**Figure 1.**  
**Ritual at ELIA Conference in Milan**  
Opening sequence of the presentation with mangrove forest on LED wall and ritual props (stone, shell, mangrove wood). ©Angelica Böhm, 2024.

**Figure 2.**  
**Artist in Connection with the Sea**  
Self-portrait by Angelica Böhm, taken during field research in Australia. The image symbolises personal and ecological connection— a visual echo of the *Come with Me* ritual. ©Angelica Böhm, 2024.

**Figure 3.**  
**Workshop Team in the Wetlands**  
Filming and research during the Blue Heart Project field phase in Yandina Wetlands, Australia. © Angelica Böhm, 2024.

## 02. Context and Collaboration

This presentation was part of a transdisciplinary collaboration between **Griffith Film School**, the **Australian Rivers Institute**, and the **Art for Futures Lab (AFFL)** at **Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF** in Germany.

**We gathered in Brisbane to explore new methods for climate storytelling - ways to merge artistic and scientific perspectives into narratives that could move both hearts and minds.**

The project was embedded in the *Blue Heart Project*, an initiative dedicated to the regeneration of wetlands in Australia. Wetlands are vital to climate resilience, yet often overlooked. They are the Earth's lungs-filtering water, storing carbon, and providing habitats for countless species. Our team included filmmakers, scientists, and artists. Together, we designed a workshop to test how scenographic and narrative tools could be used to **'future'** - not to predict, but to *co-create* possible worlds.

As a **Professor of Scenography and Artistic Research at Film University Babelsberg KONRAD WOLF**, and **board member of the Institute for Artistic Research (IKF)**, I represented the **Art for Futures Lab**, a platform dedicated to exploring how artistic methods can foster ecological imagination.

Within this context, storytelling becomes an ecological interface - connecting data, emotion, and embodied experience into shared narratives of care and possibility. Our aim was not to explain science, but to create experiences that allow people to *feel* ecological connection.

We wanted to see whether artistic storytelling could help participants move beyond abstract data and into emotional, embodied understanding.



(F. 4)

**Figure 4.**  
**Muddy Shoes after Fieldwork**  
Symbolic documentation of embodied, place-based storytelling practices. © Angelica Böhm, 2024.

### 03. The Futuring Framework

So, what exactly is *Futuring*?

It's more than imagining the future - it's a **creative method** for exploring the many futures that could emerge from our present choices.

In this project, futuring became a way to **prototype climate possibilities through narrative**.

Traditional climate communication often focuses on fear, loss, or crisis. While these narratives are important, they can also lead to paralysis - what some researchers call *eco-anxiety*.

Futuring seeks to counter that by inviting hope, curiosity, and imagination as tools of agency.

The futuring framework we developed combined three elements:

#### 1. Scientific grounding

Understanding the ecological systems at stake.

#### 2. Artistic translation

Transforming facts into stories, metaphors, and visual worlds.

#### 3. Collective co-creation

Bringing diverse participants into shared imagination.

In scenographic terms, futuring is a spatial practice: it constructs environments for thought. By building scenes, prototypes, or rituals, participants can literally 'step into' possible futures - and through that embodied experience, reflect on the pathways leading there.

This workshop became a living experiment in transdisciplinary learning. It asked: *Can storytelling not only describe climate change but also help us re-sense our relationship with the planet?*

The answer, as we found, lies in the merging of methods - where art, science, and spirituality meet to generate meaning.



(F. 5)

**Figure 5.**  
Art for Futures Lab Co-Creation Session  
Team discussion and story mapping in front of the  
Blue Heart project board. © Angelica Böhm, 2024.

## 04. Workshop Process - The Blue Heart Experiment

The *Futuring Framework* took shape through a workshop designed around the **Blue Heart Project**, an inspiring initiative focused on regenerating wetlands across Australia.

Our goal was to explore how **artistic research** and **scientific inquiry** could intertwine - not in competition, but in dialogue.

The workshop was structured in three phases:

### 1. Grounding

Establishing ecological knowledge and artistic curiosity.

### 2. Co-Creation

Developing narrative prototypes and visual metaphors.

### 3. Reflection

Screening, feedback, and embodied discussion.

We began with scientific input by **Ally Bisshop** and the collaborator from the Australian Rivers Institute, **Fernanda Adame**, who presented the hydrological and ecological systems of the wetlands. This was followed by my introduction of the **Art for Futures Lab** approach - a method that merges storytelling, worldbuilding, and scenographic imagination to open spaces for futuring.

Then, we went out into the field - quite literally. Standing knee-deep in the muddy waters of the wetlands, surrounded by herons and mangrove roots, participants began observing, sketching, and filming. Later, we moved into the **LED studio** at Griffith Film School, using virtual production tools and game engines to visualise speculative futures of the *Blue Heart 2050* landscape.

Through this process, the workshop became an act of embodied research - a collective choreography of science, art, and imagination. Participants didn't just talk about climate change; they staged it, *filmed* it, and *felt* it.



(F. 6)

**Figure 6.**  
Virtual Production at Griffith LED Studio  
Students experimenting with futuring scenarios using  
LED wall and game engine environments.  
© Angelica Böhm, 2024.

## 05. Transdisciplinary Learnings - When Science Learns to Dance

One of our main insights was that starting with heavy scientific data often blocked creative flow. Participants felt overwhelmed by complex facts before they could begin to imagine. So, in our debrief, we decided: next time, science will enter more gently - like a rhythm that joins the dance instead of dictating the steps. Art and science are often treated as separate worlds, yet both rely on imagination and experimentation.

In the **Art for Futures Lab**, we call this process *suturing* - weaving threads between disciplines so that knowledge can flow rather than fragment.

During the workshop, we learned that co-creation requires time, trust, and curiosity - a willingness to sit with not-knowing. We also tested **place-based storytelling**. Using a 3D virtual model of the Blue Heart site, participants could explore the environment remotely. While useful, it couldn't fully replace the physical experience of being in the wetlands - smelling the salt, feeling the mud, hearing the insects.

These sensory connections proved essential for authentic storytelling. Next time, a full site visit before story design will be integral to the process.

Transdisciplinary work is not just about combining skills - it's about **sharing vulnerability**, accepting that no single perspective can grasp complexity alone.

When filmmakers listen to biologists, and scientists listen to scenographers, a new kind of knowledge emerges - one that is emotional, embodied, and imaginative.

(F. 7)



**Figure 7.**  
Workshop Team in the Wetlands  
Filming and research during the Blue Heart Project  
field phase in Yandina Wetlands, Australia.  
© Angelica Böhm, 2024.

## 06. Shifting Perspectives - Between Eco-Anxiety and Agency

We aimed to explore whether a futuring framework could help participants shift their perspectives on climate anxiety - from paralysis to agency. In this first iteration, no major psychological shifts were recorded. That's understandable: the framework was still emerging, and participants had limited time to immerse themselves fully. Many were students juggling other courses.

Still, there were small yet meaningful transformations. Some described feeling 'hopeful for the first time'; others said they finally saw how creative practice could relate to environmental action. We took these as signs that the combination of *story*, *ritual*, and *collaboration* can open a pathway towards resilience.

Future iterations will focus more on defining collective goals and clarifying the link between imaginative storytelling and concrete climate pathways.

Our next challenge is to **translate emotion into action** - to bridge the poetic and the practical.

At its core, futuring is not only about envisioning positive futures - it's about **rehearsing them**.

Like in scenography, we construct a world to understand what it feels like to live inside it.

Through that embodied rehearsal, the future becomes tangible - something we can sense, shape, and sustain.

Figure 8 - 9.  
Virtual Production at Griffith LED Studio  
Students experimenting with futuring scenarios using  
LED wall and game engine environments.  
© Angelica Böhm, 2024.



(F. 8)

(F. 9)



## 07. Guided Meditation - Imagining the Wetlands of 2050

As the workshop unfolded, I wanted to end not with conclusions, but with a shared *visioning*.

At the ELIA Biennial in Milan, we were invited to experiment with lecture formats—to merge speech, image, and embodied experience. So I closed my keynote with a guided meditation, inviting the audience to travel into an imagined future.

I asked them to take a deep breath - in and out - letting the breath become as calm as the tide.

In the year 2050, I said, *you stand in the Yandina Wetlands, a place of return and renewal. The mangroves have come back, the air is vibrant with life, and the waters breathe in perfect harmony once again.*

Around you, people move in silence, celebrating not through noise, but through presence.

In this vision, the wetlands are no longer sites of extraction, but sanctuaries of balance.

A woman moves slowly through the water, her silhouette merging with the light-inspired by my painting *In Swing with Nature*, created as part of the project.

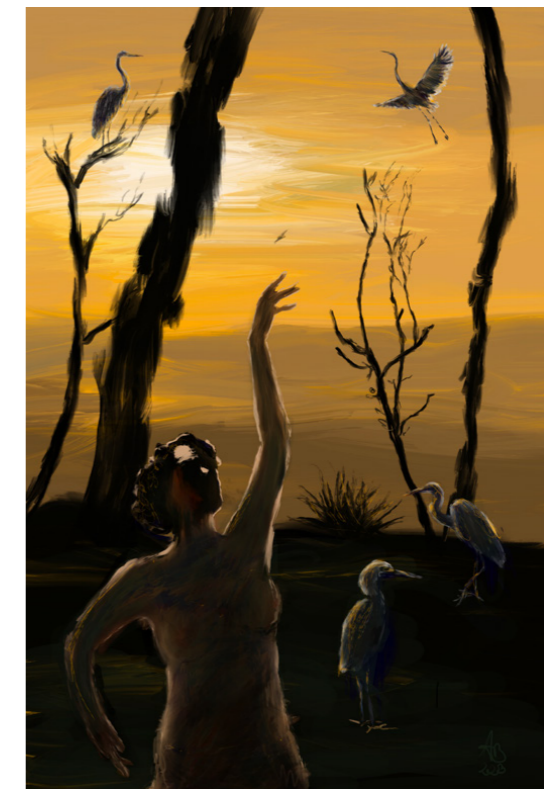
It depicts a utopian image: a woman surrounded by white herons, dancing with the rhythm of the earth.

This painting became both an anchor and a portal - an embodied dream of coexistence. During the meditation, I invited the audience to *listen*: to the soft rustle of leaves, the quiet splash of fish among the roots, the hum of unseen insects - each sound a heartbeat of the ecosystem. They were asked to feel the roots beneath their feet, to imagine their own bodies as part of the forest, absorbing strength and equilibrium.

The more they breathed, the more they felt connected - to the air, the land, the unseen beings of the mangrove.

This meditative act was not escapism. It was a **method** - a scenographic and sensorial form of research.

By imagining the future with the body, participants engaged in a subtle rehearsal of ecological empathy. They experienced *futuring* not as theory, but as inner cinema: a movie projected by the mind, guided by breath and care.



(F.10)

Figure 10.

Painting, *In Swing with Nature*

Artwork by Angelica Böhm, created after the Australian workshop and representing the 2050 vision of harmony and regeneration.

© Angelica Böhm, 2024.

## 08. Conclusion - Hope as a Method

In conclusion, the *Futuring Framework* demonstrated the potential of **storytelling and artistic research** to cultivate emotional and ecological literacy. The combination of scientific context, creative narrative, and ritual attention offered a glimpse into what transdisciplinary climate education might become. It reminded us that change begins not only with data, but with imagination.

Through collaboration between the **Art for Futures Lab, Griffith Film School, and the Australian Rivers Institute**, we learned that *hope is not naïve*.

It is a practice - a deliberate act of world-making.

By envisioning desirable futures, we help them take shape. By giving form to empathy, we create space for transformation.

Futuring, in this sense, is both a research method and a rehearsal for life: a scenographic exercise where art and science meet to generate belonging. It invites us to move beyond doom narratives and to tell new stories—stories of resilience, reciprocity, and care.

As I told the audience at the end of the meditation:  
*Because it can be an adventure - where every step brings us closer to a future we are co-creating.* And, like the mangroves that hold land and sea in gentle balance, our task as artists and researchers is to nurture that threshold - where imagination becomes action, and storytelling becomes stewardship.

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This approach resonates with ongoing discussions in artistic research and futures studies (Candy & Edmonds, 2018; Inayatullah, 2008; Haraway, 2016).

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# We Teach Creativity: Why creative pedagogy matters in Higher Education

Hilary Carlisle  
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## ABSTRACT

This paper argues that creativity is an essential skill for navigating a rapidly changing world, and that higher education must move beyond nurturing creative talent to intentionally teaching creativity itself. Drawing on practice at Norwich University of the Arts, it introduces the concept of 'critical creativity'—a learned, inclusive framework combining curiosity, research, reflection, resilience, and risk-taking. The paper explores how project-centred learning, psychological safety, and well-being initiatives foster these attributes, and outlines strategies for embedding them at both micro and macro levels. Ultimately, it calls for explicit, transformative creative pedagogy to empower graduates as agents of change.

## INTRODUCTION

In a rapidly changing world,

**CREATIVITY  
IS NOT A LUXURY  
IT IS A NECESSITY.**

Higher education must move beyond nurturing creative talent and instead teach creativity itself as a core skill. This means embracing a pedagogy that is intentional, explicit, and transformative, equipping students not only to navigate but to shape an ever-evolving global landscape. Drawing on the work at Norwich University of the Arts, this piece explores how creative education fosters curiosity, resilience, and risk-taking, and why a shift towards critical creativity is essential for the future of learning and work.

## THE CASE FOR CRITICAL CREATIVITY

The concept of ‘artistic intelligence’ has long been celebrated in creative disciplines, yet it risks perpetuating the notion of creativity as innate and exclusive, ideas that I refute. Through examination of traditional notions of intelligence, in which the capacity to achieve desirable outcomes is central, Langer argues that “The capacity to achieve an outcome is different from the ability to explore the world and understand experience” (Langer, p. 117), implying, perhaps, these definitions of intelligence don’t extend to curiosity and discovery. I therefore offer ‘critical creativity’ as a more inclusive and dynamic framework to explore creative education: critical creativity is learned, developed, and contextualised. It combines curiosity with research, reflection, and the ability to understand different viewpoints and anticipate future possibilities.

Creative education is about much more than producing artists or designers. It is about fostering the ability to generate, research, and contextualise ideas—skills that are highly valued in the workplace and beyond. The latest World Economic Forum (WEF) *Future of Jobs report (2025)* states that current global drivers will

**“INCREASE THE DEMAND  
FOR CREATIVE THINKING  
AND RESILIENCE, FLEXIBILITY,  
AND AGILITY SKILLS.”**

Those skills have indeed been ranked as highly sought after by employers in previous WEF reports spanning several years.

## CURIOSITY, RESILIENCE, AND CREATIVE RISK-TAKING AS INGREDIENTS OF CRITICAL CREATIVITY

Being curious is about asking questions, looking in unexpected places, and not accepting received wisdom as fact. Resilience is the ability to bounce back, to continue looking for new paths when the ones taken have met with dead-ends.

**CREATIVE RISK-TAKING  
ACKNOWLEDGES  
THE POSSIBILITY, SOMETIMES  
PROBABILITY, THAT FAILURE  
WILL BE ENCOUNTERED  
AS WE FOLLOW  
OUR CREATIVE GOALS.**

These key ingredients of critical creativity require particular environmental conditions that allow students to flourish. Play can take an equally important role, providing ‘a curriculum of trust and care with the aim of learning to fail and learning from failure...’ (Norgard & Whitton, 2025, p. 302). Invoking a sense of psychological safety in our learning environments that allows a sharing of ideas and opinions

without the fear of being exposed or ridiculed is paramount. But, as Moffett points out:

**Asking students to engage  
in generating original ideas  
often involves messy, non-  
linear processes. It can be  
difficult to define ‘what works’  
in developing creative skills,  
meaning that teaching is  
less structured and it can  
be harder to gauge student  
progress (Moffett, 2024).**

Moffett (2024) goes on to suggest several ways educators can facilitate psychological safety, including introducing collaborative tasks based around real-world challenges, co-creating terms of engagement with the student group, and adopting a facilitative rather than an authoritative role as teacher. As Seal and Smith point out:

**Sometimes the student  
will know more than we do,  
and we should acknowledge  
this and let them educate us.  
We have to create and contest  
knowledge together  
(Seal & Smith, 2021, p. 5).**

## PROJECT-CENTRED LEARNING AND IMMERSIVE BRIEFS

Project-centred learning is a fundamental tool in developing curiosity, resilience, and creative risk-taking, and one that is widely embedded in art and design education. It can also be, when

adopted mindfully, a method to help invoke a sense of psychological safety. This approach immerses students in real-world briefs that demand engagement, adaptability, and holistic problem-solving. It is demanding, but it prepares students for contemporary workplaces where

**FLEXIBILITY,  
AGILITY,  
AND RESILIENCE  
ARE KEY**  
(Orr & Shreeve, 2018).

Immersive projects, which tend to be short and all-consuming, offer an intensity of experience—what Orr & Shreeve (2018) call 'sticky' learning. Engagement is hard to resist, distractions are few, and the project offers an intense learning experience in a short period. This intensity fosters deep learning and the development of skills that are transferable to many professional contexts.

**OVERCOMING BARRIERS:  
STRATEGIES  
FOR FOSTERING  
CURIOSITY, RESILIENCE,  
AND CREATIVE  
RISK-TAKING**

Fostering curiosity, resilience, and creative risk-taking in the curriculum requires a deliberate and mindful approach to designing and implementing a creative pedagogy. We can do this by:

- Nurturing a sense of belonging by celebrating individual stories and ensuring all students see themselves in the curriculum.
- Scaffolding learning with 'low stakes' tasks and structured briefs, mapping their student journey.
- Providing life skills and contextual knowledge to build social capital.
- Using a facilitative approach and showing vulnerability.

These actions can be implemented from a micro level (within an individual teaching) approach to a macro level (strategic university approach). The latter offers a compelling framework for future focused creative pedagogies to thrive.

**THE NORWICH  
PEDAGOGY**

At Norwich, we take a whole university approach. This is articulated through the five values (positive change, interconnectedness, experimentation, collaboration, and whole self) of our Creative Learning Strategy. These values lean towards a critical pedagogy that emphasises the co-creation of knowledge, lived experience, and openness to challenge and debate. As our strategy states:

**"WE ARE ALL LEARNERS;  
WE ARE ALL TEACHERS;  
WE ARE ALL CREATIVE.  
WE TEACH CREATIVITY"**  
(Norwich University of the Arts, 2023)

At the start of the year, we engage all our students in a shared project entitled *Make it Manifest(o)*, which encourages course-level collaboration to set out and make manifest the cohort's shared understanding and expectations of the year ahead. At the end of the week, work is displayed and shared across the campus with staff and students. The project lays the groundwork for developing a psychological shared space by acknowledging and celebrating the unique lived experiences of all our students and helping them to find a shared respect and understanding for each other.

We embed well-being in the curriculum through a number of projects, and take well-being initiatives from extracurricular to co-curricular, inviting a shared emphasis on wellness among students and academic and support staff. Inversely, we have extended cultural context teaching from the course curriculum into a shared programme for all new undergraduate students, providing a grounding that ensures all are equipped with basic contextual references and research techniques to thrive in their university journeys. This approach aligns with Corr's view that:

**It is time for extracurricular activity to emerge from the student engagement blind spot and to prove its place as a key driver for student engagement and a vitally important component of an improved student experience (Corr, 2023, p. 247).**

The Norwich campus is actively designed to inculcate belonging and encourage physical and intellectual learning journeys by providing shared study spaces, open access workshops and a welcoming environment. Students may find a chance encounter provides the catalyst for a new learning experience or change of direction in their project work.

The student experience is not only defined by the course timetable but also by the tangential, optional, unexpected, and accidental. Our extended pedagogy deliberately and mindfully encompasses elements of student experience beyond the timetabled curriculum to create the right conditions for a transformational learning experience.

## A CALL TO ACTION

The benefits of creative education are clear: it develops skills that are vital for navigating and contributing to an ever-evolving global landscape. But to fully realise this potential, higher education must be more explicit and intentional in its pedagogies.

WE MUST TEACH CRITICAL CREATIVITY, NOT JUST HOPE THAT STUDENTS ABSORB IT BY OSMOSIS.

By doing so, we not only enhance the educational experience for our students—we also demonstrate the true value of creative education to the world.

Intentional, explicit creative pedagogy is essential for preparing students to thrive in a pluralistic, uncertain future. By centring on critical creativity through curiosity, resilience, and creative risk-taking, and by making these skills visible and valued, higher education can empower graduates to become agents of change, innovation, and evolution. Our work at Norwich University of the Arts offers a model of creative pedagogy that is embedded, measured, and celebrated.

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# ART EDUCATION AS PEDAGOGIC STAGINGS AT HKU DESIGN

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HKU University of the Arts Utrecht

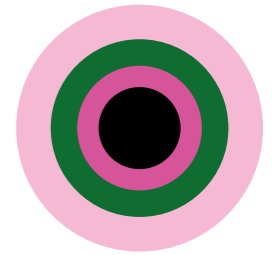
10 October 2025

At the ELIA Biennial Conference 2024 *Arts Plural* in Milan, HKU Design gave a workshop entitled 'Re-imagining art schools'. In short: How do we ensure in our own organisation that a plurality of voices is given a place and artistic intelligence can be expressed? During the workshop, we used 'musical types of activity'<sup>1</sup> that gave participants the opportunity to discuss their own work practices with one another, in an intuitive and reflective way.

The preparations for the workshop prompted us to reflect on how we at HKU Design have been working for years now ourselves. And to which people from the education sector we can relate. This article came about because of this reflection: not as the result of a process, but as a glimpse into a process that is continuing onward.

We discuss our teaching practice as well as introduce a specific intervention in our testing practice. We would like to give a voice to *forming*, or rather, *transforming*; a voice that deserves more attention in higher (arts) education, in which noises about standards, evidence-based working, learning outcomes, excellence, and related approaches are currently predominant.

In the bachelor's course at HKU Design, we have developed a way of working over the past ten years that we call a collection of pedagogic stagings. It is a culture



## About HKU

HKU Design is an arts academy with around 500 students who follow a design programme at level 5, 6, or 7. The four-year Bachelor of Design has the graduation pathways Fashion, Product, and Spatial design, and the two-year design programmes Connected Design and Master of Interior Architecture. Design as an academy is part of the HKU University of the Arts Utrecht: the broadest arts university in the Netherlands, with over 4,000 students.

<sup>1</sup> Taken from: Bart van Rosmalen, 'Stappen in het onbekende, Handboek Muzisch Werk', HKU Press, 2024.

or pedagogic learning and working climate in which both students and lecturers participate and develop designship together.

By pedagogic stagings, we mean situations in which students and teachers, among others, are working **together**, supported by a few types of activity, rules, and agreements. These situations are staged, with the aim of initiating **development**; however, also having plenty of scope or **space**, as it is not always known beforehand what will happen and which direction the development will take. This means that all participants in the staging are active **co-determiners** of the process.

### What is a pedagogic staging?

There is no better description of the term 'staging' than the one given by Gert Biesta (which Biesta borrowed in turn from Meyer-Drawe [1999]). Like Biesta, we see it as 'giving spaces and creating forms through which pupils can meet their desires and find out in a fundamentally experimental way, i.e., without certainty about the results, which of their desires may be helpful—in which way and to what extent—in taking the leap, the mature step into the world. The job of the school and other educational spaces is to focus on providing time, scope, and forms that allow children to practice mature ways of being in, and with the world' (*Letting Art Teach: Art Education 'After' Joseph Beuys*, ArtEZ Press, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 2022, p. 93).

Biesta argues that, because of the arts themselves, stagings in arts education are already pedagogic and contribute to a transformation process: the use of head, heart, and hands in the arts; the materiality, the rhythmic, and the sensory; touching and being touched; the intuitive and the unexpected; the deceleration, demonstration, and explanation. All these things prompt people to begin openly and inspire them to try and embark on 'it'. We do not use art for educational goals, as it is not an instrumental approach, but the arts themselves have 'educational potential to go out into the world as a mature subject'. The notion of freedom is important in stagings: it is up to the student to take the next step into the world, and in which way and direction the transformation to maturity takes place. Teaching is a 'gift', and the desire lecturers have to get something in return—for instance, that gift being acknowledged—is arguably an immature desire (once again in agreement with Biesta).

### Education at HKU Design

At the academy, we work from the principle of a developing narrative about the variety of places for art

and design in society and the way in which to involve young people in all these variations. Over the last ten years, the bachelor's programme Design is an open question of what design can become today and in the near future. We want to approach the question of what a product can be in our current times, what fashion is, or what a spatial design can be in relation to the artistic domain, seriously regarding this question as the core issue in the curriculum<sup>2</sup>. The goal is not to learn a profession through a consecutive series of lessons that follow a predefined learning plan, but rather to explore possibilities through experimenting, creating, expressing, and doing. We wanted to regard the curriculum as a series of activities with diverse people at various places in and around the academy.

HKU Design is an art academy, in which Design is not viewed as an industrial or methodical way of working, but where we search for what Design can mean in relation to the arts. We search for room to move and explore alternatives. Designers can work in different ways familiar to us, as outcomes are not predetermined, leaving space for the intuitive and the unexpected. Design does not provide a solution in advance for problems or projects. The focus is on the questions, interests, and desires that form the basis for designers' work and the possibilities that then arise in the artistic process. Imagination, space, identity, embodiment, sensory perception, material, technique, relation to the other, design, tactility, and empathy are important concepts in that regard.

We slowly but surely came to realise that we were sharing these starting principles. And from this value framework, we made numerous minor and major interventions in the curricula. Experimental pilots that, once experienced and discussed, became structural. Or disappeared like one-day flies. It was not always easy to explain to lecturers and students, as their assumptions about the nature of the profession and the purpose of teaching were challenged. We call this design-based education—education in motion. It is uncertain in advance which approaches will prove effective<sup>3</sup>.

### How to deal with normative assessment?

One important question was how to set up a fitting assessment practice. We found ourselves increasingly entangled in the arrangements and policy principles of higher education, including those within our own institution, particularly around summative testing and evaluation. Our efforts were constrained by set goals to define, measure, weigh, and evaluate

<sup>2</sup> In this regard, arts education in the Netherlands has undergone a major paradigm shift over the years.

### Curriculum as the content of education

Traditionally, arts education has a didactic angle, in which the growth on the ladder and the development of talent towards unique and individual success in the public domain are dominant factors. Along a predetermined route through the *school building* with consecutive 'building blocks' of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, students picked up the master's principles in accordance with the building regulations. Testing was mainly summative and normative, whereby the question of whether a student showed quality was about the degree to which they had mastered the teaching content given by the lecturer and could take a step up the ladder in the school before going out into the world.

### Curriculum as the form of education

We see competency-based education as a reaction to this rather one-dimensional idea of good education. Important premise: one student works differently to another, and education can pay more attention to different learning processes in a variety of education situations. Education became assignment-based and academies became a *house of study*, in which students were guided along learning paths, through meaningful and also realistic assignments. Take, for example: 'Onderwijs als opdracht' and 'Het construeren en beoordelen van opdrachten' (De Bie en De Kleijn, 2001). Students learned to integrate thinking and doing, knowledge and skills, and theory and practice in various forms of education.

assessment criteria, and view education as care that can be planned—treated as a sequence of steps with a guaranteed outcome. We resisted reducing students to bullet points or lecturers to a set of predefined qualifications. The friction was: If we no longer have a clear idea of what design is, then what yardstick should be used? Who determines what quality is, when something is artistic, and when something has impact? We want to be moved by its variations and its possibilities. We want to encounter examples of work or approaches that spark our curiosity and challenge us to see things from a different perspective. Moreover, should we stimulate this?

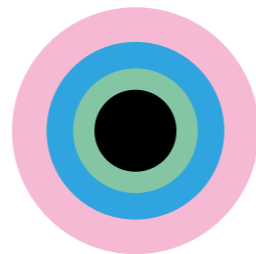
### A radical intervention in assessment practices

Education has a **purpose**, and we seek to determine whether we are succeeding in meeting it. In that sense we are **not without obligation**. Our credit system reflects the fact that students are making meaningful progress towards their degree, with summative testing and assessment playing a role in this.

Throughout four years of study, various discussions at different moments formed the main thread of the care and attention we wanted to give students in developing their designship. Discussions continually take place, both among students and between students and lecturers, covering obstacles, aspirations, and technical and design possibilities, as well as broader questions about the world and the present moment. This care and attention in the studios, in the canteen, or on a walk are essential. Planned conversations also take place.

Summative assessment and evaluation are essentially a planned conversation with several lecturers, focused on the work presented by the student. They are similar to what is known as 'landing moments' in education literature; moments that are preceded by a shorter or longer learning curve. We regard the discussions mainly as moments to put the work down for a moment and talk about competency development. This also made the minimum limit clear right away: when no work was done and no works are to be seen, then the conversation cannot happen, either—the target could not have been hit.

We emphasised with this that testing and assessment are to be seen as aspects that contribute to 'becoming', as education that is **focused on development**. At HKU Design, the question of quality in education is less about assessing a final product and more about evaluating the design attitude behind the work, as well as how competencies are increasingly applied throughout the



and the fact that students did so in their own way was valued as such and included in assessments.

More scope was also given to formative feedback. Rubrics became popular, partly because they gave students the opportunity to take control of their learning process. This house of study paradigm also includes a focus on learning outcomes and the invitation to students to personally show through burden of proof how they have dealt with previous feedback and that they have achieved a learning outcome. Assessments determine whether the student can progress to the next level within the framework created beforehand by the school. The house of study is established, as are the steps to be taken, but it is up to the students how they go through them. Becoming more flexible is an important concept in this regard.

### Curriculum as the purpose of education

The indeterminacy and unpredictability of the work processes of artists and designers, and the variations in which they appear to the public, are central to this paradigm. Lecturers and students work on the basis of equality, whereby all the participants are affected and take action, yet with varying contributions, positions, and perspectives. Consequently, participants are able to properly develop themselves. This paradigm is particularly interesting in arts education, because in artistic work processes, this emotional, sensory, and relational layer, is always present. The whole person takes part. In our view, tapping this energy is the purpose of education. Academies serve as *learning spaces*, in which students and lecturers position themselves in the world as personalities and together create curricula with varying building blocks and types of homes.

3 Interesting in this regard is an article by Biesta, G. (2024). 'Educational research and the distortion

progression of the study programme. In this way, we could also value the various ways in which students demonstrated their personal designship.

### Development discussions as pedagogical stagings

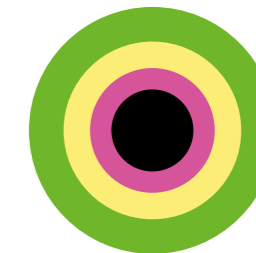
We have limited the number of planned conversations in which study credits are allocated. The structure and guidelines have been set together, covering aspects such as required discussion topics, conversation length, and rotating pairings of lecturers and students to avoid repetitive interactions.

In this way, students all go through the same 'stagings', but there is a high degree of differentiation. The participating lecturers and students will keep making different contributions to the discussion, as they have gained other experiences. In this regard, each student develops uniquely according to their encounters with a variety of lecturers and the experience they have gained in the various activities.

We have three types of discussions regarding summative evaluations but will highlight the **development discussions** here. In development discussions (three in Year 1 and three in Year 2) the focus is on the studying, exploring student, who in the preceding block has completed a variety of design exercises and experiments across different stand-alone modules, thereby gathering the ingredients (meaning components, building blocks) to shape themselves as a designer and express themselves visually. By reviewing what the student has done and experimented with, particularly in relation to the essence of the preceding block, and then discussing it together, we gain insight into how the student wishes to develop moving forward.

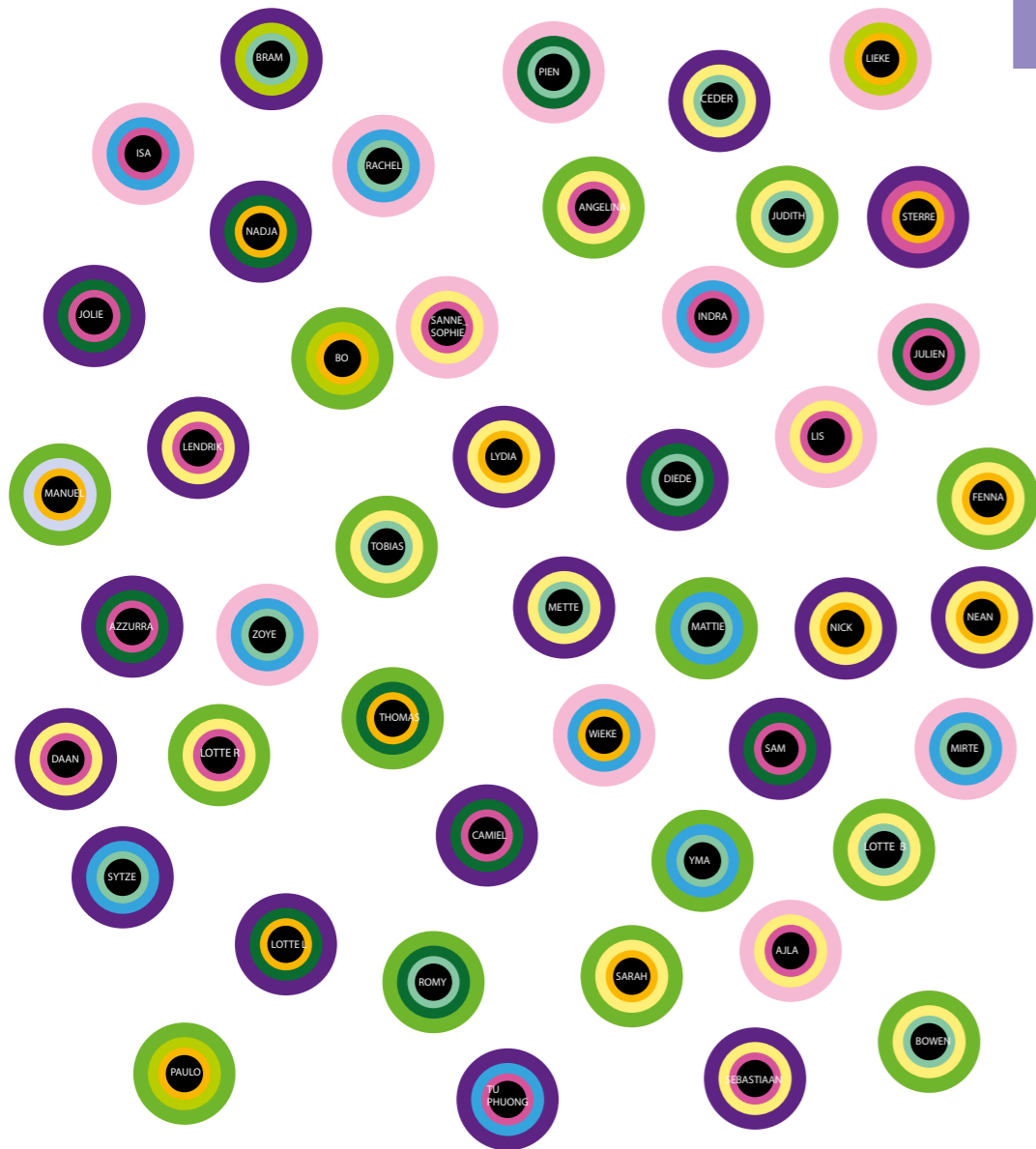
### Criteria:

- Is there development in an artistic way of working (experimental, dealing with the unexpected, delaying working to final shapes, etc.)
- Using several competencies (create, research and reflect, connect to surroundings, work in practice)
- The relation to essence of the preceding block (see below)
- Possibilities for the following block



of educational practice'. In J. Drerup, N. Goddertz, R. Mattig, W. Thole & U. Uhlendorff (Eds), *Bildungsforschung: Erziehungswissenschaftliche Perspektiven* (pp. 29–43). Heidelberg: J.B. Metzler. Biesta points to a restricted view of research into the quality of education in terms of measuring learning outcomes. Education cannot be evidence-based. Lecturers do not produce any learning outcomes. Thereby, you reduce the dynamics in educational practice, miss out on other formative educational goals, and deny the 'Artistry of Teaching'.

## PRODUCT DESIGN HKU JAAR 2 2022 2023



6 februari 2023

### Year 1

Design A is about practising other ways of working than those you are used to

Design B is about searching for new ways of working

Design C is about making your viewpoint visible, using all the feedback

### Year 2

Design D is about searching for and trying out what your way of working might be

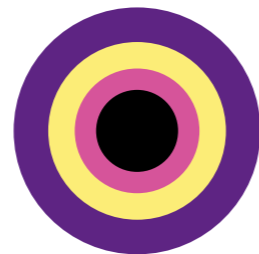
Design E is about going further in the direction of your own way of working in relation to others and in a multiperspectival context

Design F is about developing a vision and your own design approach, and dealing with feedback

In development discussions, the question of whether the student has done 'well' concerns mainly:

- **Checking** whether goals are being achieved: do we observe development as a designer and in visual expression? Is the student working in line with the intended essence of that block? This essence might include practicing with unfamiliar work methods or exploring new ways of working.
- Can we provide **feedforward**, given the insight we have into both how and what the student is developing, and how they want to proceed?

During the development discussions, it is not about forming a judgement about the quality of the work, or about giving advice on improving a design. These classes are meant for the knowledge, experience, and feedback of a lecturer. This is where students discover several views, attitudes, and opinions regarding what design is or can be, and not at moments where credits are also handed out.



Upon the introduction of these development discussions, something remarkable happened.

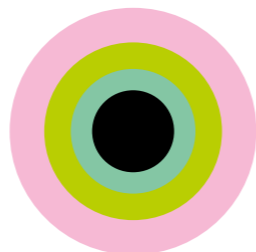
By talking with the student rather than about them, students become active co-determiners of the assessment process. The development discussions turned out to have a formative value, and as such, we see them as a pedagogic staging. Initially, lecturers struggled with what they were and were not 'allowed' to say to students in the discussions; students struggled with what they could and could not expect, leading to a lack of clarity about assessment criteria. The question arose of whether this method monitored quality levels sufficiently, or whether it was perhaps too non-committal.

By continuing to practice and share experiences, and through better preparations and clearer explanations of the intention, we also saw more positive experiences. The quality of the discussions was exceptionally high. Students themselves succeeded in bringing coherence to what they had done and the way they had dealt with feedback received earlier. They also presented a great diversity of work, offering ample input to ascertain whether a student could progress...

### Summary

We discovered that we are searching for learning spaces in which students and lecturers exist in the world as people and collaboratively shape building blocks of knowledge and understanding. As an educational institution operating on an academy model, we organise opportunities for creating, doing, presenting, and discussion moments where meaningful interaction takes place. Such moments appeal to the whole person; prompting them to do something, tempting them, and setting them in motion. But what exactly will happen, and what all these experiences will 'produce', is not yet known. It is true that students and lecturers bring along their biographical process, but they develop through the encounters with others and the contexts in which they work. The work is regularly paused, and dialogic interviews help it to proceed. We do not dictate what the other must do, nor how they should do it. Formative actions and ipsative assessment<sup>4</sup> ensure that setting standards becomes a shared endeavour. In this way, education contributes to personal development and to becoming a designer, giving it a clear formative value. The search for what is 'good' and for what has 'quality' in a context becomes the goal of art education. In this process, a student's personal ambitions emerge as criteria: those that reflect personal motivation (Does

<sup>4</sup> Taken from Dominique Sluijsmans, educationalist and testing expert. Professor of Integrated Curriculum Development at Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences, in, for example: 'De toetsrevolutie: ongemakkelijk maar meer dan ooit hard nodig', 21 August 2023 and in: 'Formatief Handelen, van instrument naar ontwerp', with René Kneyber, Valentina Devid, Blanca Wilde López, March 2022.



it give energy?); those that represent standards in a professional field (What points towards excellence?); and those that touch more on the ethical side of the action or the effect (Does it do good?).

### How to proceed?

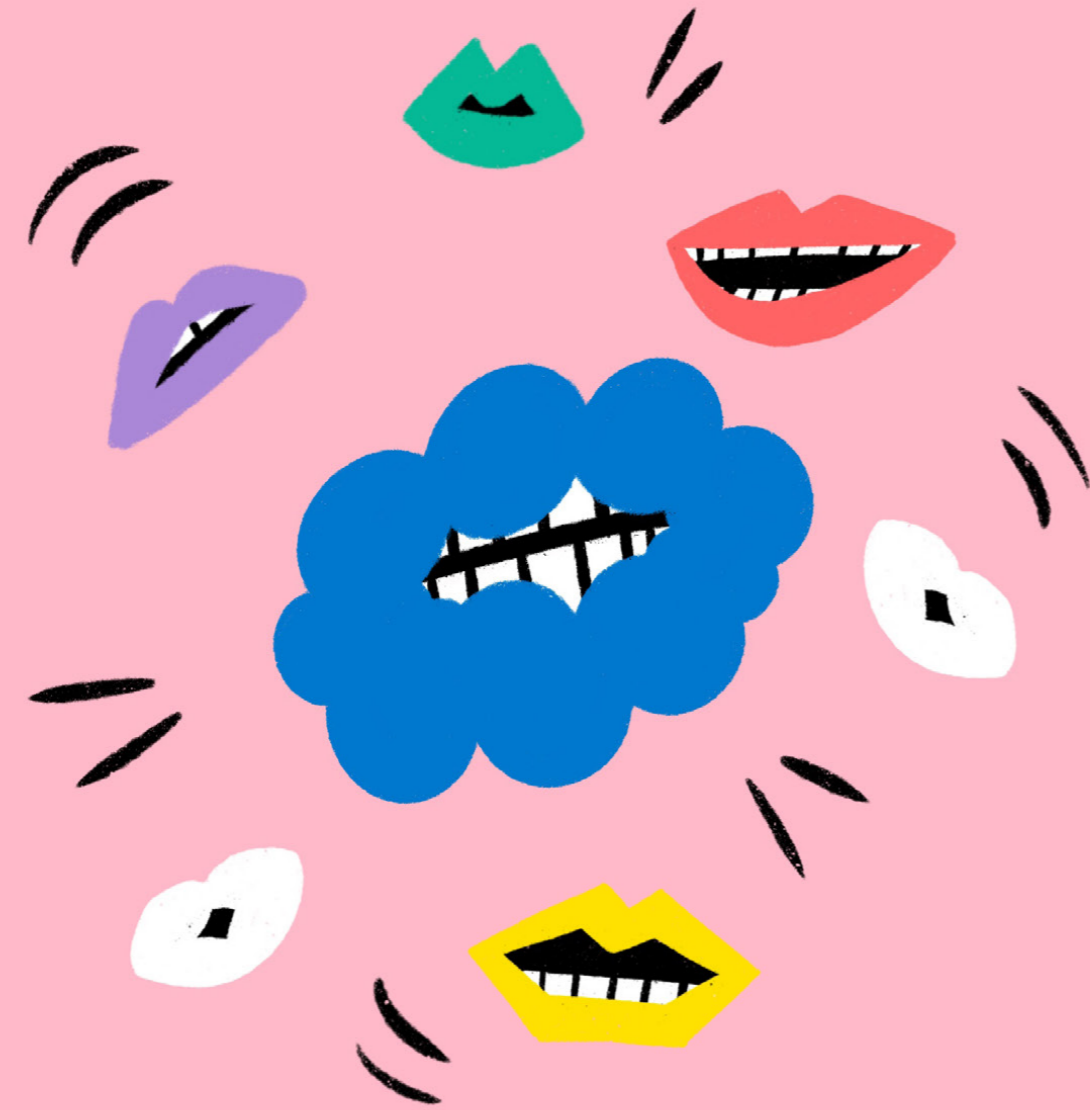
In the past, we might already have defined the aim of an assignment. Later, we may have provided an example to demonstrate what we were looking for. But now, we do things differently and let it unfold. We said: just go ahead. We don't know what it will become, but we have confidence that we can make something of it together, something meaningful. We see possibilities in stagings where we spark curiosity about the world, about others (both human and nonhuman), and about the countless differences that arise.

HKU Design will continue with an 'open-ended' approach to art education. The major social, ecological, and ethical issues of today, and the world we live in, are of course central to this approach. Art has an important role to play here, particularly in creating meaning and engaging with what doesn't work (Van Rosmalen, 2024).<sup>5</sup>



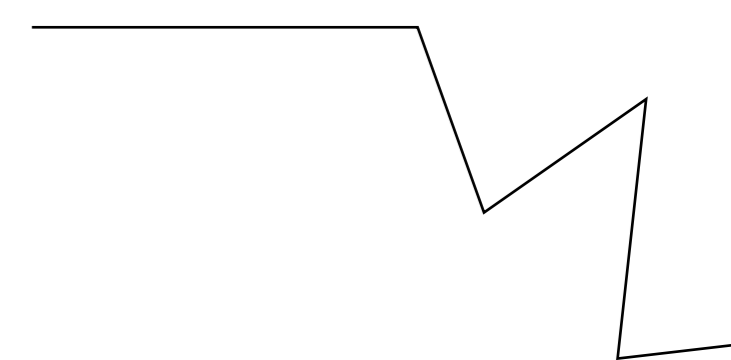
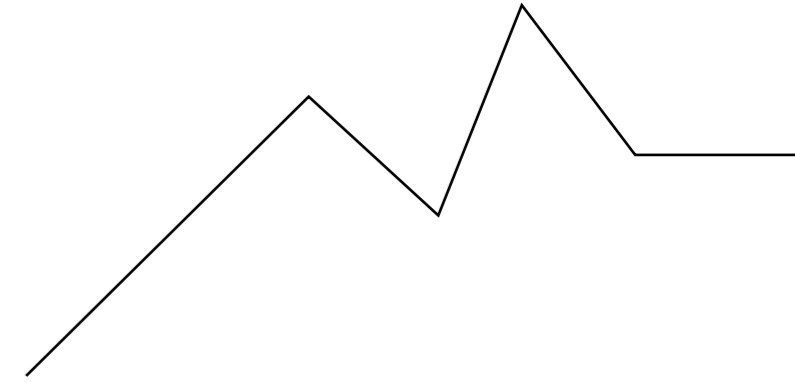
<sup>5</sup> Bart van Rosmalen said in interview upon the conclusion of his ten-year Art and Professionalisation professorship at HKU (2024): "The big questions of today are about the decline in social engineering. For a long time, we have believed that the world could be socially engineered. But now we see in all sorts of areas far afield and close to home [...] that social engineering is an illusion. Art has a big role to play in this, precisely in giving meaning and relating to what doesn't work. Although it doesn't solve anything, through art we learn to deal with the tragic. And once again, I think that the solution of social problems suggests there should be a new form of social engineering. Art education can, however, challenge students to show their view of the world in and through their work, because a different perspective can provide meaning. Anyone can use AI to translate a collection of data into information, but it does not produce anything new. Through the arts, something different happens, and something new is potentially created."

**Note by the editors:** The pedagogic question is thereby closely connected with how we deal with one another in society. Within HKU, Fabiola Camuti focuses her research group Critical Creative Pedagogies on the idea of unlearning as an essential process to challenge the established standards and to create an educational environment that is open to diverse perspectives and makes efforts for development and transformation. In doing so, we operate within the humanist tradition of Utrecht educationalists. In this regard, we would like to refer to the concept of Developing Education, about which educationalists Langeveld, Van Parreren and Carpay have written, following in the footsteps of Kohnstamm. ('Een school voor toekomstige burgers'. Text of the third Langeveld lecture, held on 20 April 1994 in St Peter's Church, Utrecht. By: Jacques Carpay, Professor of Educational Pedagogy at VU University Amsterdam.)



# Embedding Artistic Intelligence in Conservatoire Training

*Baptiste Bourgougnon and Josh Slater*



## Abstract

This article reflects on the redesign of the BA (Hons) Contemporary Dance at London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS), part of The Place, a creative powerhouse committed to

*a world with more dance.*

Through this process, we explored artistic intelligence as an embodied, relational and ethically responsive practice that extends beyond technical mastery. Drawing on Helen Yung's (2024) framing of artistic intelligence and Ruth Pethybridge's (2023; 2014) writing on inclusive, cross-generational practice, we consider how conservatoires can move beyond inward-looking hierarchies. Our case study, Unit 6: Outside Encounters, shows how authentic community partnerships and co-created projects prepare students for socially embedded, freelance careers while reshaping institutional notions of excellence. We offer practical actions to arts education providers to help step out of the bubble and model the artistic intelligence they seek to cultivate.

## Introduction

The Place is a creative powerhouse for dance: a home for experimentation, creation, training and performance for over fifty years. At its heart is London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS), one of Europe's leading centres for contemporary dance education. At LCDS we train artists to shape the future of the art form while engaging critically with the world around them

*Our institutional vision A world with more dance drives not only performance and production but also how we imagine education: porous, socially connected, and able to respond to cultural change.*

Recent course revalidation at LCDS prompted us to re-examine what conservatoire training can and should be in the twenty-first century. Technical mastery remains vital, yet alone it no longer prepares artists for the realities of freelance, socially embedded careers or for the potential to foster belonging and transformation through dance.

In this article, we explore artistic intelligence as a way to expand arts education thinking: a form of embodied, relational and ethically responsive knowing. Drawing on our BA redesign and the creation of Unit 6: Outside Encounters, we reflect on how curriculum, assessment and institutional practice can move beyond the conservatoire "bubble," connect with communities, and better prepare students to thrive as artists in an interconnected cultural landscape.

## Defining Artistic Intelligence

At the 2024 ELIA Biennial, artist and researcher Helen Yung described *artistic intelligence* in strikingly everyday terms. Her keynote moved beyond specialist jargon to show how artistic ways of perceiving and acting can shape ordinary life. Speaking about a project with long-term job seekers, she explained how participants found new confidence and employment once they had "unlocked their artistic intelligence" the same skills they had used informally to solve problems, adapt, and imagine different futures. One of her slides defined artistic intelligence as:

*"...all of the ways of knowing and doing that art and artists further. Artistic intelligence is a system of capacities for perception, sensing, discernment, insight, activity, choice making, and divergent synthesis that is developed by, and transcends beyond, human intelligence. It includes embodied, inherited, and protected wisdoms. Knowledge accumulated and transmitted through body, gift and ritual." (Yung, 2024)*

This framing resonated strongly with our work at LCDS. Yung recognises that artistic intelligence is not a single skill but a set of capacities: perceiving deeply, sensing context, making choices under uncertainty, and creating new connections. It is both personal and collective, embodied and culturally inherited (CLCF, 2025).

Drawing also on Dr Ruth Pethybridge's<sup>1</sup> (2023; 2014) writing on inclusive, cross-generational dance, we understand artistic intelligence in three intertwined ways:

- Relational knowing: learning with and from others and from place. Dance becomes a way to be in relationship: listening, co-creating, negotiating difference.
- Embodied knowledge: understanding lives in the body as much as in theory. Dancers sense timing, space, force, and emotion. They learn through physical presence and shared movement.
- Ethical responsiveness: participatory practice asks artists to be alert to power, consent and reciprocity. Artistic intelligence involves making choices that respect and include others.

These three aspects of knowledge matter for contemporary dance training because today's artists rarely work in closed, company systems. They freelance, collaborate, teach, create projects in schools, health settings or community spaces, and respond to complex social contexts. If training only rewards technical virtuosity, it risks leaving graduates unprepared for this reality.

Seeing artistic intelligence as rigorous learning also challenges long-standing conservatoire hierarchies where knowledge is held by the institution and passed down to students. Artistic intelligence provides a means to question entrenched formats, processes and pedagogical models, transforming them from mechanisms of gatekeeping into practices of openness and exchange. Instead, we see intelligence as something co-created between students, staff, artists and the communities they engage with.

*We believe this shift prepares dancers not just to perform, but to participate meaningfully in culture and society.*

## Case Study – Outside Encounters

Unit 6: Outside Encounters<sup>2</sup> was developed as part of the 2023 revalidation of the BA (Hons) Contemporary Dance course. The unit responds directly to the school’s wider pedagogic shift described in our *Breaking the Mould* manifesto (Bourgougnon & Uytterhoeven, 2023) towards access and social justice, student well-being, and professional outcomes.

*It was also shaped by The Place’s strategic aims, to Move People and Move Dance by connecting students with communities, and by recognising socially engaged practice as rigorous, innovative artistic work.*

Conceived as a practical site for these ambitions, the unit enables students to encounter dance as a socially engaged, co-created practice, testing artistic intelligence beyond the studio and into real-world contexts.

Structurally, Unit 6 runs over an 18-week semester in the second year and carries 40 credits. The real-world exchange activates artistic intelligence in students and partners. With the involvement of the students, we collaboratively commissioned experienced socially engaged dance artists to lead collaborative projects with external community groups. These partners have included stroke-survivor support groups, housing estate residents, older adults, youth clubs, and refugee organisations. Crucially, both the artists and community groups are paid and resourced, ensuring that participation is not extractive but mutually beneficial.

Students join these ongoing projects as artist-collaborators rather than service providers. They are expected to participate in the group’s social rhythms, attending informal gatherings, listening to community stories, and shaping movement material together. As one student reflected:

*“It wasn’t about me ‘teaching’ dance; it was about listening, joining in, and letting the work grow from what mattered to the group.” A community partner noted: “We felt the students were with us, not just delivering something to us. They became part of our weekly life.”*

The unit articulates four learning outcomes:

1. Demonstrate an in-depth understanding of the value of, and career possibilities within, dance education and community practice
2. Apply a critical understanding of and appropriate approaches for sharing and co-creating dance with participants
3. Demonstrate professionalism as a dance artist in an educational or participatory context
4. Critically analyse the social and cultural implications of participation in dance practices for a range of diverse participants (*Unit 6: Outside Encounters Unit Guide*, 2023)

Unit 6 is referenced as a case study in Lehtikoinen’s (2025) book *Creativity, Society and the Role of Socially Engaged Art in Higher Arts Education*. In this Lehtikoinen references both our Unit 6 and the MA Dance: Participation, Communities, Activism as key case studies in socially engaged practice at university level<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Unit 6 was developed in collaboration with Jo Parkes, Course Leader for MA Dance: Participation, Communities, Activism. Jo is a dance artist, facilitator and educator with a focus on co-creative processes with communities.

<sup>3</sup> We met Kai at the ELIA Biennale in Milan, November 2024. Kai watched the presentation which led to the inclusion of London Contemporary Dance School’s socially engaged MA course and BA Unit in his book.

The assessment blends practice and reflection. Students maintain a self-evaluation log throughout the process, complemented by a written reflective analysis that connects practical choices to social context and ethical awareness. One student reflected that “*writing about the process forced me to notice power dynamics and my own assumptions*,”.

The student feedback evidences transformation. They describe a “*shift from performer to facilitator-artist*,” and increased confidence navigating unfamiliar social spaces. Staff observe heightened empathy and collaborative skill; partners report meaningful cultural exchange and ownership of the artistic process: “*The final sharing felt ours, not something done to us*,” said one community participant.

By embedding Unit 6 within the BA, we bridge the gap between conservatoire training and socially engaged professional practice. The course provides a scaffolded progression towards postgraduate study, notably our MA Dance: Participation, Communities, Activism. Unit 6 models how artistic intelligence thrives when students co-create with diverse real-world communities, rather than remain within the conservatoire “bubble”.

## Rethinking Hierarchies in Conservatoire Training

The introduction of Unit 6: Outside Encounters was not an isolated experiment but part of a broader institutional reshaping of the curriculum at LCDS. In revalidating the course, we articulated three interlinked key drivers; access and social justice, student well-being, and professional outcomes. Unit 6 emerged within this context as a deliberate strategy to extend learning beyond the conservatoire “bubble” and connect students with diverse communities as co-creators. The unit became a practical site for testing how these drivers could challenge entrenched ideas of expertise, value and artistic authorship.

Conservatoire dance education has long been shaped by implicit hierarchies: codified Euro-American techniques, especially ballet, positioned as the pinnacle of excellence; product-driven performance outcomes valued above process; and a tacit divide between “high art” and participatory or community practice. Such structures reinforce narrow ideas of talent and limit how students understand their own artistic intelligence. At LCDS we have worked to unsettle these assumptions through both curriculum design and pedagogic culture, as articulated in *Breaking the Mould* (Bourgougnon & Uytterhoeven, 2023).

The manifesto describes a radical redesign of the BA course. In learning and teaching, we moved beyond a model where daily ballet signified ultimate value or high art, instead creating a decentred technical ecology. Students now encounter a plurality of practices;

*South Indian practices, house, vogueing, locking, popping, hip hop-based floorwork, alongside release, Flying Low and contemporary improvisation.*

By reallocating curriculum hours rather than merely adding “other” forms to the margins, we questioned what deserves to be central in contemporary training and enabled students to build embodied, context-sensitive artistic identities rather than emulate a fixed aesthetic ideal.

We similarly reconfigured our assessment practices. The traditional modes that privileged the assessor’s aesthetic lens were replaced with portfolio-based evaluation, in which students curate reflective and artistic evidence through blogs, vlogs, auto-ethnographic films and research-informed creative portfolios. This destabilises the one-way hierarchy of judgement and invites a dialogic relationship: students frame how their work is seen, and assessors engage with their self-articulated contexts, values and processes. We chose to consciously centre the students’ articulation of their individual artistic intelligence.

Our admission processes also became a site of de-hierarchisation and removal of entrenched elitism. We moved away from the ballet-led audition towards workshop-based and contextualised entry, reframing “talent” as potential for growth, curiosity and creative contribution rather than prior access to elite training.

These structural changes intersect directly with the idea of artistic intelligence. LCDS creates space for relational, embodied and ethically responsive learning to thrive by dismantling hierarchies of form, authorship and access. Students encounter themselves as artists among many lineages and communities; staff move from gatekeepers to co-learners; and the conservatoire begins to resemble a porous, world-facing art school rather than a closed technical enclave.

## Implications for Arts Education

The experience of Unit 6 points to an urgent need for institutions themselves to embody the artistic intelligence they wish to cultivate in students. Recalibrating students’ perceptions of what matters in arts education cannot happen if the institution continues to privilege only virtuosity, product and internal hierarchies. Conservatoires and art schools must lead by example, recognising participatory, relational, socially engaged practice as rigorous artistic learning and embedding it at the heart of their curricula rather than treating it as peripheral or “knowledge exchange”.

A first step is to invest in authentic, long-term community partnerships. These cannot be one-off outreach projects or unpaid “placements”.

*Institutions can commission artists with participatory expertise, pay and resource community partners, and create space for projects to evolve over time.*

Such commitment would model ethical practice, demonstrate that knowledge flows both ways, and challenge the idea of the school as the gatekeeper of artistic intelligence. Equally crucial is encouraging students and staff to work in the real world, beyond the conservatoire bubble. This means integrating credit-bearing modules that take place in community or public settings; supporting staff to build relationships outside the institution; and valuing artistic growth that emerges from collaboration, listening and responsiveness to context.

Act now:

- **Fund and sustain real partnerships:** Pay community collaborators and participatory artists properly; plan multi-year relationships rather than single outreach weeks.
- **Embed credit-bearing modules outside the building:** Let students co-create with schools, health groups or local arts collectives as part of the core curriculum.
- **Rebalance what is assessed:** Design criteria that reward ethical listening, process and collaboration alongside performance product.
- **Resource staff development:** Offer training, mentoring and time for faculty to practice co-creation and anti-hierarchical pedagogy.
- **Share power and visibility:** Invite community partners into panels, showcases and public discourse so artistic intelligence is not gate-kept by the institution alone.

Such changes require gentle but deliberate institutional courage: loosening gatekeeping, widening definitions of excellence, and recognising that artistic intelligence is co-created across multiple social worlds.

*It is the responsibility of higher education providers to model this stance, and prepare artists who are not only technically skilled but also relational, ethical and attuned to the societies they will help to shape.*

When the curriculum makes visible that artistic intelligence resides not only within the academy but also in neighbourhood centres, refugee collectives, elders’ groups or youth clubs, students learn to situate themselves within the wider cultural ecosystem.

## Conclusion

Our work with Unit 6: Outside Encounters shows that artistic intelligence flourishes when conservatoire training steps beyond the studio and into the world. We have seen students mature into artists who can listen, adapt and contribute meaningfully to society. This shift requires institutions themselves to model openness: to dismantle hierarchies that privilege only product and virtuosity, and to recognise that intelligence also lives in communities, traditions and embodied knowledge beyond the academy.

We write with gratitude to colleagues and peers at the ELIA Biennial, whose rich, provocative discussions continue to challenge and inspire new ways of thinking about art, pedagogy and institutional responsibility.

In that spirit, we offer a gentle provocation:

The language of *High Arts* and *Higher Arts Education* may unintentionally reinforce hierarchies that separate “elite” art from participatory, socially embedded practice. If we are serious about plurality and belonging, perhaps it is time to re-imagine this vocabulary and embrace an understanding of arts education that is inclusive and relationally intelligent.

A world with more dance is a world where artistic intelligence  
is shared rather than gate-kept, cultivated in classrooms, studios,  
communities and public life alike.

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# Time as Material:

## Teaching Theatre as Relations through Minimal Cues and Shared Tools

*Kateřina Jeřavá*

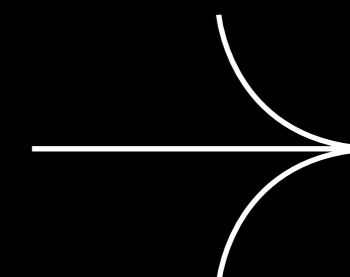
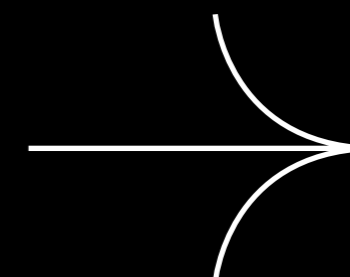
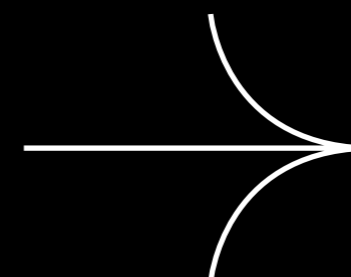
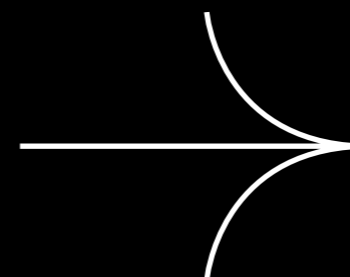
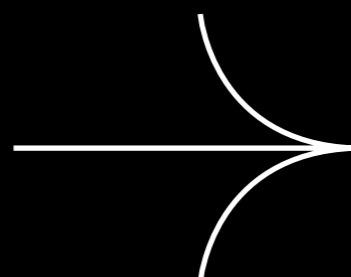
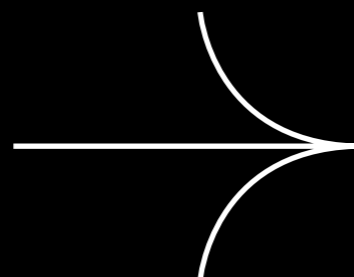
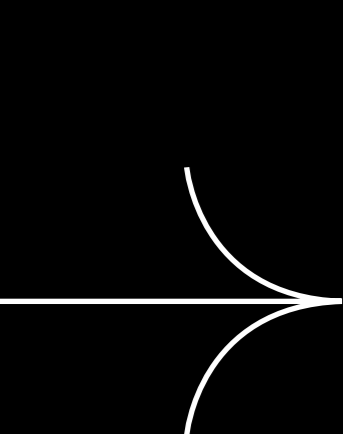
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### Abstract

This article reflects on a workshop presented at the ELIA Biennial Conference 2024 that explored theatre-making as a relational practice by treating time, space, context, and the actor's body and mind as malleable material.

Through minimal, legible cue stacks (line → snap → blackout → hold → relight), a receptionfirst protocol (see → say → mean), and a compact movementscore practice (build → fix → improve → interpret), the session demonstrated how collective attention can be composed and how interpretation can remain open without losing precision.

Drawing on Drábek, Sennet, Fischer-Lichte, and Zich, the article argues that time is not only malleable but also the medium of education and sharing; meeting in time—scoring, holding, and releasing together—proves a strong pedagogy for teenfacing contexts. The piece also outlines how [Theatrum.online](#) operationalises the approach through shareable templates and reflection prompts, and sketches next steps for international collaboration, translation, and evaluation.



## Introduction

At the ELIA Biennial 2024, I led a session titled ‘Theatrum.online – Theatre Event Together: Created, Experienced and Reflected’, conceived as a compact laboratory for testing how acting and theatre-making can treat time, space, and context as material, with a view to teen-facing pedagogy. Rather than framing performance as a fixed product, the workshop explored performance as an ecology of relations that can be composed, stretched, and cared for. Through both individual and collective moments of perception, creation, and playful interaction, participants moved across scales of experience—from intimate attention to expansive ensemble, from the illusive to the immersive—while making their processes visible and discussable. This article distills that session into a practical framework for educators. It outlines the session design, offers brief practice demonstrations, and argues for three working propositions: that time is malleable, that context is coauthored, and that care is a method. Finally, it reflects on [Theatrum.online](#) as a tool for sharing both artistic and educational resources and cultivating pedagogical communities. I argue for teaching theatre (teaching theatre, teaching about theatre, and teaching through theatre) as a relational practice that honours teens’ creativity and perceptual agency—openly sharing acting and theatre-making tools while resisting prescriptive readings of scenes or performances.

## Context and Research Questions

At stake in my artistic research is a practical puzzle: What counts as the material of acting, and how do time, space, the actor’s body and mind, and context operate dynamically within it? I open with a tiny theatre trick. When the audience is ready, I deliver a theatrical line in Czech: *Když vznikl svět, všude byla tma* (“When the world began, everywhere was darkness”), after that I snap my fingers, the lights go out, and we hold a brief silence. In a beat, the room’s attention recomposes, time stretches, space thickens, and meaning is co-authored by everyone present. Nothing new is built—we simply rescore time and reframe context. Such tricks work because they synchronise cues across modalities (verbal, physical, spatial), invite audiences to complete the action, and create a low-cost, high-impact shift in shared perception. From this opening flow two questions. What is the material of acting and theatre-making when minimal cues transform collective attention? And how can pedagogy teach this as relations rather than artefacts—so that learners work with tempo, rhythm, pause, recovery, building attention, and contextual framing as compositional tools?

## Workshop Structure (brief)

This in-person workshop followed a simple arc: create → experience → reflect. It was grounded in collective perception and creation, playful interaction, and low-threshold tasks with legible cues and minimal technology.

I acted as facilitator when moving through elements of acting training, imaginative prompts, or practical tasks—scoring cues and timing, using an ask-before-tell protocol, holding safety and consent, and keeping interpretation open. Rhythm and tempo were light and modular: three- to ten-minute blocks with explicit count-ins, short holds, and recovery beats, scaled to the group’s energy and attention.

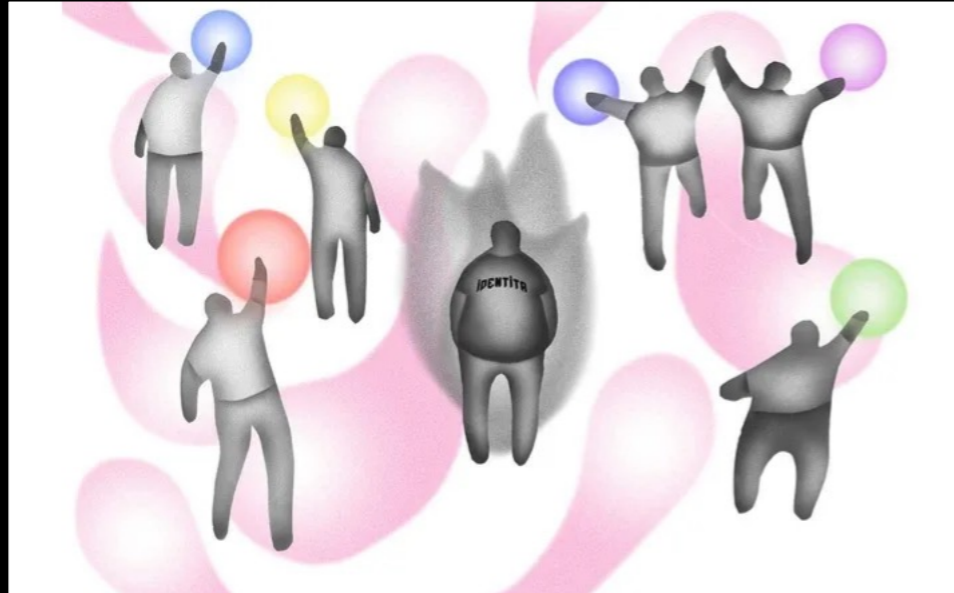
## What the Session Demonstrated (concise narrative)

The session demonstrated four points in quick succession.

**First**, a minimal cue stack (line → snap → blackout → hold → relight) showed how time and context can be treated as material that recomposes collective attention.

**Second**, brief context framing linked this to practice—my role as the Shaman in the production *Akiak* at Divadlo Polárka (4+)—and to theory (Drábek, [2022], on playful interaction as cognitive, socially co-evolving work for young people and adults alike), clarifying why simple theatrical tricks are effective without being prescriptive.

**Third**, a reception-first task (See-Analyse-Name) centred perceptual agency by sequencing—have a look at the picture → imagine → name it → discuss in a group → agree on a title—keeping evidence public before interpretation; titles diverged



**Figure 1.** What connects me with other people (summary). From 'Divadelnost – Activity: What connects me with other people' in theatrum.online (n.d.). Illustration by Karolina Srpková.

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Used with permission.

but remained discussable, because the evidence was shared.

Echoing Boal's (2008) spectator, the image-based task turns spectators into co-authors: description precedes interpretation, so agency is trained before meaning is fixed.

Fourth, a compact composition segment (movement score: build → fix → improve → interpret) made actorly tools visible and trainable (body/voice with memory/imagination/partnership) and situated rehearsal as method.

A short swap of roles—one group performing a score while another observed and attempted an interpretation—made visible how tiny timing shifts (a one-second hold, a faster transit between points) alter reading without changing the score itself. The wrap-up connected these demonstrations to sharing practices and to the Theatrum.online textbook as a practical source for activity cards, cue stacks, and reflection prompts.

### Why This Matters (discussion)

Taken together, these demonstrations support three linked claims. Time is malleable: tiny cueing choices—count-ins, one-second holds, recoveries—recompose attention and meaning. Context is co-authored: audiences' minds complete actions and images; pedagogy should design for what the room can add and keep interpretation open. Care is a method: playful, low-threshold structures plus ask-before-tell protocols lower risk while raising clarity. As Sennett argues in *Together*: "Mutual support is built into the genes of all social animals; they cooperate to accomplish what they can't do alone" (Sennett, 2012, p.18). This is precisely the ethic our structures aim to cultivate. Teacher takeaway: script cue stacks like lines, make evidence public before interpretation, and package activities as legible, shareable templates so practices can travel.

Time is not only malleable material but also the medium through which education and sharing occur; meeting in time—to score, hold, and release together—proves the strongest pedagogy.

In Fischer-Lichte's (2008) terms, our cue-based work activates the autopoietic feedback loop between performers and spectators; time is not only the background but the medium in which this event of transformation emerges.

### Teens' Perceptual Agency (concise)

We kept looking before telling primarily through an ask-before-tell protocol (see → say → mean) and by making evidence public (shared titles, visible cue stacks).

This sequencing preserves multiple readings without flattening difference and trains timing literacy in reception: participants notice order, duration, and holds as part of meaning. Following Zich's (2024) account of theatrical perception, the performance coheres as a synthesis achieved in the spectator's mind;

our see → say → mean protocol makes that synthesising work explicit and shareable.

Although this ELIA session involved professionals, the methods are designed and used for teen-facing practice.

### Theatrum.online (tool)

Theatrum.online operationalises this approach. Teachers can print, use, save, and share activity cards, cue-stack templates, and reflection prompts, and remix them across classes. Low-friction versioning keeps authorship clear while allowing practices to evolve; in this sense, the platform works as a lightweight common for teen-facing theatre pedagogy.

### Limitations and Future Work

This account reflects a single conference session with a mixed professional audience; time and group size limited depth. Beyond the session, we have delivered webinars and on-site workshops for educators across the Czech Republic, as well as lectures and workshops for teens at Theatre Faculty JAMU, and we are now building partnerships with European colleagues in different linguistic and cultural contexts to co-develop translations and context-sensitive adaptations of the toolkit and textbook. Next steps include pilot classes, sharing know-how, and evaluation. We aim to scale this collaboration with partner institutions and develop further language- and culture-specific versions of the Theatrum.online tool. We welcome enquiries from colleagues and institutions interested in collaboration, translation, or context-sensitive local adaptation.

## Conclusion

Sharing skills, knowledge, and experience matters because it clarifies the craft and expands the commons. For young people, open access to acting and theatre-making tools turns theatre from a finished artefact into a relational practice they can enter, test, and reshape. For artists and teachers, sharing is not a one-way donation but a discipline of attention: by naming our cue stacks, demonstrating timings, and keeping interpretation open, we become more consciously skillful in how we use our tools. The exchange is reciprocal: young audiences give back—through what they notice, title, and read—revealing timings, images, and contexts we might overlook. In Drábek's sense, such reciprocity fuels social co-evolution: learning flows both ways, and the work stays alive.

Practically, sharing practice and knowledge—lowering the barriers—increases transfer across classrooms and companies, and builds a language for collaboration (see → say → mean; build → fix → improve → interpret).

Ethically, it resists prescriptive readings and honours teens' perceptual agency. Platforms like *Theatrum.online* can hold this movement—templates, reflections, evolving scores—so that practices travel without losing authorship.

To share is to rehearse the art of attention together, and that is why it matters to youngsters and artists alike.

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## AI use disclosure

The author used generative AI tools (ChatGPT, OpenAI) for language editing, clarity improvements, and reference formatting only. No AI was used to generate the core scholarly content, data, analyses, or conclusions. The author reviewed, verified, and takes full responsibility for all content.



# PART III

## Artistic Intelligence Versus Artificial Intelligence

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# Paper Basket Artistic vs. Artificial Intelligence

An experimental workshop  
on the future and significance  
of artistic intelligence

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## Abstract

The *Paper Basket* workshop, developed by the Zurich Centre for Creative Economies (ZCCE) and the Quality Development Office of ZHdK, explored the role of **artistic intelligence** in a future increasingly shaped by **artificial intelligence (AI)**. Using Jerome C. Glenn's *Future Wheel* method, participants imagined art universities in a climate-neutral 2050 and examined how **artistic and AI** approach creativity, problem-solving, and failure differently. While **AI-generated ideas emphasised structure, efficiency, and measurable outcomes**, artistic processes focused on **openness, emotion, collaboration, and experimentation**. The workshop revealed that **artistic intelligence** thrives on uncertainty and failure, transforming them into creative potential. It proposed that future art education should value unpredictability and embrace the dialogue between **human and machine** intelligence. *Paper Basket* ultimately functioned as both experiment and metaphor, demonstrating how embracing error can drive learning, innovation, and imaginative thinking within the evolving landscape of art universities.

## Introduction

What role or significance does **artistic intelligence** have in a world where **artificial intelligence** is increasingly becoming a cultural co-producer? The workshop *Paper Basket*, developed by the Zurich Centre for Creative Economies (ZCCE) in cooperation with the Quality Development Office of the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK), took this question as the starting point for an experimental workshop. The format combined methods of future thinking with principles of artistic practice. It explored what art universities might look like in a climate-neutral future and what role human creativity could play in this.

## 1. Context and initial questions

The discussion about the relationship between **artificial** and **artistic intelligence** has gained considerable momentum in recent years. With the emergence of **generative AI systems**, the question of what 'creativity' actually means is shifting—as is the question of what skills a future generation of artists, designers, and researchers will need to remain capable of acting in this changed landscape.

At ZHdK, this debate is not theoretical, but institutionally relevant: How can art universities promote **artistic intelligence**, make it visible, and develop it further in the field of tension between technology, research, innovation, and social responsibility? Are we training/educating the right skills, or do curricula, examination logic, quality criteria, and facilities need to be changed fundamentally?

The *Paper Basket* workshop addressed this issue. It posited the thesis that **artistic intelligence** is not opposed to **artificial intelligence**, but rather represents a different, complementary understanding of knowledge, imagination, and failure.

A knowledge which is important for future education, cultural awareness in society, and technological innovation.

## 2. Artistic and artificial intelligence – two epistemic modes

In preparation for the workshop, the two forms of intelligence were compared in terms of their internal logic:

**Artificial Intelligence (AI)** operates on the basis of **logic, scaling, and optimisation**. It works with machine learning, recognises patterns, and produces predictions. Its goal is consistency and efficiency. It strives for perfection—and avoids errors as far as the training data allows.

Artistic intelligence, on the other hand, is based on the *human mind*, on perception, openness, emotions, intuition, improvisation, and critical thinking. It is experimental, reflective, and error-friendly. It does not regard irritations as disturbances, but as productive impulses. At its core, it is dialogical and social: it seeks resonance, not control.

While **artificial intelligence provides predictions**, artistic intelligence produces *questions*. It is not only a tool for problem solving but also an attitude of openness towards the unknown. Its process orientation allows us to change direction, find new solutions, and grow with experience.

This distinction was not only discussed theoretically in the workshop but also staged practically and examined experimentally.

### 3. Concept and objectives

The **Paper Basket** format was conceived as an *experimental laboratory* for future forms of learning and knowledge at art universities. The basic idea was to pit artistic and artificial intelligence against each other in parallel settings, to make their different potential for contributing to the transformation process of art universities tangible and visible. The title refers to a central metaphor of artistic practice—the **paper basket**, which stands for rejection, for failed attempts, and for the courage not to delete imperfect ideas, but to understand them as the starting point for new ways of thinking.

“Take your crazy ideas out of the paper basket and go!” was the motto.

The aim was to highlight the *creative power* of a *positive error culture*, and at the same time to explore the insights that arise when artistic and **artificial** intelligence are applied to the same question.

## 4. Methodology: The Future Wheel

The basic framework was the **Future Wheel method** developed by Jerome C. Glenn (2009), a participatory tool for future thinking. It is used to explore the primary, secondary, and tertiary consequences of a hypothetical event by arranging the results in concentric circles around a central question.

At ZHdK, this method is often used to open creative and discursive spaces, especially where boundaries between research, teaching, and artistic practice become blurred. Visual mapping supports networked thinking, reveals interactions, and promotes systemic perspectives. In the workshop, the Future Wheel served as a shared thinking and drawing tool that was suitable for both **algorithmic** and **intuitive** processes.

## 5. Scenario: Art College in 2050

The workshop began with a **visioning phase**. Participants were invited to imagine an art academy in the year 2050, in a future in which the **EU climate targets** have been **fully implemented**.

The scenario described a society in which resources are severely limited, digital processes are regulated, and consumption habits have changed radically.

Art colleges operate in an environment that prioritises sustainability, cooperation, and social impact. Teaching, research, and administration take place within the framework of civic programmes, materials and energy are scarce, and time becomes the most valuable commodity.

This fictional future landscape provided the resonance space for rethinking the role of **artistic intelligence**.

## 6. Workshop setting: Two worlds

The room was physically divided into two halves, a performative setting that made the dualism of **Artistic Intelligence (Art-I)** and **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** visible.

**On the AI side, the groups worked with a generative AI (ChatGPT) as a sparring partner: they used AI to develop ideas, design structures, and formulate narratives.**

On the Art-I side, participants worked with the so-called paper basket method. This involved first developing ideas freely and without restrictions, but then deliberately discarding them. A second Art-I group then took up these discarded concepts again and developed them further. Mistakes, irritations, and detours were explicitly desired. They opened new solutions, perspectives, and creative possibilities.

Both sides were instructed to work on the same initial question: What might the art university of the future look like—in a climate-neutral, post-digital, resource-conscious society?

## 7. Group work and process

The small groups (4–5 people each) were asked to use the Future Wheel to develop initial clusters of future consequences. From these, they were to derive fields of action for the areas of 'spaces and infrastructures' and 'skills and curricula'.

Each group then presented their visions in the form of a fictional press release announcing a concrete, strategic university project. The results of the group works were presented in plenary on a whiteboard and visually mapped in one of the following spheres: the sociopolitical, ecological-environmental, artistic, economic, or scientific-philosophical dimensions of society.

## 8. Results and observations

The results presented showed a clear pattern that could be reconstructed along the working methods of the two forms of intelligence.

### AI working groups

The two groups that worked with ChatGPT presented the following projects:

- **Art for the Future** – a project by the [fictional] Greenwood Art Academy, aimed at combining sustainability and communities. Students would work with local artists and with the community to promote sustainability and social change.
- **ChatGPT Art Academy – Championing Sustainability for 2050** – a project that proposed consistently aligning teaching, research, and artistic practice with environmental goals.

Both approaches were clearly structured, efficiently formulated, and they emphasised sustainability, resource management, and measurable impact by picking up on the scenario's specifications without developing ideas beyond them. According to the group members, AI primarily helped to organise terms, smooth narratives, and condense arguments. The process was described as 'too rational' and 'emotionally distant'. The projects were in the sociopolitical and ecological spheres.

### Art-I working groups

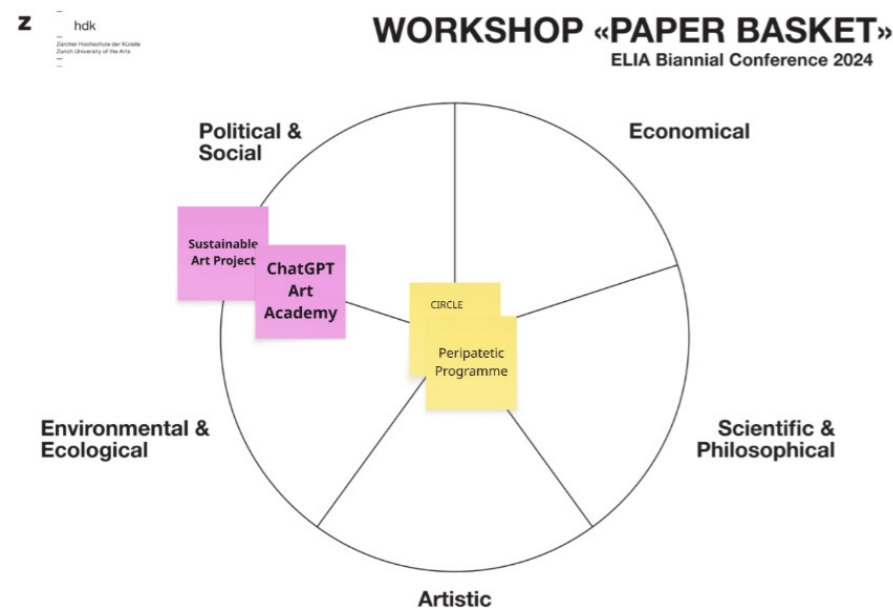
The groups that applied the paper basket method of artistic practices developed the following projects:

- The Peripatetic Programme was described as a five-year programme of the Community Council which, as in Aristotle's time, aims to focus on learning, observing, sharing, and exploring one's own and other communities by walking and wandering around.
- The project CIRCLE – The Solution of Everything described a school that would not only impart knowledge but also take on a social role. Its focus would be on bringing small communities together, promoting mutual understanding, strengthening them in their uniqueness and diversity, and facilitating exchange and collaboration to create a new holistic cultural ecosystem.

Both scenarios were holistically, socially, and emotionally charged. They combined ecological, social, philosophical, and cultural aspects, and emphasised community, empathy, and the aesthetic dimension of education.

The working process was experienced as inspiring, chaotic, energetic, and full of surprises by its group members.

In the plenary session, both projects were in the centre of the screen, at the intersection of all socially relevant dimensions.



**Figure 1.** Author's representation of the workshop results, based on visual mapping in the workshop *Paper Basket*, ELIA Biennial Conference 2024 (Milan).

The comparison revealed how differently the two forms of intelligence respond to the same question:

**AI thinks in terms of structures and probabilities and focuses on solutions from an ecological and economic perspective**, while artistic intelligence thinks in terms of relationships, collaborations, and possibilities. It tends to produce holistic, out-of-the-box approaches.

**In the feedback round, the members of the AI groups described their working methods as rather monotonous and dull. Responsibility was largely handed over to the AI. The participants felt more like extras, while the thinking process was taken over by AI.**

The Art-I groups described their production process as a lively, creative exchange among all members of the group. They all contributed in a stimulating and inspiring way, thereby supporting the development of more comprehensive solutions.

## 9. Insights: The power of failure

The **paper basket** proved to be a productive metaphor: What is often discarded in artistic practice is rarely worthless; frequently, the actual impulse for insight lies in the sketch, the failed attempt, or the irritation.

The workshop has shown that dealing with mistakes is not only an aesthetic but also an **epistemic practice**.

Artistic intelligence can transform failure into energy that creates movement, reinterpretation, resonance, and new possibilities.

**While AI strives for optimisation, artistic practice depends on allowing uncertainty.**

This difference could become central to the future design of art universities: their actual educational mission is not the reproduction of functioning systems, but the cultivation of the unpredictable.

## 10. Significance for art universities

The **Paper Basket** workshop made it clear that art universities can be understood as places where **different forms of intelligence** meet and are allowed to irritate each other. The ability to deal productively with contradictions, ambiguity, and ignorance could become a key competence in future curricula.

The combination of artistic thinking and **technological reflection** creates a space in which creativity is not replaced by efficiency but expanded by complexity.

For artistic research this means understanding AI not only as a tool but as a discourse partner, as a medium that reflects

and challenges human perception. **Artistic intelligence** will gain in importance and social relevance in the face of **artificial intelligence**, and artistic skills, like critical thinking and reflecting, will become increasingly important for the development of solutions and visions for social transformation processes.

## 11. Conclusion

The *Paper Basket* workshop was both a laboratory and a mirror: It revealed how differently thought processes and problem solving unfold in artificial and artistic settings. The results can be summarised in a simple formula:

- **Artificial intelligence** takes on structural, rational, and economic solutions.
- **Artistic intelligence** opens new spaces and creates imaginative, social, and holistic perspectives.
- **A culture of error** resonates more with **artistic intelligence**: It makes the processual, the unfinished, and the surprising a central learning moment.

Thus, the 'paper basket'—a symbol of rejection—became a symbol of a new attitude: **Artistic intelligence means *remaining open to the unpredictable*, even in the age of machines.**

'Paper Basket' is thus less a workshop than a thought experiment for future university development; an invitation to design educational spaces as places of experimentation, failure, and resumption, and to take **artistic intelligence** seriously as a social and imaginative resource.

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# Arts Plural as Method:

Operationalising Artistic  
Intelligence through the P+ARTS Project

Elisa Poli

p+arts

Partnership  
for Artistic Research  
in Technology  
and Sustainability

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## Abstract

The paper explores *Artistic Research* as a methodological, infrastructural, and governance framework through the case of **P+ARTS – Partnership for Artistic Research in Technology and Sustainability**, a national initiative funded by Italy's *PNRR – National Recovery and Resilience Plan* within the *AFAM – Higher Education in*

*Art, Music, and Dance* system. Drawing on European frameworks such as the *Florence Principles* (2016) and the *Vienna Declaration* (2020), the paper situates P+ARTS as a concrete model for translating *Arts Plural* into institutional practice. It analyses the project's pilot actions, digital infrastructures (repository and Academy Press), and

the first international double peer-reviewed conference *Unframing Knowledge* (Naples, 2025). Through these, *Artistic Intelligence* emerges as a transformative capacity linking ecological transition, digital innovation, and cultural sustainability, while preparing the ground for Italy's first *Framework in the Arts* aligned with European standards.

## 01.

## Introduction

The ELIA Biennial 2024, held in Milan, offered a privileged observatory for shared reflection on practices within European higher arts education. Under the theme *Arts Plural*, the biennial emphasised not only the diversity of artistic disciplines but also the need to enact plurality as a research method and institutional framework (ELIA, 2024). The central notion of *artistic intelligence* was introduced as a sociopolitical and methodological challenge: How can artistic research (AR) act as a recognised driver of educational reform, aesthetic transformation, and ecological innovation?

This paper responds by examining the case of **P+ARTS – Partnership for Artistic Research in Technology and Sustainability**, a large-scale initiative funded under the Italian **National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR)** through the European instrument **NextGenerationEU**. P+ARTS is coordinated by **NABA, Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti**, in collaboration with eight artistic institutions and two public universities:

- **Fondazione Accademia Teatro alla Scala** – specialised in performing arts.
- **Accademia di Belle Arti di Napoli** – focused on visual arts and digital media.
- **Conservatorio di Milano ‘Giuseppe Verdi’** – research in musical improvisation and emerging technologies.
- **Accademia di Belle Arti di Bari** – seminars on Mediterranean heritage and new media.
- **Conservatorio di Matera ‘E. R. Duni’** – expertise in sound ecosystems.
- **IAAD – Istituto d’Arte Applicata e Design** – projects in urban regeneration and social innovation.
- **SAE Institute Milano** – specialisation in educational video games and game studies.
- **Politecnico di Bari** – development of a digital platform for managing artistic content.
- **Libera Università di Bolzano** – theoretical research through artistic practice.

This consortium, which represents all six clusters of the Italian **AFAM** system (*Alta Formazione Artistica, Musicale e Coreutica* – Higher Artistic, Musical, and Choreutic Education), is supported by a network of international partners including

**ELIA – European League of Institutes of the Arts.** The project operates with a budget exceeding €4 million, runs from May 2024 to April 2026, and is structured around three main objectives: **(1) fostering an Italian artistic research culture; (2) driving innovation through artistic practices in line with European standards; and (3) redefining the role of artists as social and cultural agents.**

This essay argues that P+ARTS provides a model for operationalising the concept of *arts plural* through three interdependent dimensions:

## Method,

by experimenting with practice-based, interdisciplinary research;

## Infrastructure,

through the creation of a digital repository, a peer-reviewed Academy Press, and a biennial international conference;

## Governance,

by designing shared management systems that prepare the ground for a national framework with programmes and best practices for research in the arts, aligned with European documents such as the Florence Principles (2016) and the Vienna Declaration (2020).

By situating P+ARTS within the intellectual genealogy of ELIA and European AR policy, this contribution demonstrates how artistic intelligence can be institutionalised in the Italian context, generating original forms of economic sustainability, cultural participation, and technological creativity.

# 02 . European Frameworks for Artistic Research

The last two decades have witnessed the consolidation of artistic research across Europe. ELIA's *Share Handbook for Artistic Research Education* (2007) established early principles for recognising AR as a legitimate form of knowledge production, distinct from but interrelated with scientific inquiry. Borgdorff (2012) further theorised AR as a mode of epistemic inquiry in which artistic practice itself constitutes research. Two landmark documents – the *Florence Principles on the Doctorate in the Arts* (2016) and the *Vienna Declaration on Artistic Research* (2020) – set the standards for AR in higher education systems.

The Florence Principles outlined seven criteria, including the centrality of artistic practice, the development of new insights, and international peer review (ELIA, 2016). The Vienna Declaration reiterated the need for sustainable infrastructures, open access, and cross-sectoral collaboration (ERC, 2020). These frameworks align with broader European policy agendas:

## The New European Bauhaus

initiative links cultural creativity with ecological and digital transitions (European Commission, 2021).

## The European Green Deal

positions culture as a driver of sustainability, encouraging creative responses to environmental crises.

## Horizon Europe

emphasises research-creation projects that connect art, science, and technology.

Within this landscape, P+ARTS is significant because it represents the first large-scale attempt to embed AR within Italy's AFAM system, explicitly aligned with ELIA's principles while addressing long-standing national structural gaps.

# 03 . Italy's AFAM Landscape and the PNRR Opportunity

Italy's AFAM institutions – including academies of fine arts, conservatoires, dance academies, and higher institutes of design and applied arts – were formally recognised as higher education only in 1999 (Law 508/1999). Unlike universities, they lacked a developed research mandate, and doctoral-level programmes in the arts were only approved in 2024.

Until recently, AR in Italy was fragmented: small-scale projects, limited funding, and the absence of structural evaluation criteria. Unlike northern European contexts, where organised research and doctoral schools in the arts have flourished since the 1990s (e.g., the Netherlands, Finland, Austria), Italy lacked both infrastructures and governance systems to sustain AR at scale (Wilson & Van Ruiten, 2013).

## The NextGenerationEU (PNRR)

created an unprecedented opportunity to allocate resources aimed at strengthening research and internationalisation within AFAM.

P+ARTS is one of the flagship initiatives under this scheme, strategically designed to:

**connect**

AFAM institutions with universities, stakeholders, and international partners;

**produce**

a framework for Italian artistic research, including guidelines for doctoral pathways;

**create**

shared infrastructures (repository, publishing, conferences);

**align**

AR with European socio-artistic and digital transitions.

Thus, P+ARTS responds not only to artistic needs but also to the structural reforms envisioned by the PNRR.

# 04 . P+ARTS as Case Study

## 4.1. Method: Multi-epistemic Artistic Research

P+ARTS operationalises *arts plural* through six disciplinary clusters: design and applied arts; visual arts; theatre and performing arts; cinema and audiovisual; music; and arts and technology. These clusters intersect in pilot actions that embody plural methodologies.

Examples of interdisciplinary artistic actions already developed and visible on the website

[partsproject.eu](http://partsproject.eu) include:

### **Improvisation with AI**

collaborations between conservatoires and computer scientists exploring human-machine creativity.

### **Performative Mapping and Games Research**

integrating digital interaction with gaming for children, embodied didactic experimentation, and site-specific performances.

### **Visual and Digital Arts Experiments**

VR/AR installations, projection mapping, and cinematic interludes.

### **Ecological Design Projects**

informed by the New European Bauhaus, focusing on urban experiences and sustainable cultural agenda.

These methods are not ancillary but central: AR is defined here as an epistemic practice that generates knowledge through doing, making, and performing (Biggs & Karlsson, 2011). By situating AR within real-world challenges – ecological, digital, and social – P+ARTS affirms the broader societal role of artistic intelligence.

## 4.2. Infrastructure: Repository, Press, Conference

### **Digital Repository (P+ARTS Digital).**

Developed by the Politecnico di Bari, this platform adopts FAIR Data principles (*Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable*) and hosts multimodal outputs such as scores, installations, performances, and videos. It is conceived not merely as an archive but as a research tool that traces impact and enables open-access dissemination.

### **Academy Press.**

The first AFAM publishing house, coordinated by NABA, adheres to peer-review standards and publishes journals and books on AR. Its scientific committee includes national and international experts and works in synergy with the repository and conference proceedings.

### **Biennial Conference – *Unframing Knowledge* (Naples, 2025).**

Organised by NABA and hosted at the Academy of Fine Arts and the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, the conference received 185 submissions worldwide, selecting 34 academic papers and 21 PhD posters. Structured around seven thematic tracks, it provided a platform for AR to be publicly debated and internationally validated.

Together, these infrastructures position Italian artistic research within global networks while consolidating its national legitimacy.

## 4.3. Governance: Towards a National AR Programme

P+ARTS introduces a shared management model that balances public (60%) and private (40%) AFAM partners alongside universities. Governance is overseen by an International Board, with ELIA's participation ensuring European alignment. Key initiatives include:

### **Italian Guidelines**

**for Artistic Research Evaluation,**  
aligned with the Florence Principles and the Vienna Declaration.

### **National Doctoral Programme in the Arts,**

to be piloted through co-tutorships between AFAM institutions and relevant partners.

**National Prize for Artistic Research,**  
a proposal for positioning AR within Italy's cultural policy ecosystem.

This governance model addresses systemic weaknesses in AFAM, where research evaluation and doctoral programmes have long been absent.

## 05 . Unframing Knowledge Conference as Milestone

The *Unframing Knowledge* conference (Naples, 27–29 October 2025) represented a historic milestone: the first international double peer-reviewed AR conference organised by Italian AFAM institutions.

### Programme Structure.

Seven tracks explored epistemologies, AI practices, Mediterranean ecologies, exhibiting AR, and new ecologies of perception. The PhD Forum, unprecedented in Italy, connected doctoral candidates with peers from across Europe, creating a platform for exchange and future collaboration.

### Keynote Speakers.

Figures such as Jørn Mortensen (Vice-President of ELIA), Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (curator), Mauro Lanza (composer), Emanuele Coccia (philosopher), and Antonietta De Lillo (filmmaker) provided perspectives linking AR with the most advanced research fields in artistic disciplines and the theoretical frameworks that sustain them.

## Roundtables.

Policymakers and institutional leaders debated the challenges of integrating AR into Italy's higher education system. Representatives from **ANVUR** (National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research Institutes), **CNAM** (National Council for the Arts and Music), the **Ministry of Universities and Research (MUR)**, and the **Ministry of Culture (MIC)** participated, signalling strong policy engagement.

Beyond dissemination, the conference enacted governance: it tested conditions for doctoral programmes, evaluation frameworks, and inter-institutional dialogue.

## 06 . Towards an Italian National Artistic Research Structure

The **Thematic Work Package 1**, led by **ABANA**, focuses on building research capacity, aligning evaluation methods, and designing doctoral curricula.

Key elements include:

### International Exchanges

with research institutions, ensuring alignment with European standards.

### Faculty Training,

enabling staff to adopt AR methodologies.

### Extended AR Programmes,

designed as integration and reinforcement of doctoral studies, focusing on social, digital, and ecological practices.

By embedding doctoral frameworks within AFAM, P+ARTS directly addresses a structural lacuna in Italian higher arts education. If successful, the initiative will represent a paradigm shift, aligning Italy with European standards and consolidating AR as a recognised research domain.

# 07.

## Conclusions: Operationalising Artistic Intelligence

This paper has examined P+ARTS as a case study in operationalising *arts plural* through method, infrastructure, and governance. Inspired by ELIA's long-standing advocacy, P+ARTS demonstrates how AR can be institutionalised within Italy's AFAM system to address social, technological, and cultural challenges.

The concept of *artistic intelligence* is enacted here as a distributed capacity, generating knowledge and innovation through practice-based research. Pilot actions demonstrate methodological plurality; infrastructures such as the Academy Press and digital repository ensure sustainability; and governance initiatives prepare the ground for doctoral programmes and national evaluation systems.

Challenges remain: structural fragmentation between AFAM institutions and universities, the development of evaluation systems, and long-term sustainability beyond the PNRR. Yet the foundations laid by P+ARTS — particularly the repository, Academy Press, and AR framework — offer a transferable model for international contexts. Ultimately, P+ARTS extends ELIA's legacy into the Italian national system, enacting *arts plural* not as rhetoric but as lived practice and institutional transformation.

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Higher Arts Education in a  
Posthuman Era: Speculative  
Ideas for an Eco-Inspired  
Educational Design

Koenraad  
Hinnekind

## Abstract

This article explores how educational design in Higher Arts Education (HAE) can be reimagined through posthuman and eco-inspired perspectives that go beyond human-centred viewpoints. Drawing on the qualitative study ‘Walking an Ontological Turn’, it examines how ethical standards and social sustainability, defined as equity, inclusion, diversity, and well-being, can be promoted when educational design is seen as an ecology of human and nonhuman connections. Using speculative and participatory methods such as notional cartography, the study involved students, lecturers, and researchers in higher arts education to develop an *Ecology of Justice Archive* collaboratively. This process produced five speculative ideas that address issues related to representation, curriculum rigidity, exclusivity, and well-being, using concepts such as symbiosis, regeneration, composting, and homeostasis. The study contends that eco-inspired educational design reveals educational practices in higher arts education as an ongoing process of co-becoming and ethical attunement, encouraging systemic change towards socially sustainable futures in HAE.

## Introduction

In a posthuman era, Higher Arts Education (HAE) faces growing challenges in upholding ethical standards and promoting social sustainability. Traditional human-centred approaches often fail to engage with nonhuman perspectives or recognise the interdependence of all entities shaping learning environments in HAE. In an era characterised by ecological and technological challenges and opportunities, the need for educational design that embraces these interconnections has become urgent (Hochtritt et al., 2017; Sclater, 2019; Heinrich & Kørnøv, 2022). Educational design is the iterative process of planning and preparing educational activities, referring to the ongoing development of solutions to practical and complex educational challenges (McKenney & Reeves, 2019).

This article presents a qualitative study, titled ‘Walking an Ontological Turn’, which reimagines educational design in HAE through a posthuman and eco-inspired perspective (Hinnekin, Elen & Simons, 2025).

The study examines how ethical standards and social sustainability can be enhanced when educational design is considered a dynamic ecology of human and nonhuman relationships. It aligns with the call to rethink ethics within the *posthuman condition* (Braidotti, 2013, 2019), a reality shaped by the convergence of cultural, technological, and historical forces that highlight the need to challenge the idea of the human as a central, autonomous actor.

The study ‘Walking an Ontological Turn’ explores how stakeholders in HAE can foster social sustainability, broadly defined as equity, inclusion, diversity, and social well-being (Ajmal et al., 2018; Broadhead, 2022; Buller, 2021; Vallance et al., 2011), using speculative and relational methods. It combines theory and practice to investigate how posthumanism and eco-inspired thinking can shape educational design in HAE beyond human-centred paradigms (Hayes, 2021; Hossain, 2024; Leonard, 2020; Jandrić & Ford, 2022; Reinertsen, 2016).

At the heart of this inquiry is an ethical shift: from ego-centric towards eco-inspired educational design. Educational practices in HAE often reinforce exclusivity, mastery, and individual authorship, which are rooted in Western or anthropocentric epistemologies. A posthuman orientation and eco-inspired educational design instead recognises the agency of materials, technologies, and environments, situating artistic learning within broader networks of relations (Carstens, 2016; Hood & Kraehe, 2017; Jagodzinski, 2017).

Drawing on ontology, agency, and politics defined within the theoretical traces of New Materialism (Burchell & Foucault, 1991; Barad, 2007; Cool & Frost, 2010; Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2012), the study examines how (power) relations shape what 'counts' and who or what is 'recognised' within HAE. By exploring educational design as an entangled process of becoming, rather than a fixed system of transmission, the study 'Walking an Ontological Turn' reframes art educational processes as a collaborative world-making practice.

The study revolves around two guiding questions: (1) How can stakeholders in HAE catalyse transformation towards ethical decision-making and social sustainability that move beyond human-centred frameworks? (2) How can an ecology of justice that decentralises the human foster more equitable and sustainable futures in HAE? In exploring these questions, the study positions HAE as a site where multiple realities are negotiated.

It invites all stakeholders in HAE to consider what becomes possible when educational design embraces ontological plurality and more-than-human participation; when it begins, quite literally, to *walk an ontological turn* (Sismondo, 2015; Springgay & Truman, 2018; Vivante, 1980; Walsh et al., 2021).

## Educational Design in Higher Arts Education Institutions

The context in which HAE develops its educational design has become increasingly complex. Hybrid methods, interdisciplinary curricula, and digital transformation challenge long-standing assumptions about the master-apprentice model and artistic independence in art educational settings (Srinivasa et al., 2022). Within this changing landscape, the posthuman condition urges educators to reconsider how anthropocentric structures sustain inequality and exclusion (Braidotti, 2019).

Traditional art educational practices emphasise individual mastery and artistic autonomy, often prioritising the human subject and culture as the centre of meaning-making. However, posthuman perspectives in HAE (Bayley, 2018; Taylor & Bayley, 2019; Hickey-Moody & Page, 2015) advocate for relational encounters among humans, materials, and technologies—entities that relationally and collectively enact. Such approaches challenge the classical, often hierarchical, division between binaries that determine what currently is and what could or should become in educational design.

From this relational perspective, educational design becomes an ecology of interdependence, where artistic and educational aspects, both physical and digital, function as intertwined environments composed of human and nonhuman actors or agencies. Recognising these connections broadens the ethical and political scope of educational design in HAE by emphasising the importance of more-than-human agencies (Jaque et al., 2021) that underpin artistic and educational processes.

Educational design in HAE is shaped by competing epistemologies and ontologies, which differ in their views of what is fundamental or valuable. Power relations influence which knowledge systems are recognised, and which are marginalised (Burchell & Foucault, 1991). Postcolonial and feminist perspectives have shown that dominant humanist paradigms often exclude alternative ontologies, thereby perpetuating inequality (Cotrim, 2023).

Acknowledging relationality and multiplicity shifts educational design from focusing on how and why we know (epistemology) to what exists through relationships (ontology). It emphasises how artistic learning arises through interconnected relationships between bodies, materials, and environments. Educational design thus becomes an ethical act, as it shapes the very conditions through which learning and being in the world take place.

Recent art education scholarship increasingly addresses issues of decolonisation, identity, and social justice (Bolden & Jeanneret, 2021; Bae-Dimitriadis, 2024; Huard, 2024). Indigenous scholars and artists have contributed to relational perspectives grounded

in reciprocity and ecological awareness (Cohen, Espelie & Etherington, 2023). All this work aligns with the ontological turn, which challenges Western dualisms and insists on multiple, relationally constituted realities (Holbraad & Pederson, 2017). This may lead to a novel approach to educational design in HAE.

From a posthuman perspective, educational design is not merely a human project but a site of intra-action (Barad, 2007), a process in which entities emerge through relations rather than pre-exist them. This means that human and more-than-human entities not only co-construct learning environments, but their agency enables these environments to ‘unfold’ or ‘enact’. Instead of viewing educational design as an external structure imposed on learners, walking an *ontological turn* positions learning as a relational process that does not represent something intentionally planned or foreseen. Instead, it is a continuous act of co-creating realities (worlds) through entangled encounters among humans and more-than-humans, all of which are actants (Latour, 2005) in the process of meaning-making.

*Walking an ontological turn* challenges the idea that education begins with human intention. It suggests that non-human agencies and perspectives—including biotic and abiotic elements such as natural forces, organic or recycled materials, algorithms, or digital code—assert their own terms of involvement. Recognising this agency broadens the scope of educational design from merely functional planning to ethical attunement, exploring how educational environments might support understanding, flourishing, care, or ethical guidance for both human and nonhuman agencies.

## Walking an Ontological Turn

The study ‘Walking an Ontological Turn’ was carried out at LUCA School of Arts (2024), Fontys Hogeschool Tilburg (2025), and the School of Commons (ZHdK, 2025). It is organised as a research intervention employing speculative and participatory methods to reimagine educational design through posthuman and eco-inspired principles. Central to the study is the post-qualitative method of *Notional Cartography*, an open-ended mapping process that integrates group dialogue, tactile engagement, and speculative inquiry (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016; Lather & St. Pierre; St. Pierre, 2019; Rousell, 2021).

Notional cartography allows participants to produce diagrams and visual assemblages that trace, using sets of cards and coloured strings, relations among ethical concerns and speculative ideas to address these concerns. Rather than representing an external reality, the method aims to enact a speculative one. Students, lecturers, and researchers worked in small groups using sets of cards devised to encourage discussion and speculation.

These cards are organised into three categories: (1) *diffractive cards*, which address issues of ethics and social sustainability in HAE; (2) *continuum cards*, introducing concepts such as symbiosis, homeostasis, regeneration, and composting as metaphors for educational design processes; and (3) *question cards*, explicitly linked to the diffractive and continuum card sets by prompting reflection and speculative thinking.

Through these materials, participants collaboratively constructed an *Ecology of Justice Map*, serving as a visual archive that connects ethical concerns with speculative ideas, addressing social sustainability in educational design through ecological dimensions and concepts (fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** Participants engaging with notional cartography to develop an Ecology of Justice Map (photo taken by Koenraad Hinnekint with the consent of everyone involved).

The research intervention comprised two speculative journeys. The first, *the diffractive zone*, encouraged participants to explore existing inequities and ethical tensions in HAE from a human-centred perspective. Using diffractive cards, they mapped how structures of exclusion or hierarchy persist and how stakeholders in HAE hinder themselves from challenging these structures. The second, *the continuum zone*, shifted the discussion towards eco-inspired educational design. Participants revisited their previous mapping through the lens of natural systems, using continuum cards to generate speculative ideas that reimagine educational design. Together, the work in the diffractive and continuum zones created a collective artefact, the *Ecology of Justice Archive*, in which a collection of challenges and speculative ideas for educational design in a posthuman art school is connected to a multiplicity of educational spaces (fig. 2).



**Figure 2.** Ecology of Justice Archive (photo taken by Koenraad Hinnekint with the consent of everyone involved).

## Conceptual Insights and Speculative Ideas

From this *Ecology of Justice Archive*, several conceptual insights emerged. Participants in the speculative adventures described educational design in HAE as an *ecosystem of relations* where each component, human and nonhuman, contributes to creating socially sustainable learning environments. They observed that within these environments, an ontological turn does not marginalise the human but repositions it within a web of *co-becoming* and a commitment to *affirmative ethics*, referencing Braidotti, who called this repositioning a ‘highly generative moment for the human’ (Braidotti, 2019, p. 153). The phrase ‘unfolding the posthuman art school’ was proposed for this repositioning.

The speculative investigation in this *Ecology of Justice Archive* shows how posthuman thought can shape educational design in HAE. Instead of viewing educational practices through social or cultural lenses, the archive demonstrates how an *eco-inspired approach* invites focus on the inherent qualities and agencies of things themselves (Harman, 2018, 2019; Latour, 2005). In this way, *walking an ontological turn* is more than just a metaphor. The walk signifies a shift from culture-centred epistemology to a nature-oriented ontology, from merely knowing about educational practices to *being-with* or *within* them. Educational design, therefore, becomes a walk into something that ‘unfolds’, an embodied process of reworlding where all stakeholders in HAE learn to think with, rather than about, the material, social, and ecological entanglements that form educational practices (Bayley, 2018; Bayley & Chan, 2023; Bolden & Jeanneret, 2021).

Adopting an ontological perspective leads to an *eco-inspired view* of educational design, integrating ethical, social, and environmental dimensions. This perspective aligns with critical pedagogy and ecopedagogy (Kahn, 2010; Jandrić & Ford, 2022), considering educational environments and practices as dynamic systems that promote interdependence beyond human determinism.

The study ‘Walking an Ontological Turn’ described above revealed many speculative ideas offering eco-inspired solutions to ethical and social sustainability challenges in HAE. The authors of this study utilised these suggestions to develop the five speculative ideas outlined below. All participants in the study agreed to the author’s request to generate speculative ideas from the archives to which they contributed.

The development of these five speculative ideas followed a systematic approach. It began with a thematic analysis of the data collected in the diffractive zone, leading to a list of issues and challenges that demonstrate how a human-centred focus can hinder social sustainability in HAE. Next, analysing and coding the data gathered in the continuum zone helped synthesise all ideas on addressing these issues from an eco-inspired perspective. Finally, a speculative thinking method

that considers how objects or systems might operate in alternative realities resulted in five speculative ideas related to eco-inspired design. In this final stage, the authors used artificial intelligence as a more-than-human partner to help structure these ideas.

The five speculative ideas outlined below show how an eco-inspired approach can shift human-centred views and methods in educational design. Each idea follows a consistent structure. It starts by identifying a specific challenge related to social sustainability (1), then highlights the limitations of a human-centred approach in addressing this challenge (2). Next, it presents a speculative idea, proposing a hypothetical solution driven by an eco-inspired perspective (3). Finally, it explains how the ontological turn is incorporated (4).

### *Speculative idea 1*

*Sustainability issue (1):* Fossilised representation in HAE. *Human-centred focus (2):* HAE often emphasises Western and Eurocentric viewpoints, underrepresenting the contributions of Indigenous, Black, LGBTQ+, and marginalised communities. This exclusion results from a lack of diversity among faculty and leadership, as well as limited awareness and empathy towards these perspectives.

*Eco-inspired solution (3):* Building on symbiosis and regeneration, this speculative idea proposes that HAE should foster partnerships with other cultural communities, creating a disrupted art history that embraces multiplicity and diversity.

Symbiosis allows diverse contributions to coexist without overshadowing one another, while regeneration fosters a dynamic, multidimensional space for ongoing growth and resilience in curriculum content and representation. *The ontological turn in action (4):* This speculative idea challenges the human-centred tendency to prioritise Eurocentric perspectives by introducing a symbiotic and regenerative model.

Symbiosis decentralises human agency by emphasising coexistence and interdependence among diverse contributions from human and more-than-human systems or agencies.

Regeneration moves away from fixed historical canons, allowing educational content to evolve within an organic, living system where various forms of knowledge interact dynamically.

These actions embody an ontological turn by reframing educational design as an interconnected, more-than-human ecosystem rather than a linear, human-driven narrative.

### *Speculative idea 2*

*Sustainability issue (1):* Rigid structures in curriculum development. *Human-centred focus (2):* Curricula in HAE often remain inflexible and conform to established standards of high art culture and quality, frequently excluding unfamiliar, indigenous, endemic, non-native, or non-Western cultural elements.

This rigidity hampers the replacement of outdated content with new and diverse perspectives. *Eco-inspired solution (3):* Inspired by composting, this speculative idea proposes a curricular composting process where outdated and new ideas intertwine to create fertile ground for curriculum development. This layering of perspectives encourages slow, cyclical renewal and intervention techniques such as new readings or multilayered discussions that promote transformation. Through this approach, the curriculum can continually regenerate, allowing a flexible, inclusive, and context-sensitive structure to emerge. *The ontological turn in action (4):* Composting as a metaphor challenges human-centric educational rigidity by emphasising natural decay, renewal, and transformation processes. Instead of assuming that human-selected content remains fixed, this model conceives curricula as dynamic, layered compositions that shift and adapt through their entanglements with various forms of knowledge. It actualises the ontological turn by rendering educational design as a processual, more-than-human entity that evolves beyond human control or predetermined structures.

### *Speculative idea 3*

*Sustainability issue* (1): A strong focus on critical functioning and artistic success. *Human-centred focus* (2): In its emphasis on critical functioning and artistic success, HAE traditionally concentrates on skill development and artistic performance, often neglecting self-care and emotional well-being, which can lead to stress and mental health challenges. *Eco-inspired solution* (3): Drawing on the metaphor of homeostasis, this speculative idea emphasises the importance of balancing the focus on 'ego' with that on 'eco'. This educational design proposes spaces prioritising time, interdependence, and collaborative growth. The model considers emotional resilience and self-care as vital, integral elements in fostering an environment that nurtures a sustainable Third Space where participants collectively cultivate a resilient ecosystem for learning and growth. *The ontological turn in action* (4): Speculative idea three challenges the human-centric focus on artistic mastery and competition by drawing on homeostasis, an ecological concept of balance. Instead of emphasising individual achievement, it highlights relational equilibrium, situating artistic education within a broader ecosystem of interdependence, resilience, and care. The shift from ego-driven success to eco-inspired social sustainability exemplifies the ontological turn by connecting educational design to the materials and affective entanglements of the environments in which learning occurs.

### *Speculative idea 4*

*Sustainability issue* (1): Exclusive admissions practices. *Human-centred focus* (2): Admissions procedures in HAE institutions often favour students from privileged or traditional backgrounds, limiting opportunities for those from diverse or non-traditional backgrounds. Deeply embedded evaluation systems and societal biases sustain, amplify, or reinforce this issue. *Eco-inspired solution* (3): Drawing from homeostasis, this speculative concept proposes an admissions model based on a feedback loop and organic balance. By introducing trial periods or easing specific admission barriers, institutions could allow diverse candidates to enter without strict requirements and assess outcomes

through regular feedback, rather than standardised assessments. Furthermore, a symbiotic relationship between the applicant and the admission jury would enhance mutual support, fostering an inclusive environment that benefits both parties. *The ontological turn in action* (4): Traditional admissions rely on human-defined gatekeeping structures, reinforcing hierarchical inclusion and exclusion mechanisms. Speculative idea four introduces a model inspired by ecological feedback loops, shifting the focus towards adaptive and responsive systems that balance diverse inputs. Homeostasis in this context challenges the notion of fixed academic merit, advocating for a more dynamic and entangled admissions process where eligibility is co-constituted through ongoing interactions rather than predefined human judgements.

### *Speculative idea 5*

*Sustainability issue* (1): Failing to accommodate diverse learning styles. *Human-centred focus* (2): Traditional pedagogies in HAE emphasise standard competencies and efficiency. They are often driven by competition and cultural or socio-economic pressures and may not support diverse learning styles or backgrounds. *Eco-inspired solution* (3): This speculative idea proposes a posthuman framework in which humans are interconnected with other entities (natural or material), fostering a more egalitarian educational ecosystem. By shifting focus from individual achievement to collective resilience and interdependence, this model supports a learning environment that is adaptable to various needs and encourages collaboration among diverse stakeholders. This approach prioritises human relationships and recognises the agency of non-human elements in cultivating a resilient and interconnected educational space. *The ontological turn in action* (4): The shift from individual achievement to collective resilience and interdependence demonstrates the ontological turn by situating learning within a wider network of relationships that include human and nonhuman actors (e.g., natural elements, material agencies, and technological infrastructures). This posthuman framework recognises that knowledge and learning are co-produced through entanglements rather than being solely human-driven endeavours.

## Conclusion

Exploring speculative ideas to address the posthuman condition in HAE reveals eco-inspired ways to rethink educational design beyond anthropocentrism. Participants in the study 'Walking an Ontological Turn' successfully reimagined human-nonhuman relationships through a post-qualitative mapping practice that visualises the co-emergence of ideas, relations, and agencies. Through two speculative adventures, participants identify problematic issues and generate responses, resulting in an *Ecology of Justice Map*, which forms the basis for developing speculative ideas. These outcomes demonstrate how educational design in HAE can integrate artistic, academic, ethical, and ecological dimensions, aligning them with a more-than-human perspective on educational design for an art school in a posthuman era. The study shows that ethical decision-making in HAE grows from interdependence and ecological reciprocity, framing educational design as an unfolding and evolving system sustained by ongoing relational negotiations. Adopting posthuman and speculative approaches fosters systemic transformation, enabling the construction of more socially sustainable futures for higher arts education.

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**Embracing Imperfections** Elin Festøy | University of Inland Norway **to Build Digital Trust**

**This essay explores how the modern impulse to rely on AI for improving one's communication may undermine trust and authentic human connection. It advocates for a shift from linear, controlled messaging towards interactive experiences that offer agency and foster trust by building reliable, interpersonal relationships.**

**The author reflects on their PhD in artistic practice, describing how creators should change their perspective from being an 'auteur' of a narrative to being the 'host' of an experience. The agency offered by an interactive experience can motivate a stronger sense of interpersonal trust than one-way media and thus create more transformative, participant-driven sense-making.**

**The essay concludes that a better understanding of non-verbal, emotionally charged communication is needed. It underlines the important role of artistic research in exploring how human biology and emotions influence our communication in ways that cannot precisely be replicated or understood by AI.**

## **Embracing the Digital Imperfections to Build Trust**

### **Introduction**

Most of humanity is only a click away. Still, many of us feel more alone than ever (Smith & Alheneidi, 2023). The digital potential for closer human interaction, which should be self-evident, given the reduced distance between individuals, appears to be drowning in a relentless stream of filtered and perfected posing on social media, mixed with destructive trolling and content created more for marketing or ad revenue rather than truthful communication. These digital media trends have already led to what has been called 'a crisis of trust' (Sterrett et al., 2019), and now the current infatuation with AI seems to be making things worse. Many have started to use AI to perfect their text and images (Marr, 2023). We use AI as yet another photo filter, generating an even more 'picture-perfect' profile to show the world.

This essay is not an attempt at evaluating the value or damage of AI use but aims to explore the consequences of the increased polishing of our online presence. The following discussion argues that we need a greater understanding of non-verbal communication and reflects on the transformative potential of interactive experiences.

## Filtering 'Too

## Good

## Until to

## Be

## It's True?

It can be said that the ubiquitous availability of AI tools that can polish our communication can be democratising (Chehoudi, 2025), making the removal of irrelevant details like bad grammar or bad hair days easily accessible to all. New and value-creating uses for AI will also surely emerge. Yet, using AI to edit one's communication still introduces a layer of manipulation, subtly altering or concealing facts to make the message appear more polished. This use of AI can break down trust (Statista, 2025). In 'Building Communities of Trust', Ann E. Feldman states: "Trust is a key to creating positive social impact. Without trust, social change is unsustainable" (Feldman, 2022). She also warns how little it takes to break down existing trust: "Trust is something earned. It can take a long time to build and can evaporate in a single ill-advised interaction" (p. 2).

Exploring how the use of AI affects trust generation needs to start by acknowledging that 'trust' is a challenging concept without a clear definition. Thomas W. Simpson's article 'What is Trust?' (Simpson, 2012) lists several different examples, mentioning how we can put our trust in humans, knowledge, or objects. This article focuses on trust between humans. Mirko Tagliaferri defines interpersonal trust as an attitude belonging to a relationship. It is built over time, and the relationship must offer both parties the freedom to choose whether to rely on the other or withdraw from the relationship (Tagliaferri, 2023).

He concludes that the emergence of trust is possible in online environments, defined as 'a virtual space in which two (or more) agents can interact' (p. 234) through software. However, trust is an attitude, which means that the relationship must be between an attitude-bearer and 'an agent towards which attitudes can be directed' (p. 228). Tagliaferri thus excludes the possibility of AI being capable of generating trust, as he states: "The communicating agent must be a cognitive attitudes bearer with affective capacities and genuine moral values" (p. 251). In other words, if we use AI tools to edit our communication, our strive for perfection is likely to weaken or destroy the trust necessary for the communication to have positive social impact.<sup>1</sup>

## Freedom

## vs.

## Power

## Play

While this might indicate the damage that can be done when editing away individual quirks or imperfections, it does not account for the strong impulse many feel to do so. According to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, to communicate in the dominant and accepted way can be more important than what is said:

**From [Bourdieu's] sociological point of view there is thus no such thing as *the* language or *the* culture (or *the* knowledge), only that which is more or less dominant (accepted) in any context. The 'greatness' of individual producers—artists, intellectuals—resides not in what they have to say, i.e. their value in the market in question at the time. The operation of the field, and the success of any individual project within it, depends, in large part, upon the creation and the maintenance of complicity between the agents, a collective illusion of belief and good faith (Jenkins, 1992, p. 24).**

<sup>1</sup> It is here worth noting that when today's AI filters edit text and audiovisual material in order to look "better", this involves adapting it to be more similar to previous online communication. The process generalises and tones down or removes distinctive, individual traits.

Viewed in this light, the appearance of communicating in a way that looks 'right' becomes more important even than what is actually conveyed. It follows that communication often has a transformative effect on the receiver, more because of this 'illusion of belief and good faith' than because of its specific contents and messaging. I think we can all think of examples of this effect—as for instance online echo chambers—which are even named for the way their participants echo each other's views (Diaz Ruiz & Nilsson, 2023). Bourdieu's view presents communication as a power structure between agents, while generating interpersonal trust needs to be built on a reliable relationship offering the agents freedom. Seen in this light, AI editing strengthens the effect of communication by making it more alike to the dominant and accepted formats but weakens it if the aim is to build interpersonal trust. This outlines a dichotomy between communication that dominates and communication that offers freedom reliably over time. These different perspectives are interestingly also characteristics belonging to two of our current mass media formats.

Traditional linear mass media are categorised by an asymmetric power structure (Kucherenko, 2016). Distribution technologies like the printing press, post, radio waves, cinema networks or broadcasting are based on linear storytelling, where one creative vision is presented for a large audience, which is given no or very limited opportunity to influence the material. The creator controls the material fully, and the role offered the receiver is that of a passive audience. The only agency given is the room to reflect on the messaging in the linear material, but without the fruitful process of interactive discussion and exploration. This is the dominating communication format that we have now introduced onto our digital platforms, mostly without any adjustment to the interactive potential of digital media.<sup>2</sup> It is also the dominating media formats of Bourdieu's time.

The last couple of decades have introduced new online media formats that are building relationships that offer agency. Where the printing press or broadcasting can't support two-way dialogue, the ability to deliver interactivity is one of the major strengths of digital platforms. It has been embraced by new generations who have not grown up solely with traditional linear media formats (Media Insight Project, 2022). They are instead expecting to be able to interact with their influencers or computer game developers. This two-way communication with content makers creates online communities that are in constant dialogue with the creators they care about. Comments on the channels of large IP platforms are read by the creators and responded to, showing the community that they listen in order to build long-standing relationships that keep people engaged and interested (Wong & Lee, 2022). Here, it is easy to recognise the factors Tagliaferri describes as important in generating trust—creators building reliable relationships with their communities over time while appearing as cognitive attitude bearers with affective capacities.

<sup>2</sup>Most media houses are using digital platforms to distribute their contents with limited opportunity to comment on the material. This lets the audience discuss and comment among themselves, but seldom opens up for actual two-way dialogue with the creators.

## Learning Game

## from Design

I believe that we need a conscious attitude shift in the way we communicate, moving away from traditional modes and towards harnessing the full potential of the agency offered by digital technology. We have traditionally talked about communication as an act between actor A and actor B, discussing how A can shape a messaging to be received and encoded by B (Fornäs, 2024). To facilitate transformation through interpersonal trust, we instead need to see communication as an activity shared by two actors that both participate in a relationship over time. As a creator of digital content to be distributed on online platforms, this means that the main challenge becomes to motivate the participants to keep interacting and responding.<sup>3</sup> After all, if a participant stops interacting, then all communication stops, as with it the hope for further transformative results. This motivational challenge is at the core of all computer game design, which is a field offering interesting lessons in how to build relationships through offering agency (Salen & Zimmerman, 2004). Game design also provides

us with a useful term to describe the sense-making that is created through a continued relationship. The result of an interactive relationship lies in the participant's personal user journey, consisting of their experiences, reflection, and learning while interacting. Thus, the message is not something shaped by a creator and transported to a receiver but the emotions and reflections experienced by the participant.

**Creators should think of the media production as an element that facilitates a dialogue between themselves and the experience's participants. The processing of a media experience creates a user journey over time that influences the relationship that is created between the participant and the creator (Festøy, 2023).<sup>4</sup>**

With a background in linear media, I did my PhD in artistic research exploring how to communicate nonfiction topics through offering agency instead of linear storytelling. The work consisted of four consecutive concept sketches for VR, where each new iteration was formed by my need to replace details and facts with challenges shaped to motivate the participant to reflect. The aim was to motivate a user journey that made the participant shape their own process of sense-making. Instead of me trying to shape a message that the participant was to passively adopt, they were free to conclude on their own with what the message of the digital experience was.<sup>5</sup>

This artistic process resulted in a new personal insight. As a creator, I had to leave my previous role of auteur—being in control of a message that I push out to an audience—and instead to adapt to the role of a host, facilitating and inviting participation and motivating continued interaction. I also had to ensure that the context for the interaction was trust-inducing—showing that the digital experience recognised the presence of the participant, respected their integrity and freedom to interact or not, and that they could interact safely. The experience needed to be reliable—consistent and respectful to the participant's personal moral and integrity.

The artistic development journey made it clear that my approach as a creator was too focused on my own motivation to communicate, and not enough on how to motivate the participant to explore. I kept working like a linear storyteller—thinking about all I wished to tell instead of the participant's interest in engaging with the material. The first concept sketch focused on narrative while hardly offering the participant any agency. The second presented information in a more interactive landscape but failed in motivating exploration. The third introduced a companion and replaced text with challenges but did not manage to create personal relevance. By concept sketch number four, my work had evolved into a design where everything was focused on the participant's agency and challenges. Nothing is told. Information is given indirectly by the way the surroundings and context is

shaped. I started thinking about the digital experience as a storytelling space designed as an 'obstacle course', where the participant's reflections on what choices to make dominates the emotional and cognitive result of their user journey.

**In order to not push participants into objectifying, dualistic positions, it becomes important to ensure that my interactive experiences—which are works that reflect me as the creator—present the participants with an agency that levels out the power imbalance that might otherwise exist. I should avoid methods, genres, or formats that indicate any supremacy or authority or contain hidden manipulation, and make sure that I give agency and control of the material to my participant (Festøy, 2023).<sup>6</sup>**

As a creator, I am no longer a storyteller, but instead a host and facilitator inviting a participant into an environment: "I wish to create a meeting with the participant—to show respect in order to create a more even dialogue between us" (Festøy, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> I will use the term participant instead of the terms players or users, as the former is more neutral regarding the motivation to interact. It also highlights that the person is actively participating in the communication.

<sup>4</sup> Online exposition, page: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1363914/1900165>

<sup>5</sup> I here discuss communication as a relationship between software and a participant, with the creator shaping the software to offer meaningful interactivity in their stead.

<sup>6</sup> Online exposition, page <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/1363914/1900350>

## Giving Up Control

Changing my perspective from being an auteur of linear storytelling to becoming a host of an interactive environment means that I am giving away control over the narrative. Although a carefully crafted voice-over might give me as the creator the belief that I correctly communicate nuances and details, this belief will be false if the participant doesn't trust me or listen to my narrative. If I instead craft interactive challenges that the participant is motivated to explore, they will actively be engaging with the material and learn from their personal experience. The creative challenge changes into developing contexts and agency that indirectly demonstrate the topics they wish to present.

This involves a creative process combining the need to motivate continued interaction and processing with challenges and gameplay that make the participant reflect on relevant issues and dilemmas. The audiovisual—and maybe also bionic—art and impulses create an emotive context while linear voice-over or text can offer supporting information. But the main experience for the participant will be to reflect on the context and their personal experience in order to decide how to interact. It is a process that engages our

cognitive decision-making and that is heavily based on emotions. To communicate a creator's intention through agency thus involves understanding how to engage human emotions, to design challenges, and to communicate through context: "Intention, transfer, and persistence are three cornerstones for successful transformational game design" (Culyba, 2018). Intentions need to be communicated through the shaping of more than words in ways that elicit trust and motivate decision-making. The material must be relevant to the individual participants. With experiences including digital characters or avatars, we will also need to understand how body language communicates and influences us in non-verbal ways.

This is where we can return to the topic of AI filtering. The smoothing out of individual traits removes human details that communicate in ways we don't fully understand. The sense that something important is being lost by this technological development is not new a new idea. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, thinkers and artists like John Ruskin and William Morris reacted to the industrialisation that was able to mass produce products of higher quality than ever before, starting the wave of consumerism (Triggs, 2012). They felt that

something was being lost in the massive volume of sameness that was being produced and instead turned to craft—to the creative process and the lessons that could be made by hands interacting with material. As Swedish arts and crafts artist Karin Larsson put it: "The hand should show" (Högardh-Ihr, 2010, p. 88)—meaning that leaving the handmade imperfections from the creative process communicated the care and process and made it part of the finished piece.

More artistic and academic research is needed to learn how to harness the strong potential for trustworthy and engaging communication that exists in digital, interactive media. This includes creating a better understanding of non-verbal communication and involves artistic exploration of the craft and creative processes that demonstrate our intentions

and individuality—created by the interplay of human brains and bodies. AI filtering can be seen as a new wave of standardisation hiding the creator's hands. The result will be a better understanding of the differences in communication generated by humans and AI that will hopefully motivate creators to trust more in their uniquely individual and human expression.

**Human emotions are the one thing that AI will never be fully capable of understanding. Our emotions are the result both of our reflections and of our physical bodies. Trust is affected both by other people's reasoning and by the way in which we experience their body language. Human empathy is created by recognising ourselves in others and can motivate selfless sacrifice. Our emotions are humanity's strength, and our ability to understand them in order to communicate non-fiction issues to motivate change is more important than ever (Festøy, 2023).<sup>7</sup>**

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# PART IV

## Artistic Intelligence and Meaning Making

199—211

Ulrike Scholtes  
and Ties van de Werff

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Roberta Bernasconi, Alessia Prati  
and Alessandro Tollari

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Ingrid Grünwald

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Bert Willems, Els De bruyn,  
Milan Gillard, Sonja Spee  
and Ilse Van Roy

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Anna Klimczak



# Teaching bodies and boundaries to blur:

## The Leaky Bodies Archives

Ulrike Scholtes  
and Ties van de Werff  
Academy of Arts Maastricht,  
Zuyd University  
of Applied Sciences





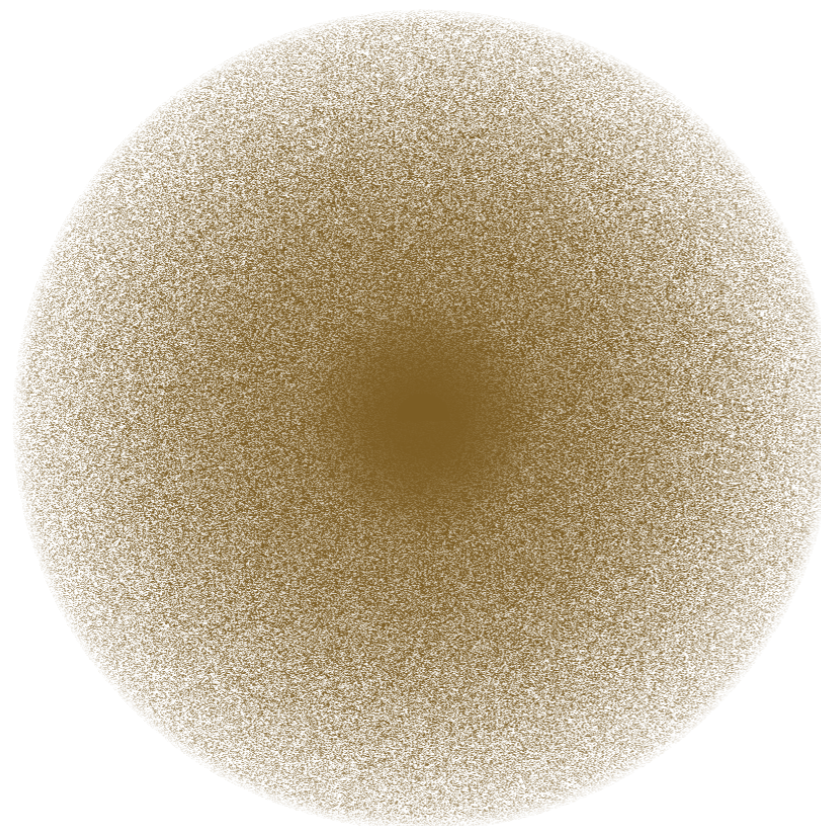
Over the past decades, artistic research—research in and through art practices—has become a recognisable and justified form of knowledge production. Artistic researchers increasingly are called upon to normatively engage with topics of societal concern. While artistic researchers are expected to challenge the contexts they engage in, they often run the risk of becoming merely an icing on the cake.

## How can artistic research become truly transformative?

At research centre What Art Knows (Academy of Arts Maastricht, Zuyd University of Applied Sciences, Netherlands), we experiment with ways to foster a generous and resonant artistic research practice. As part of our Embodied Methods programme, we explore attunement as a research skill: the ability of researchers to be receptive, to adapt, and to allow themselves to be transformed within the research process and through interacting with their research subjects. For the past years, we have been mobilising the concept *generosity* to enact attuned relationships, ethical research attitudes, and engaging artistic research projects (Benschop & Van de Werff, 2022). As head

of the Embodied Methods research programme, Ulrike Scholtes explores the concept of *porosity* as the embodiment of generosity.

In our workshop at ELIA 2024, we explored this concept further, together with our audience. We proposed that the contemporary planetary context asks for a form of embodiment that exceeds the boundaries contained by their skin. Rather, what our planet needs (and allows for) is a conceptualisation and experience of the body that is different than the individual, bounded, and separated body (such as a 'second body' proposed by Daisy Hildyard, 2017). We adhere to breaking the *one-body-one-*



*person rule* (Boll & Müller, 2020) that has already been challenged by postmodern scholars who present bodies and boundaries as leaky, permeable, or dissolving (Shildrick, 1997; Mol, 2002; Hildyard, 2017).

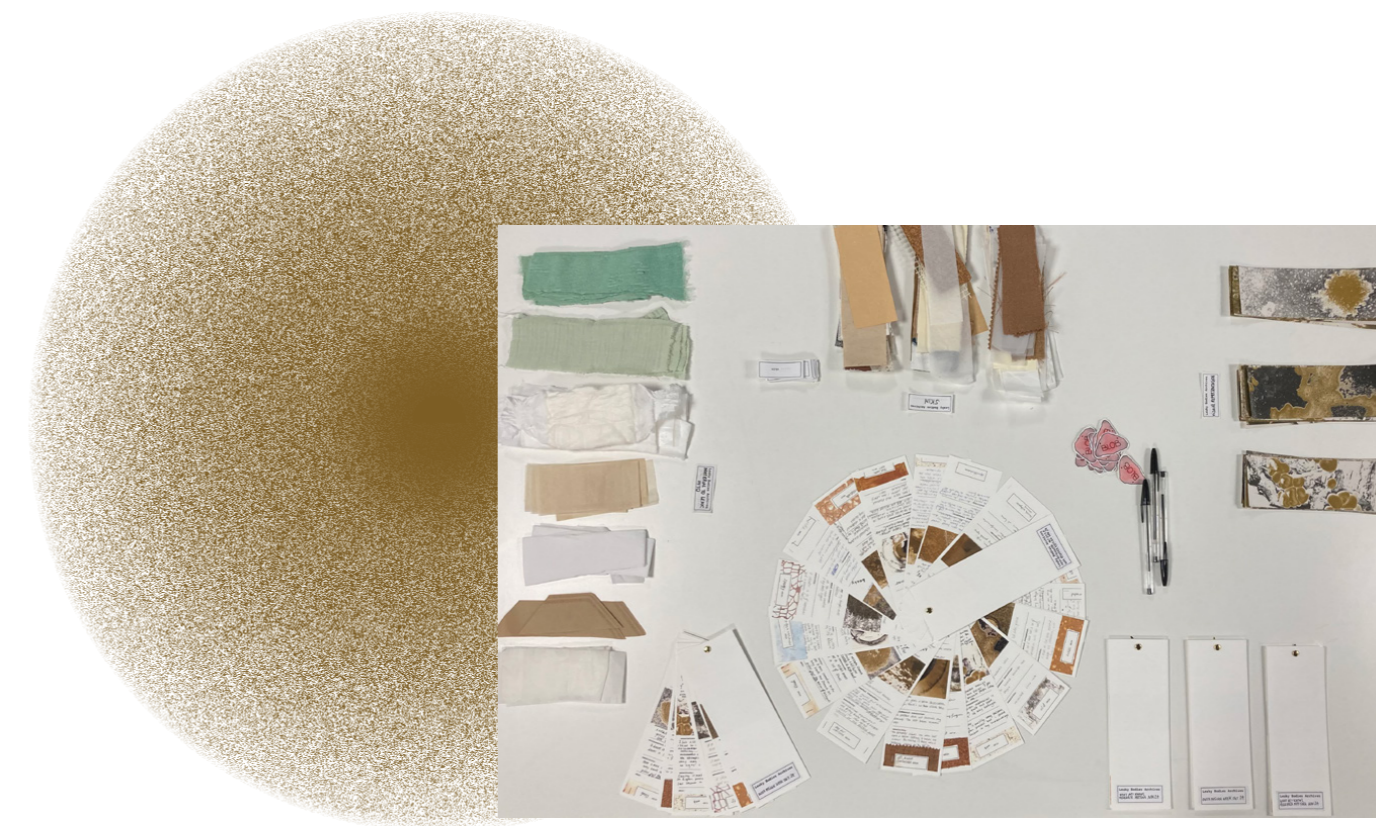
## But how does a porous body feel?

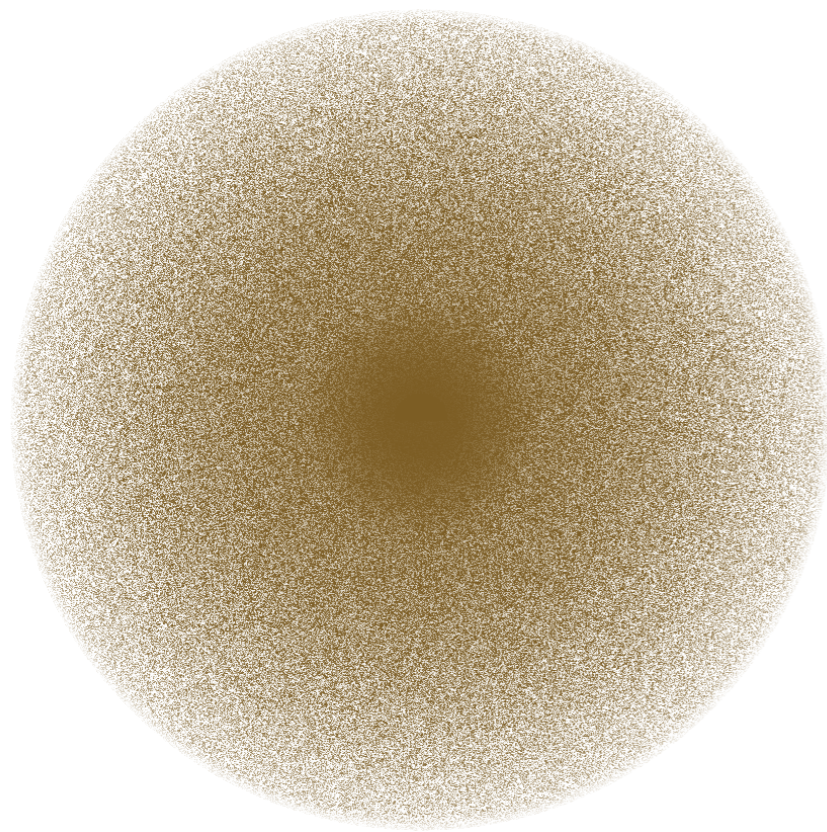
In our workshop, we presented the Leaky Bodies Archives: a performative intervention developed by Ulrike Scholtes (What Art Knows and art collective BLOB) and Mariëlle Kleyn Winkel (art collective BLOB). In this project, we perform leaking bodies through forms of documentation that one registers and produces porous

body boundaries. Participants chose a material (cloth, tissue, pieces of diaper, plastic, and other materials with different absorptive qualities) and held onto it for a while, while attending to the feeling of exchange with (e.g., sweating into) this material. Meanwhile, they filled out paper forms that helped them articulate their experiences of 'leaking into' another body: physical sensations, sensory impressions, associations, their sense of and attitude towards their surroundings, and their overall sensitivity in that moment. Besides these cues to articulate in words, we also offered other modes of documentation, such as different images of stains that help them visualise their form of leaking, and materials with different levels of porosity that they could use to represent their skin density.

Together, these forms feed into a wheel that resembles a tasting wheel, as often used in tasting practices such as tea, wine, or coffee tasting. Such wheels help tasters to find words for what they are tasting. However, words do not just function as descriptors here; they also evoke possibilities of flavours that one could potentially taste, thereby widening the palate of the taster and adding nuance to their tasting skills. The Leaky Bodies Archives similarly aims to produce experiences of leaking bodies, while articulating a language for practices of leaking that help foster awareness of leaky bodies,

**acknowledges porosity as  
a skill and attitude, and demystifies  
the blurring of body boundaries.**





We concluded our session with a lively discussion about leaky practices and attitudes. Next to addressing our own embodiment while doing artistic research (Ulrike was pregnant at the time, preparing herself for specific [and explicitly leaky] bodily practices and exploring ways to allow this to

feed into her artistic practice), we speculated about the societal and planetary impact of thin-skinned, weakly bounded, and attuned artistic researchers. We also considered how this may transform art education by complicating individual notions of authorship, voice, and self (Strand, 2022).

form of leaking: CHALEUR & MELTING

date: 22/11/2024

location / situation: MIAN, ELIA Biennial 2024

physical characteristics: Heavy and moist - conducted to my mispairing.

sensory impressions: Very moving and rather stressful. Later it became

associations: A mansea. My head is so full with the tragic situation in Gaza and Me.

environmental interaction: Leaking in the air with floral odors.

sensitivity: My skin felt more exposed and kinda "narrow".

skin: floral (breast)

ANY. skin

form of leaking: pressing moving bursting

date: 20.11.24

location / situation: ELIA

physical characteristics: light, rough, dry, hard in constant

sensory impressions: derailed roughness, BUT barely noticeable sticky

associations: responsibility, activism, anger

environmental interaction: rough disconnection -> object changed

no traces, bare traces in/on m.

sensitivity: focussed, and body aware, body as a whole is more tangible, my body feels the memory of liquidity but not a new sensation

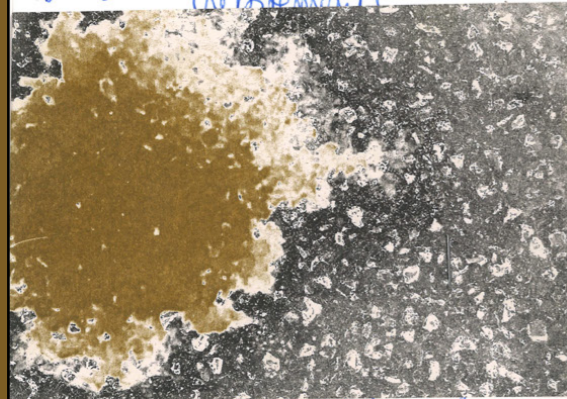
skin: make up sponge with

make up sponge skin

form of leaking: *sensory slowing*  
 date: *22.XI.24*  
 location / situation: *attending cheek face*  
*NABA, Milano Workshop thumbs*

physical characteristics: *fingers palm*  
*soft thin*  
*smooth resistant*  
*layered white*

sensory impressions:  
*creases stain (make up skin powder)*  
*smooth* *coincidente*



associations: *diving into a landscape of folds and creases*  
*slow concentrated merging*

environmental interaction:  
*the paper pulp of my fingers*  
*the skin surface of the paper*

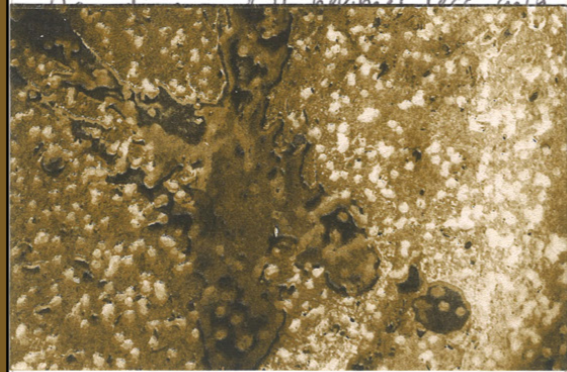
sensitivity:  
*my attention faded entirely in the leaking*  
*time slows and condenses*  
*space expands*

skin:  
 [ *paperly* skin ]  
*soft*

form of leaking: *warmth and moist*  
 date: *22/11/2024*  
 location / situation: *ELIA Milan*

physical characteristics:  
*heat from hand and small amount of moist into diaper material*

sensory impressions:  
*the heat felt became less*



associations: *I was touching diaper material. It reminded me of spaces/situations that are normally private. Elderly center where I used to work-*

environmental interaction: *Small pieces of dust enter the environment. Fly around. The liquid doesn't really evaporate, the diaper absorbs it.*

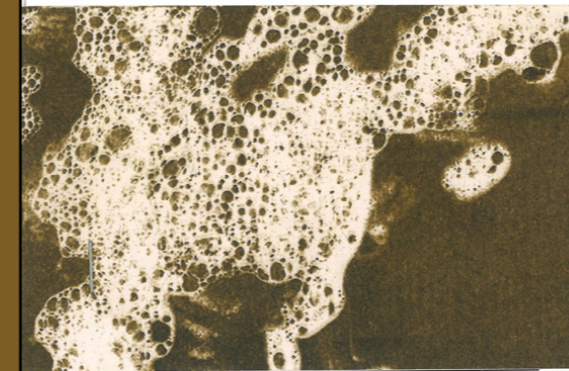
sensitivity: *I felt my body less, because I was focused on leaking (and on writing). My hand that held the diaper feels more porous than the hand that held the pen.*

skin:  
*Soft, slightly swollen, moist, warm*  
 [ ..... skin ]

form of leaking: *touching*  
 date: *22 nov 2024*  
 location / situation: *Milano*

physical characteristics:  
*flexible*  
*dry*  
*uneven*

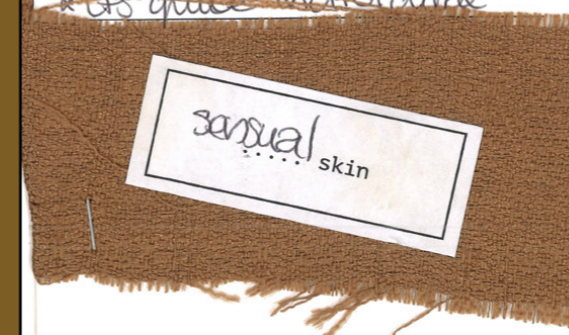
sensory impressions:  
*only tactile had association of lemon smell*



associations:  
*labour/cleaning*  
*sensuality*  
*also: the cardboard clothes*  
*wool in my childhood*

environmental interaction:  
*my hands got warm & leaved some sweat*

sensitivity: *x openness*  
*x less aware of the annoying sound in the room*  
*x it's quite individual*

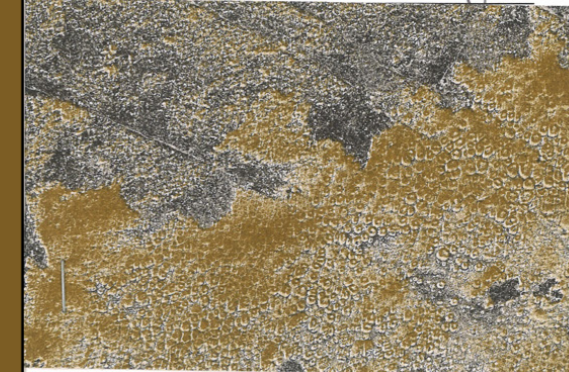


[ *sensual* skin ]

form of leaking:  
 date: *22/11/2024*  
 location / situation: *Milano / ELIA Conference*

physical characteristics:  
*Paper thin, smooth with a little resistance*  
*will absorb liquid*

sensory impressions:  
*A parchment, strong but flexible, smooth, dry-*



associations:  
*Something written for to*  
*Something passes through change the paper but doesn't destroy it.*

environmental interaction:  
*absorption is its fate.*

sensitivity: *Strong and but porous. An interesting, metaphorical combination*

skin:  
*Thin but not sensitive or fragile*  
 [ *thin* skin ]

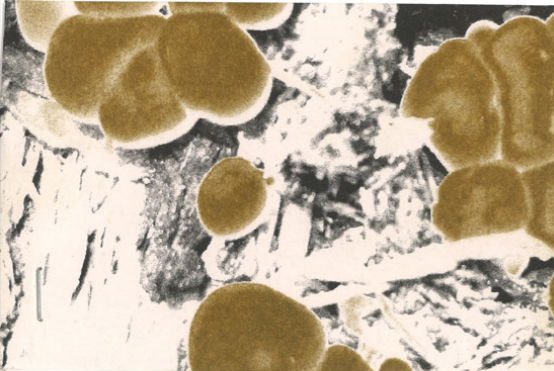
form of leaking: *Smell, heat*

date: *22/11/2024*

location / situation: *NABA, Milan*

physical characteristics:  
*Thin, warm, dry, absorbing, light, soft*

sensory impressions:  
*small smell, rough feeling on skin but soft. I can hear the friction, slightly gritty*

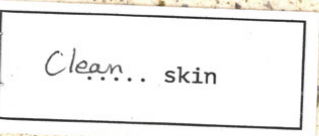


associations:  
*comfy blanket, childhood, warmth*

environmental interaction:  
*A lot of stuff is falling / leaking all over me.*

sensitivity:  
*More attentive, I'm careful, more cautious. Soothing me, calming me*

skin:  
*Clean... skin*




form of leaking:

date: *22 Nov 2024*

location / situation: *ELIA MILAN*

physical characteristics:  
*MESH, WOVEN, OPEN WEAVE, MATRIX*

sensory impressions:  
*ROUGH, HOLES (ROUGH + SOFT) MANIABLE, FLEXIBLE*



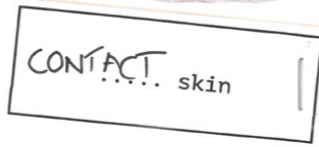
associations:  
*FISH(ING) NET, TIGHTS, OR A CARPET UNDERLAY*

environmental interaction:  
*KEEPS COOL, RETAINS SHAPE WELL EVEN AFTER MANIPULATION, RESILIENT*

sensitivity:  
*CONNECTION, ALLOWED FOR CONTINUED SKIN ON SKIN CONTACT, MEDIATED BY THE MESH.*

skin:  
*ALLOWS FOR CONTACT*

*CONTACT... skin*



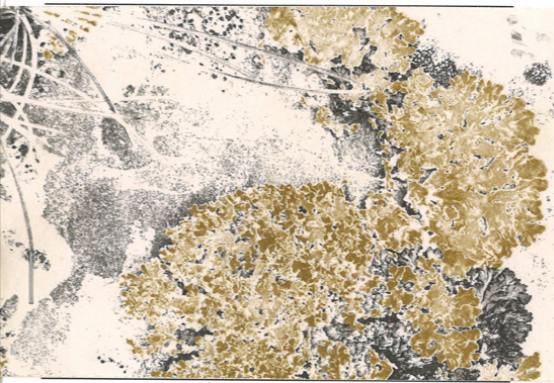
form of leaking: *Fragments*

date: *22.11.2024*

location / situation: *ELIA / Milan*

physical characteristics:  
*• Dots • Neutral • Micro • Dry*

sensory impressions:  
*• Grey, flat • Sound of "grissing" • No smell • Like sandpaper*




associations:  
*• Peace, calmness • Feeling in place, peaceful • Home*

environmental interaction:  
*• Flatten, grey • Traces of "greyness" • Transparency*

sensitivity:  
*• More in place, more focused, more self-confident • I became more clear, my boundaries stronger in a positive way.*

*softening polished*

*cloth skin*



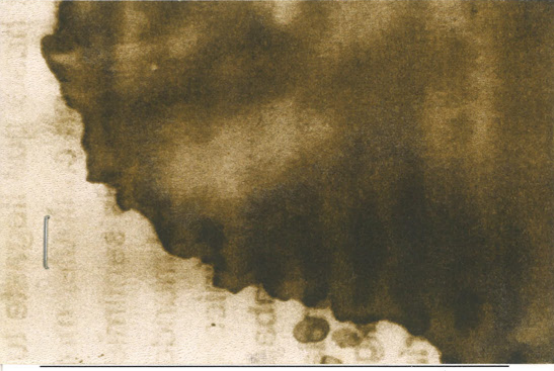
form of leaking: *sweat*

date: *22.11.2024*

location / situation: *NABA, MILAN*

physical characteristics:  
*light, not much, cold, damp*

sensory impressions:  
*my hands are extremely dry these days - the surrounding leads home. No, bathroom soap, sticky, no*




associations:  
*- fighting tiredness - I was surprised given that my hand was so dry*

environmental interaction:  
*- nobody will notice - slowly*

sensitivity:  
*It was hidden from my surroundings I felt like it took the little moisture I have out of my body.*

skin:  
*damp sand paper*



form of leaking:

date:

location / situation:

---

physical characteristics:

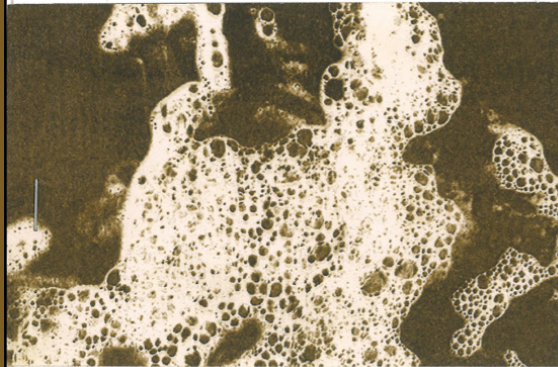
zacht, stroef

---

sensory impressions:

sweaty skin & material

---



associations:

dried mud

---

environmental interaction:


absorption Rupture  
from within

---

sensitivity:

---

skin:



form of leaking: touching, smelling

date:

location / situation:

hand

---

physical characteristics:

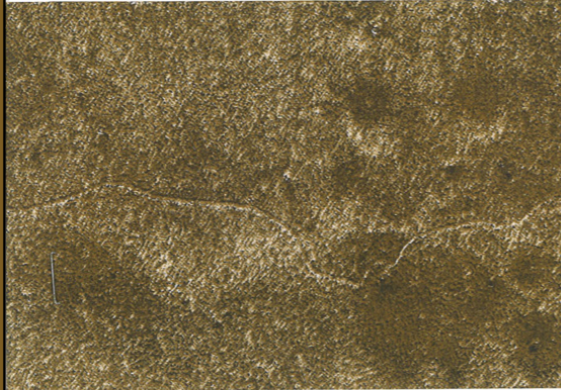
thin, light, small, dry, rough  
flexible

---

sensory impressions:

neutral smell of paper,  
you can feel the texture - edges  
are more rough

---



associations:

Rather relaxing - reminds me  
of the process of brewing  
coffee in the morning - ritual

---

environmental interaction:

There are visible marks,  
however, they appeared later

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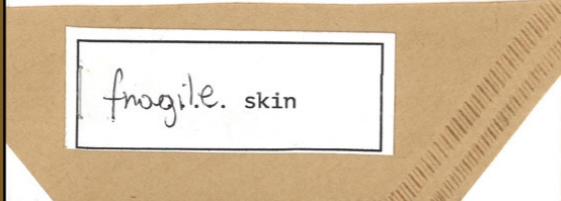
sensitivity:

It felt fragile yet strong -  
made me feel more connected  
to it due to long interaction thus  
~~reflect more on the way~~  
interact with the environment

---

skin:

Clothing Paper Label



## Authors' Notes

As part of the *Embodied Methods* research programme, research centre What Art Knows (Ulrike Scholtes and Ties van de Werff, Academy of Arts Maastricht), we propose *generosity* and *porosity* as artistic research skills that enable researchers to be receptive, to adapt, and to allow themselves to be transformed within the research process and through interacting with their research subjects. During our session, we practiced the Leaky Bodies Archives: a performative intervention by BLOB collective that fosters and documents experiences of leakiness. In our contribution to this reader, we present the visual material made during our session, after giving a short introduction into our work and project.

[whatartknows.nl](http://whatartknows.nl)

[www.ulrikescholtes.de/blob/](http://www.ulrikescholtes.de/blob/)

[www.ulrikescholtes.de/blob/leaky-bodies-archives/](http://www.ulrikescholtes.de/blob/leaky-bodies-archives/)

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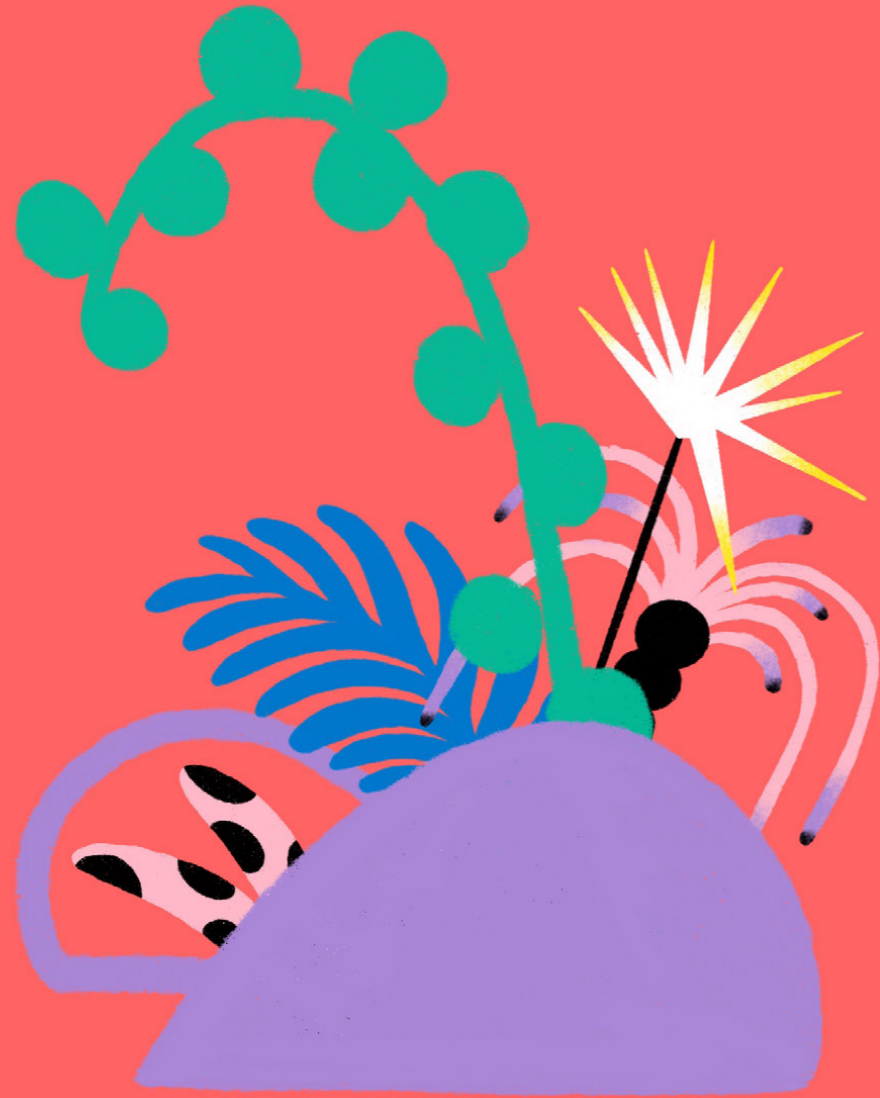
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# ANTERIOR FUTURES

Embodied knowledges at the intersection of performance, pedagogy, and fictionality<sup>1</sup>

Roberta  
Bernasconi,  
Alessia  
Prati  
and  
Alessandro  
Tollari

<sup>1</sup> This article has been collaboratively conceived and developed by the three authors, who jointly authored the Introduction and Conclusion. The first main section was authored individually by Roberta Bernasconi, the second by Alessia Prati, and the third by Alessandro Tollari.

How can an educational laboratory become a site for elaborating “anterior futures”—an experience rooted

in the present that rewires temporalities and fosters new imaginaries? This contribution examines how

laboratorial practice functions as a liminal space where pedagogy, imagination, and creation intersect

and is shaped by memory and immaterial dimensions of learning. Starting from the case study of the

workshop led by El Conde de Torrefiel at Iuav University of Venice, the authors explore how performative

practices challenge traditional knowledge production, positioning themselves within a ‘suspended’

pedagogical dimension where the emphasis is on process.

Figure 1.  
Performance *Il tempo è nostro - Possibili teatralità di un edificio*,  
Palazzo Ca' Tron, Venice [Picture by Anja Dimitrijević, 2024]

# Introduction

In recent decades, the paradigm of the ephemeral has dominated performance studies as both a theoretical lens and pedagogical concern. From Peggy Phelan's assertion that performance "becomes itself through disappearance" (1993) to the widespread view of liveness as performativity's defining condition, much scholarship has focused on the elusiveness and irreproducibility of embodied practice. Yet this paradigm increasingly shows limitations in accounting for the complex ecologies of survival, transformation, and transmission characterising contemporary performance pedagogies. This essay emerges from a shared inquiry into educational approaches embracing instability, porousness, and incompleteness as generative conditions for artistic and scholarly practice. Drawing on a collaborative laboratory at Ca' Tron, Iuav University of Venice, with El Conde de Torrefiel, we examine how performative practices generate knowledge that persists through fragility.

The project *Il tempo è nostro – Possibili teatralità di un edificio* (*The Time is ours – Possible Theatricalities of a Building*) functioned as an intensive pedagogical experiment and epistemic site where embodied practice, collective imagination, and spatial inhabitation converged, producing precarious knowledge that survives via mutation, circulation, and ongoing reactivation rather than fixation or codification.

Conceived as a three-voiced inquiry by Roberta Bernasconi, Alessia Prati, and Alessandro Tollari, this essay unfolds along three intersecting themes: situating (the laboratory as an affective relational space), temporality (the precarious ontology as an alternative to the ephemeral), and reactivation (practices of return and transmission in the *Anterior Futures Workshop*). Together, these perspectives present performance and pedagogy as intertwined, collective processes of becoming that learn through vulnerability, evolve through difference, and persist as living ecologies of knowledge.

# 1 Situating: The whisper of Ca' Tron

To tell this story, we need to go back in time, to January 2024, at Palazzo Ca' Tron in Venice, within the Iuav University. Something elusive was taking place: an intensive theatre laboratory, unfolding over three weeks through an assiduous inhabiting of the space. The theatre company El Conde de Torrefiel (Tanya Beyeler and Pablo Gisbert) and 16 performers from the MA in Theatre and Performing Arts of Iuav University of Venice worked together on the threshold between fiction and reality, to construct perceptual dramaturgies that question what it means to see, to act, and to be seen together. Over the weeks of inhabiting and rehearsing, the space accumulated gestures and traces.

When the laboratory culminated in *Il tempo è nostro*, the experience transformed the Palazzo into a performative landscape. The audience was invited to move through its rooms, encountering the process: a group of 16 performers—still figures, blind faces, suspended gestures, and disembodied voices resonating through the corridors. Two eyeballs, transmitted on two separate screens, stared at us; we were the observed observes. Time stretched as the performers played with the architectural elements of the Palazzo, awakening it like a ghostly organism: alive, inhabitable, capable of generating unease, obsession, and laughter. Moving from the room to the garden, the boundaries between performers and viewers, fiction and life, blurred into a collective experience of attention and perception, culminating in a surreal banquet with people with veiled faces.

What began as a laboratory of research and collective inhabiting transformed into a performative act: the final articulation of an educational

journey suspended between exploration, learning, and production. But the journey did not end there.

Since 2017, the Theatre and Performing Arts programme at Luav University has developed a pedagogical approach that combines theoretical–methodological teachings with practice-based learning. Over the years, the Luav laboratories have become spaces for developing collaborative pedagogies rooted in bodily practices and critical inquiry. Theatre, choreography, sound, and queer studies intersect on this transdisciplinary terrain, engendering the emergence of performance as a mode of resistance against the neoliberal structures that continue to shape contemporary universities.

Having worked as coordinator within this programme for several years, I have inhabited this in-between dimension—a space of negotiation between students, artists, and the institution itself. The laboratory emerges here as both a pedagogical and epistemological device: this model inherits the interdisciplinary legacy of hybrid, immaterial, and corporeal practices—forms of knowledge not technically codified, emerging at the intersection of visual arts, theatre, dance, and music—and the pedagogical principle of learning by doing, reinterpreted within the contemporary context of performance studies. Within such perspectives, the laboratory becomes a critical and generative field where education is lived as both personal and collective transformation: transformative precisely because it resists codification and is sustained through a constant reformulation of questions through an open-ended educational journey.

In this liminal dimension—what Tim Ingold (2018) calls a “middle-place”, a space of learning that embraces the invisible and unexplored “within a geometrical abstraction” (p. 48)—students experienced an alternative to the traditional school paradigm, which passively transmits knowledge and marginalises practice as a source of knowing. As first-year students and still unfamiliar with one another, the laboratory compelled them to act as complicit members of a co-responsible collective, intuitively engaging with the perceptual dimensions of space and time as material. The laboratory generated what can be described as affection: a shared mode of seeing and relating, a trust and complicity cultivated through extemporaneous actions that continually shape what we are learning together. Over the years, I have inhabited this pedagogical space alongside students, observing how such affection materialises as both a sensorial and epistemic condition—a living tissue connecting gestures, thoughts, and temporalities.

Here, affection can be understood as a relational intensity, following Sara Ahmed (2004) but also as what Erin Manning (2009) describes as affective tonality: a kinetic and collective thinking that emerges between bodies in motion. Within this resonance, learning becomes less an act of transmission than one of sensing—a mutual calibration of attention, vulnerability, and response. The laboratory thus operates as an epistemic *milieu*, a shared environment where teachers and students co-create forms of knowledge that are not simply learned but lived. Within this ecology of relation, thinking takes place in and between bodies, carried by rhythms, hesitations, and affects.

As in most Luav laboratories, the final performance at Ca' Tron did not aim for a spectacular final product;

instead it preserved the attempts, deviations, and transformations as a field of potential that unfolded

throughout the process.

As I write, it becomes clear that this is not simply a reflection but a continuation of that experience that

seeks “to learn past through return” (Spencer, 2018, p.20). The laboratory situates itself in the evolving

dialogue between education, research, and performance, within the “imperceptible midline” that opens

and “unfolds into a universe” (Ingold, 2018, p. 48). It persists as a whisper that resists in our bodies—an

epistemic capsule where performance becomes a field of speculation and affection, and where learning

remains an unfinished living practice.

Figure 2  
Performance *Il tempo è nostro* – Possibili teatralità di un edificio,  
Palazzo Ca' Tron, Venice [Picture by Anja Dimitrijević, 2024]



# 2 Temporality: Echoes in Motion

Initiated by El Conde de Torrefiel and later evolving into the *Anterior Futures Workshop*—curated by Roberta Bernasconi, Alessia Prati, and Alessandro Tollari—the laboratory can be understood as an experiment in transposing the ontology of the precarious from the field of performative practice into that of artistic pedagogy. Rather than as an outcome, the project—culminating in the lecture performance, *Anterior Futures*, presented at the ELIA Biennial Conference | Arts Plural—unfolds as an ongoing inquiry that positions precariousness as a generative condition for artistic thought and learning, activated and made perceptible through performative practice itself.

The ontology of the precarious—constantly emerging through performative practices and critical discourses over recent decades—opposes the notion of the completed, stable, and self-sufficient artwork.

Rather than conceiving the work as a closed and autonomous entity, it recognises it as vulnerable, situated, and continuously subjected to redefinition. At the same time, it departs from the paradigm of the ephemeral—long consolidated in performance studies as an emblem of presence—rejecting the idea of performance as a fleeting apparition that vanishes in its very appearance. In both cases, what is ultimately unsettled is the ontological stability of the work: its supposed autonomy and completeness, or its reduction to an event fated to disappear.

As Peggy Phelan famously reminds us, performance “lives only in the present” and “becomes something else the moment it seeks to be reproduced” (1993, p. 145). The ontology of the precarious, developed through the critical work of Rebecca Schneider (2011), Amelia Jones (1997; 2012), Adrian Heathfield (2012), Eleonora Fabião (2012), and José Esteban Muñoz (1996), reinterprets this assertion as an ontology of persistence—one characterised by endurance through difference, deferral, and transformation. What surfaces is not the impossibility of duration but the potentiality of an unstable, porous, and intermittent temporality, one that embraces contingency as its foundational structure. As Fabião observes, “if the ephemeral is transitory, momentary, brief, the precarious is unstable, risky, dangerous; if the ephemeral experiences death, precariousness lives life” (Fabião, 2012, p. 134).

The ontology of the precarious does not imply the dissolution of performative art but affirms its ability to mutate and endure through adaptation.

Simon Ellis (2015, p. 97) notes that performance never truly “ends”; it extends into multiple afterlives, inhabiting bodies, images, texts, relations, and even alien environments. This survival through transformation—what Bedford (2012, p. 78) terms a “long variegated trace history,” and what Lepecki (2010, p. 31), drawing on Gilles Deleuze, conceives as a multiplicity of “compossible and impossible” lives—opens onto a non-linear, stratified temporality. Whereas the ephemeral is still bound to the binary logic of appearance and disappearance, the precarious implies a vulnerable persistence. As Schneider (2011, p. 100) notes, performance resists a cultural habituation to vision, remaining—differently, in difference—rather than vanishing.

The paradigm of the precarious further affects how performance endures and is transmitted.

As Diana Taylor (2003) has argued, performance survives through the bodies, gestures, and oral forms that constitute the repertoire. The ontology of the precarious radicalises this view, extending transmission to material itself. Many contemporary performance practices embody this shift, with not only human bodies but also objects, substances, and non-human entities participating in processes of survival, memory, and knowledge production. Matter—photos, documentation, notation, annotation—is thus neither residual nor, as Peggy Phelan suggested, a betrayal of performance; it acts as a co-agent in the endurance and transformation of gesture. Precariousness therefore appears as an ecology of the sensible—a condition

in which knowledge circulates among heterogeneous forms—human and non-human, material and immaterial, oral and gestural. In this ecology, fragility becomes a mode of knowing that binds duration to transformation and coexistence. This conception finds one of its most articulate realisations in the laboratory devised by El Conde de Torrefiel—and, more broadly, in pedagogical settings that frame performance as both operative practice and epistemic mode.

The laboratory functions as a pedagogical and political device, operating beyond productivity paradigms and suspending the demand for measurable outcomes. While institutional education prioritises results, the laboratory inhabits an unfinished, provisional, and open space. It becomes a site of knowledge that resists productivity regimes, fostering relations and affects through which situated, intermittent, and porous understandings emerge. From a pedagogical perspective, it reconfigures performance's ontological condition—vulnerability as epistemic practice—producing forms of understanding that persist as 'residual survivals' resonating through bodies, materials, and documents.

The conceptual ground of precariousness thus underpins the lecture performance at NABA—the most recent iteration of projects that began with the laboratory, developed through the first performance *Il tempo è nostro – Possibili teatralità di un edificio*, and unfolded across a series of spillovers and afterlives. Across this rhythm of discontinuous continuity, each reactivation—from the *Anterior Futures Workshop* to the lecture performance and beyond—takes shape as a distinct form of survival:

not a replication, but transformation that re-works the laboratory's principles within new

pedagogical constellations. Here, precariousness acts as both an epistemic and operative force—a

mode of transmission and renewal that keeps knowledge in motion, refusing closure, and sustains

experience as a processual and relational unfolding.

Figure 3.1  
Performance *Il tempo è nostro – Possibili teatralità di un edificio*,  
Palazzo Ca' Tron, Venice [Picture by Anja Dimitrijević, 2024]



# 3 Reactivation: Feedback and / as fictional speculation

The *Anterior Futures Workshop* took place between October and November 2024, nine months after the laboratory held by El Conde de Torrefiel. We approached them as “ignorant masters” (Rancière, 1991): the students were the experts. Our role was just to offer a framework to push them into action, over the time of four days.

On the first day, we retraced the experience of the laboratory, to make it come alive again for the participants and to help those of us who had not taken part imagine it.

We relied on fragments from the notes by Teresa Barbagallo, the course assistant; and from there personal memories

emerged, but also clarifications and doubts. We lingered on certain episodes, moving forward and backward. Explicit attention was then given to the role and methods of teaching by the artistic duo. Everything begins with the solitude of an individual walk through the building, with Eliane Radigue’s *Trilogie de la Mort* (1994) playing in the headphones: where does our attention go? From the world to the mind, and then back again with a gesture and a word/phrase to share with the group. From there, a whirlwind process begins, in pairs and groups, in research mode. Try, try, try, then think. Feel, but also decide. Without getting attached: letting things appear, disappear, and possibly reappear. Allowing oneself to enter crisis, entrusting oneself to time—“the best costume of theatre”, according to Gisbert.

A discreet facilitation by El Conde de Torrefiel, which limits itself to giving small indications for shaping what emerges, in a growing process of montage that, unpredictably, reaches the outcome.

On the second day, we invited them to interpret the experience and grasp the aspects of knowledge it had generated.

Not given knowledge to be learned, but unexpected epiphanies, which we called, onomatopoetically, *clicks*. Instantaneous moments, made of wonder and awareness that pierce through the flow of time. Each person explored and shared their own clicks with the group. Sometimes technical acquisitions, sometimes sensations of self-empowerment, sometimes revelations of subtle aptitudes. The effect of a speaker carried by bicycle into the space. Building a scene with objects very far from the viewer. Performing with the audience behind you. Editing an audio track in the space of one night. Moving a plant with wires. Drawing the same sketch fifty times. Enacting doing nothing.

The third day initiated practical work aimed at remediating the experience and its elements of knowledge.

The proposal—actually a pretext—took on precise contours, namely to re-present the work—process and product—to a new context: the space-time-relational field of the ELIA Biennial Conference 2024 at NABA, Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti at the end of November. We proposed a different vehicle, namely the construction of an audiovisual document. Through a phase of discussions and experiments, some of the languages used in the performance were revisited (written text, voice-over, photographic and video fragments), in an operation that mixed archival materials with new elements created for the occasion. A co-creation process that does not attempt to guarantee the transmission of the past, but seeks new paths for the re-emergence of its vitality, in a form of conjecture—of fictional

speculation (Burroughs & O'Sullivan, 2019)—that addresses itself as a dialogue with a new, unaware, and unknown audience. 4 minutes and 34 seconds to visit a world (Cheng, 2018) that is past and far away but not extinct.

The last meeting was dedicated to project feedback: a moment of shared evaluation simultaneously oriented towards retrospection and future relaunching.

For this reason, we wanted both El Conde de Torreñiel and Francesco Dalmaso—a member of the Ricerca X collective and expert in feedback practices (see Lerman & Borstel, 2022)—with us in this work session. They guided us in a final discussion on the audiovisual material produced and its possibilities for the conference. The collective work session unfolded around four points of attention: the question “what did I see?”; the emergence of questions—neutral, exploratory, and open—and consequent answers within the working group; the noting of positioned needs (“as x, I would need...”); a moment of meta-feedback, that is, observation of how and what feedback does, in relation to the moments and contexts in which it is called upon. Taking up Biesta’s (2023) pedagogical considerations on Arendt’s philosophy, we seem to glimpse in this experience the possibility of a teaching-learning that is not closed within the dimension of *labor* (training for useful work) nor of *opus* (disinterested creative accomplishment); rather, what is involved here is the dimension of *actio*, which belongs to collective and political life, and is an art of continually beginning. This, we believe, is the epistemic and pedagogical quality of the performative.



Figure 3.2  
Performance *Il tempo è nostro - Possibili teatralità di un edificio*,  
Palazzo Ca' Tron, Venice [Picture by Anja Dimitrijević, 2024]

# Conclusion

This collective exploration shows how contemporary performance pedagogy challenges traditional frameworks by embracing instability, incompleteness, and permeability as key conditions for generating and transmitting knowledge. The Ca' Tron laboratory exemplifies a critical pedagogical space where embodied practice, affective relations, and spatial engagement converge to produce precarious knowledge—ephemeral yet enduring, mutable but persistently reactivated. Reframing performance beyond binaries of presence and absence, this inquiry foregrounds the ontology of the precarious as an alternative temporality: one that is stratified, porous, and relational. The pedagogical processes, therefore, emerge as dynamic, collective negotiations where learning unfolds through vulnerability, continual difference, and cyclical renewal.

Through the lens of the *Anterior Futures Workshop*, archival sediments are transformed into living matter, enacting a fruitful interplay between feedback and speculative reactivation. This recursive process not only revivifies past experiences but allows them to evolve in dialogue with new contexts and audiences.

Altogether, these perspectives articulate a vision of teaching and performance as entangled, emergent practices: collective modes of becoming that learn through fragility, adapt through difference, and persist as resonant ecologies of knowledge, sustained in and through relations among bodies, spaces, and time.

#### Authors' note.

Paragraphs 1, 2, and 3 have been respectively written by Roberta Bernasconi, Alessia Prati, and Alessandro Tollari. Abstract, Introduction, and Conclusion are a joint writing by the three authors.

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# The Space

*Sensing  
the Wor(l)d*

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## in *Between*

### Abstract

In increasingly internationalised arts education environments, language is often treated as a neutral medium for communication. Yet language is never neutral—it shapes thought, frames identity, and reflects complex histories of power and exclusion. This article advocates for more language awareness in our international Art Schools by all members involved. The power of language—and the wor(l)d behind these languages—should not be underestimated in our global education.

How do we make sure we understand each other?  
Should we not find a hybrid, adaptive form of communication  
in our art schools? Not mastery of a standard, but a shared  
effort to understand and be understood?

## Notes to consider

English, widely used as a bridging language in global institutions, also carries the weight of colonial legacies. What are the implications of language inequality within international art schools and the creative, often overlooked, spaces that emerge in response?

Drawing on eight years of experience facilitating English-language intercultural communication sessions at the Graphic Design Department of the Royal Academy of Art (KABK), I argue that the English spoken in such contexts—what I call “KABK-English”—functions as a hybrid, adaptive form of communication. **It reflects not mastery of a standard, but a shared effort to understand and be understood.** This evolving ‘pidgin’ reveals the linguistic negotiations students, tutors, and staff engage in daily.

Can one truly express freely in the language of the coloniser? Who defines what is considered ‘correct’ English? Is the language we use not fluid, like many of the identities of our students? And what do we lose—or gain—in translation? How important is the recognition of native languages in our academic world? (The first thesis in Papiamentu, written by Guenn Gustina, being a fact.)

Do we have to rethink language policies and pedagogies in international education? Should we advocate for more inclusive approaches that honour linguistic diversity, encourage self-expression across languages, and value not only how we speak but even more how we listen.

**The ‘space in between’, though often uncomfortable, is where true intercultural understanding can begin.**

During the ELIA conference *Arts Plural* in Milan (2024) the importance of (intercultural) communication and dialogue were stressed. Being part of a collective, ‘The Splinter Group’, we facilitated a performative workshop that took the form of a board meeting, where all members, adopting fictional roles such as head of an art school, a tutor, or student, engage in equal-level conversations based on true, albeit fictionalised, stories and dilemmas.

Attendees, representing various art school roles, were invited to delve into meaningful engagement with students and address pertinent questions. The Splinter Group eagerly anticipated a dynamic exchange with students and colleagues, collectively exploring and unravelling the intricacies of contemporary art education dilemmas.

In this session the emphasis was on the dilemmas we are all encountering in our different roles. In the performative talk participants were able to voice the experiences/the challenges/the impossibilities they are encountering themselves, but also the ones they see in other roles.

A manager who can voice a dilemma in a safe space, stuck in their role; a student who cannot understand a rule within the school; a tutor who can voice the fear to express an opinion within an increasingly polarising global setting and, for example, the vulnerability of the gap between the generations.

There were time and space to voice experiences and to interact together—the performative board meeting being a safe space to give a voice to all these different experiences. Catharsis and recognition all over!

So why do we find get-togethers with all these different roles important, and why do we look for ways to find this interaction, be it in a performative session or a cooking workshop, drawing session, town hall, etc.?

**Can everyone give their own answer to this question? Please do...**

For me, it is finding real connection—finding common ground. I see it in the English Clubs, which are about language and different forms of communication. But the language is mainly a tool to find real connection. To learn about the world of the other.

To find interest in the wor(l)d of others. And yes, you can look up an English word and translate it to your own language, but if you cannot understand the world behind some of the words/expressions/terms you will never find real connection.

There is also fear of being misunderstood, of being stigmatised, of being cancelled. How can we still find the connection if we need to move forward together between the languages and between the generations in this challenging globalised world, where AI is taking over at an incredible speed? Can we bend our communication limitations to our advantage?

In our art schools we should be more aware that we all need to make the extra effort to find this connection. So maybe ask a follow-up question, ask a tutor/student to elaborate on a topic or give a concrete example, maybe take time for silence that will give the other person time to react.

**Be open  
to the answer and try  
not to assume  
and judge.**

**Find different ways  
to encourage the dialogue /  
the interaction.**

To finalise this article, I would like to share the graduation work of Sung Hyun Wang, who made a book and video (2025) of his struggles with the English Language, sharing his experiences while studying in unfamiliar territory.

### Subtitles and captions:

[youtu.be/s9aTEGLqWmM?si=3lzx475XTbIZCHjr](https://youtu.be/s9aTEGLqWmM?si=3lzx475XTbIZCHjr).

### Graduation project:

[graduation.kabk.nl/2025/sung-hyun-hwang](https://graduation.kabk.nl/2025/sung-hyun-hwang)

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And all participants of this workshop. The voicing of all dilemmas certainly gave radical hope that together we will all find a way to move forward and find connection in our (international) art school communities.

### Beyond Language

[www.politics-of-knowledge.net/thebigdialogue/#02](https://www.politics-of-knowledge.net/thebigdialogue/#02)

[researchplatform.art/people/ingrid-grunwald/](https://researchplatform.art/people/ingrid-grunwald/)

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*The Paris Review*.



To cook,  
to consume,  
to connect

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## Abstract

*The workshop 'To Cook, to Consume, to Connect', organised at the ELIA Biennial Conference 2024 in Milan, was an 'exercise in thinking' about the formation and future of art schools in Europe. It was described as an 'exercise in thinking', not the usual interpretation of thinking that is traditionally associated with this word. During the workshop we considered 'thinking' as a metamorphosis (fluid thinking that can shape people), as a collective activity (collectively shared by several people rather than an individual process), and as disruptive imagination (based upon active creation rather than a mere representation of the world as we know it). We consider this kind of thinking to be a solid basis for artistic intelligence.*

## Introduction

At the ELIA Biennial Conference, on 22 November 2025, we gathered with all participants around a table covered with a handmade tablecloth, outside the NABA campus main building in Milan, enlightened by the most beautiful sunlight that could possibly exist. The tablecloth was co-created by students of PXL-MAD, School of Arts, Hasselt ([www.pxl.mad.be](http://www.pxl.mad.be)), and students of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Antwerp ([ap-arts.be/en/academy](http://ap-arts.be/en/academy)) in the weeks before.

Using a screen-printing technique, the tablecloth was printed with some reflections extracted from an article written by Johan Pas (2023) concerning art schools. These written reflections were not considered facts or opinions, but rather ingredients for good conversation concerning the formation and future of the art schools in Europe. In order to process these reflections into a meaningful conversation which was not driven by an underlying agenda, we needed an appropriate metaphor. Therefore, vegetables were purchased at the local markets in Milan and participants of the workshop were asked to chop these fresh vegetables as if they were making a minestrone soup. Transforming written reflections into a 'good 'n tasty dialogue' while transforming vegetables into a 'good 'n tasty soup', allowed for new ways of thinking about the matter at hand.



## Thinking as metamorphosis

What do we mean when we say we are thinking? Traditionally, we start thinking when we need a solution for a given problem. We start thinking when we need clear answers that can then be used in a fixed state, as solid ground beneath our feet. This kind of thinking leads to something that is external to the thinker.

After thinking, a certain distance can be taken from these thoughts.

Objectively these thoughts can find their own way as things, as matters of fact, in the world.

At the workshop in Milan, we wanted to consider thinking as a never-ending and therefore open process. Hereby the resulting thoughts were not just results that had to be fixed, but new ingredients for further thinking. Something that is always changing and therefore fluid. Perhaps this fluid state of thinking made it more digestible? It was the act of thinking itself that set the thinkers in motion, and not just the things around the thinkers. As a result, we ourselves, as thinkers, changed. We, as thinkers, took on a different shape.

Through this fluid thinking process we were shaped into seeing: thinking as metamorphosis!



## Thinking as a collective activity

Typically, we view thinking as something that takes place within a single thinker. It is seen as a private matter: "I think what I think." *Je pense, donc je suis*. I think, therefore I am. The results of this kind of thinking are available only to the individual thinker. Information transfer is then needed to spread these thought-of-results to others. We call this transfer of ready-made messages, pre-formed in the mind of the individual: communication.

At the workshop in Milan, we wanted to approach thinking as a collective activity, impossible to be performed on our own. This kind of thinking was done in a group, not to merely transfer the pre-fixed information available to us individually, but to really think together. The fluid thinking, described in the preceding paragraph, lends itself well to this.

Precisely because this thinking was fluid, it could be shaped by multiple personalities. Through thinking in a group, we could be shaped together... Thinking as a collective activity!



## Thinking as disruptive imagination

Typically, we see thinking as a tool to get a grip of reality. Thinking as a gateway to 'what is'. Thinking is then considered an empirical registration system that allows us to connect with the things around us. In the form of information, these can be thought of as 'facts and figures'. Our traditional notion of truth, as a correspondence between our thoughts and reality, is based upon this traditional notion of thinking.

During our workshop in Milan, we wanted to regard thinking as a creative activity and not just as a passive registration.

This thinking process did not leave the world untouched. It did not remain confined to what-is but reached further to what-is-becoming. In a fluid state, this thinking seeped into already existing structures, and from there, it started to work. This kind of thinking 'mattered'. It is in this way, in the subtle spaces between the things around us, that thinking could shape reality...

Thinking as disruptive imagination!



To cook, to consume, to connect

The metaphorical carrier of this thinking in Milan was a daily scene that is familiar to us all: the shared preparation and consumption of food. To cook, to consume, to connect! This everyday ritual acts as a metaphor for a thinking process that shapes us (*metamorphosis*), that occurs between people (*collective activity*), and that, in this way, can make a difference in our world (*disruptive imagination*). The ingredients for the preparation, both for the minestrone (*vegetables*) and for the thinking itself (*written reflections*), were laid out before us on the sunlit table. After the workshop, the tablecloth covering the table undoubtedly contained traces of this process. Everyone was invited to make visible the traces of this thinking and cooking, in liquid or non-liquid form, on this tablecloth.

Time and time again, shaped by new thoughts and ideas, this tablecloth will continue travelling and serve as a method to gather people and ideas.

As important as these visible traces on the tablecloth were, the traces left behind in the minds of our participants. Both the minestrone soup and the conversation were delicious and invited continuation!



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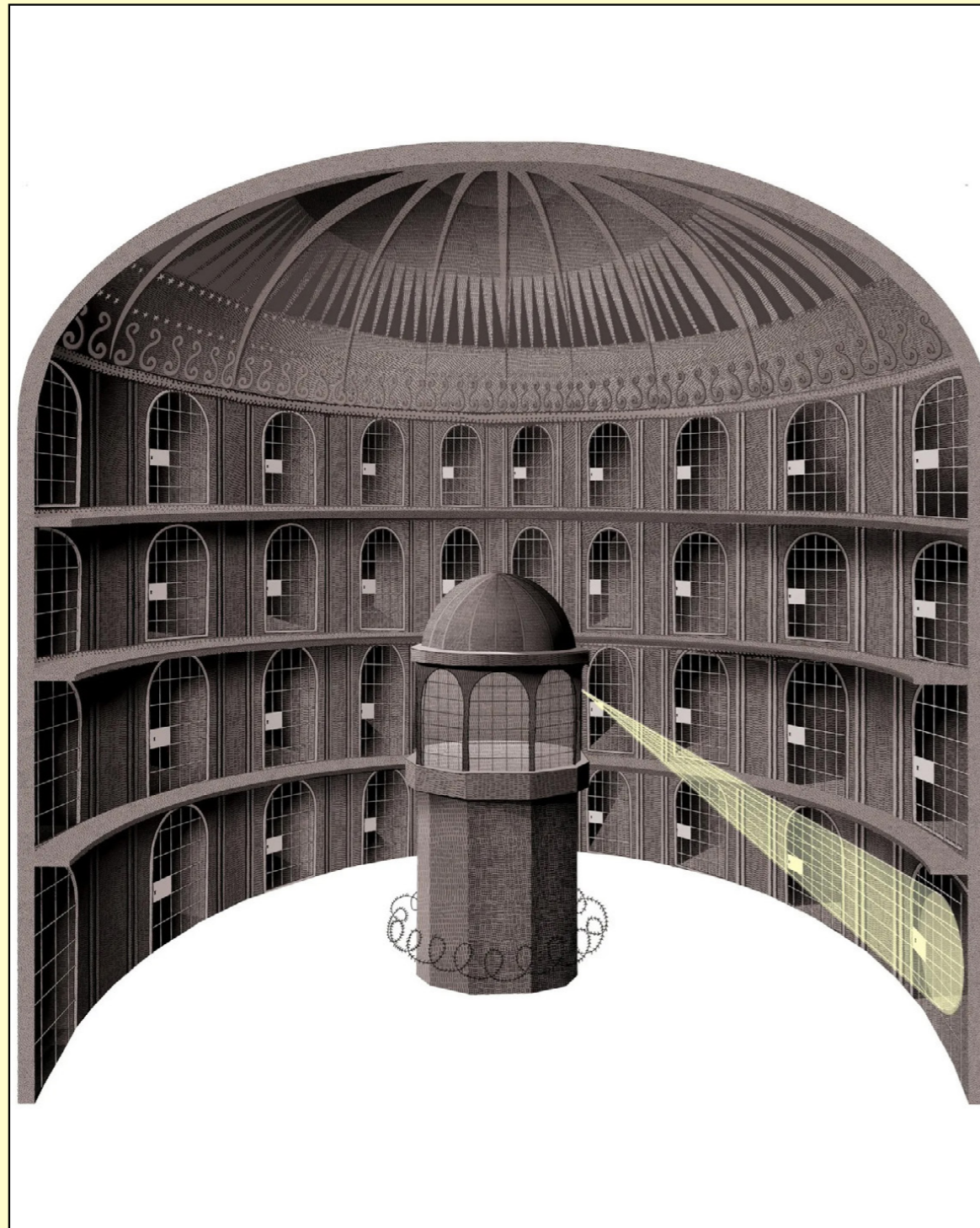
**PANOPTICON**



**COME CLOSER**

**Anna Klimczak**

Polish-Japanese Academy  
of Information Technology  
(PJAIT)



## DESCRIPTION

*Panopticon – Come Closer* is an interactive multimedia installation exhibited as part of the ELIA Biennial Conference 2024 *Arts Plural*, held at the campus of Nuova Accademia di Belle Arti (NABA) in Milan.

The project transferred to the ELIA Biennial Conference 2024 was prepared by the following team: Anna Klimczak (project manager, concept), Sefa Sagir (concept, creation, and adaptation of the artistic idea of the project for the ELIA Biennial Conference exhibition), Tomasz Miśkiewicz (production and presentation), Damian Ziółkowski (visual concept, set design, and visual communication).

The premiere of the project was realised in 2023 under the direction of Anna Klimczak and Tomasz Miśkiewicz at the Multimedia Studio of the Faculty of New Media Art (WSNM) at the Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology (PJAiT) in Warsaw, in collaboration with the following students: Helena Jabłonowska, Karolina Bloch, Jakub Chrobot, Zuzanna Goćławska, Benedikt Pfisterer, Sefa Sagir, Veranika Strakh, Natalia Ślusarska, Julia Witkowska, and Kuba Zakrzewski.

Source: Elizabeth Merritt

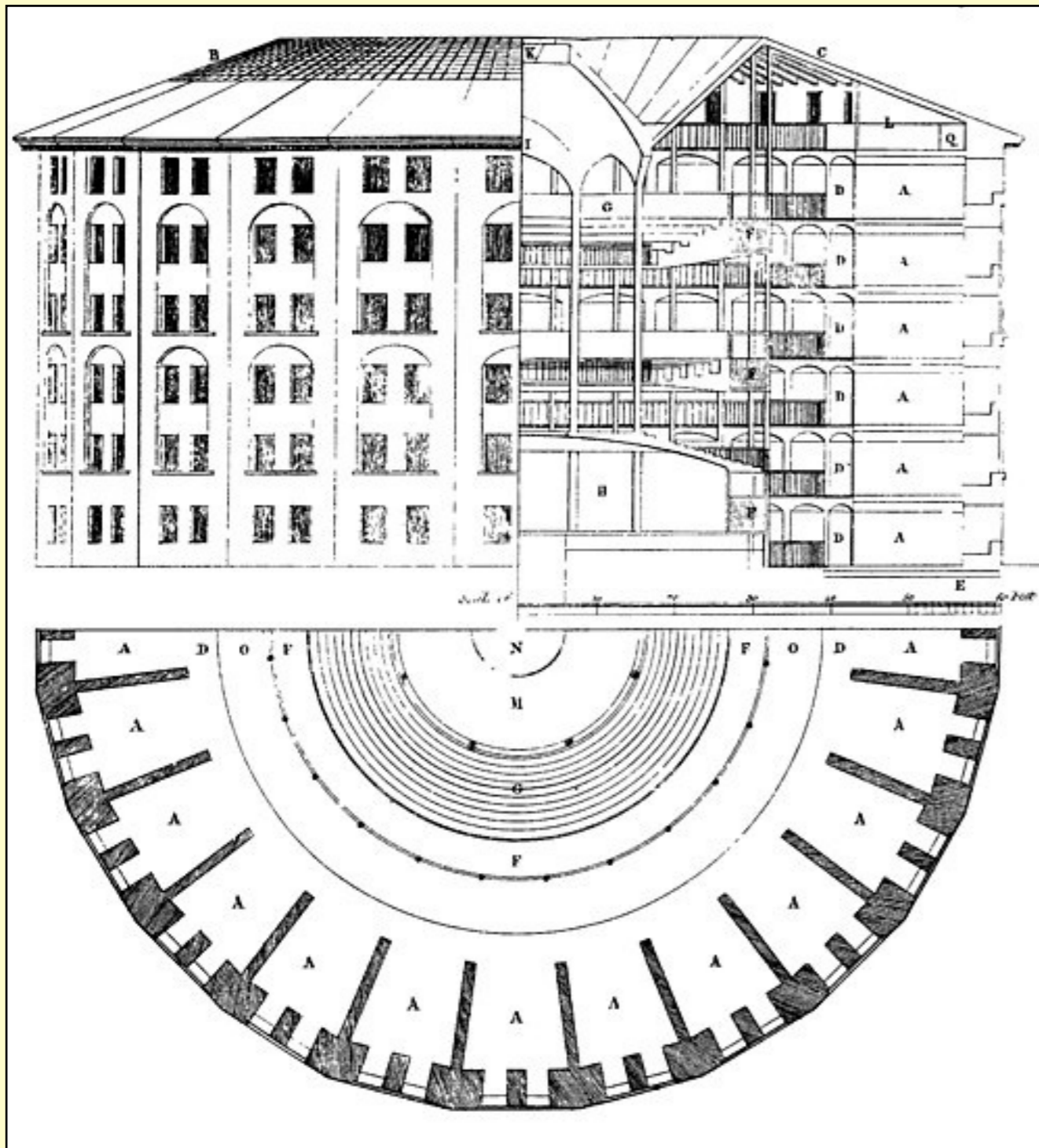
[www.aam-us.org/2015/05/29/futurist-friday-the-digital-panopticon](http://www.aam-us.org/2015/05/29/futurist-friday-the-digital-panopticon)

## INTRODUCTION

The main theme of these creative digital approaches that engage the audience was surveillance and the constant monitoring we experience via surveillance systems and applications. The project used broadcasts from unmonitored livestream webcams that secretly watch people who are unaware that they're being observed, with the live coverage being streamed online. Visitors to the exhibition were able to choose one of four global locations they wanted to observe by standing on a specific spot on the floor. As an added bonus, the participants themselves were also monitored, and their images became part of the interactive installation. The project was inspired by Shoshana Zuboff's book *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* and the analysis of works by Krzysztof Wodiczko and other artists. During their research, the students focused in particular on exploring the relationship between covert surveillance and feelings of pleasure.



**Figure 1.** *Panopticon – Come Closer*, Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology in Warsaw 2023, exhibition excerpt. Photo: Kuba Zakrzewski. Documentation on YouTube: [youtu.be/K9krOmDcI3U?si=QE829HCfZYNOpj60](https://youtu.be/K9krOmDcI3U?si=QE829HCfZYNOpj60)



**Figure 2.** The plan of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon prison drawn by [Willey Reveley](#) in 1791. Jeremy Bentham, vol. IV. Source: [Wikipedia](#).

## EXHIBITION CONTEXT

The ELIA Biennial is an event bringing together arts education institutions from various countries. In its 2024 edition, held from 20 to 23 November in Milan, the thematic focus *Arts Plural* invites questions about how art education can serve society in a more pluralistic way, how artist-practitioners can be agents of change, and what structures are needed for 'artistic intelligence' to play a role in tackling contemporary issues. In this framework, the *Panopticon - Come Closer* installation functions as both an educational and artistic experiment—the students have a hands-on role in creating, presenting, and communicating the project.



Figure 3. Research

## IDEA AND THEMATIC FOCUS

The main theme of the installation is surveillance—continuous monitoring, the relationship between observer and observed. It refers to the classic panopticon concept (e.g., by Jeremy Bentham and Michel Foucault)—questions of who watches, how does that watching affect the watched, what roles are occupied by societies and technologies.

Within the project:

- The viewer is invited to active participation, becoming both observer and observed.
- The installation allows choosing one of several global locations that can be observed via live-feed cameras, hence the user/participant makes a decision and ‘enters’ a monitoring system.
- The project emphasises that in the digital and networked age, being watched and watching becomes part of everyday experience.

In short, the installation asks: In the digital age, where monitoring and tracking are ubiquitous, what is our role in these processes? How do we feel when observed, or when we ourselves decide to observe others?



Figure 4.

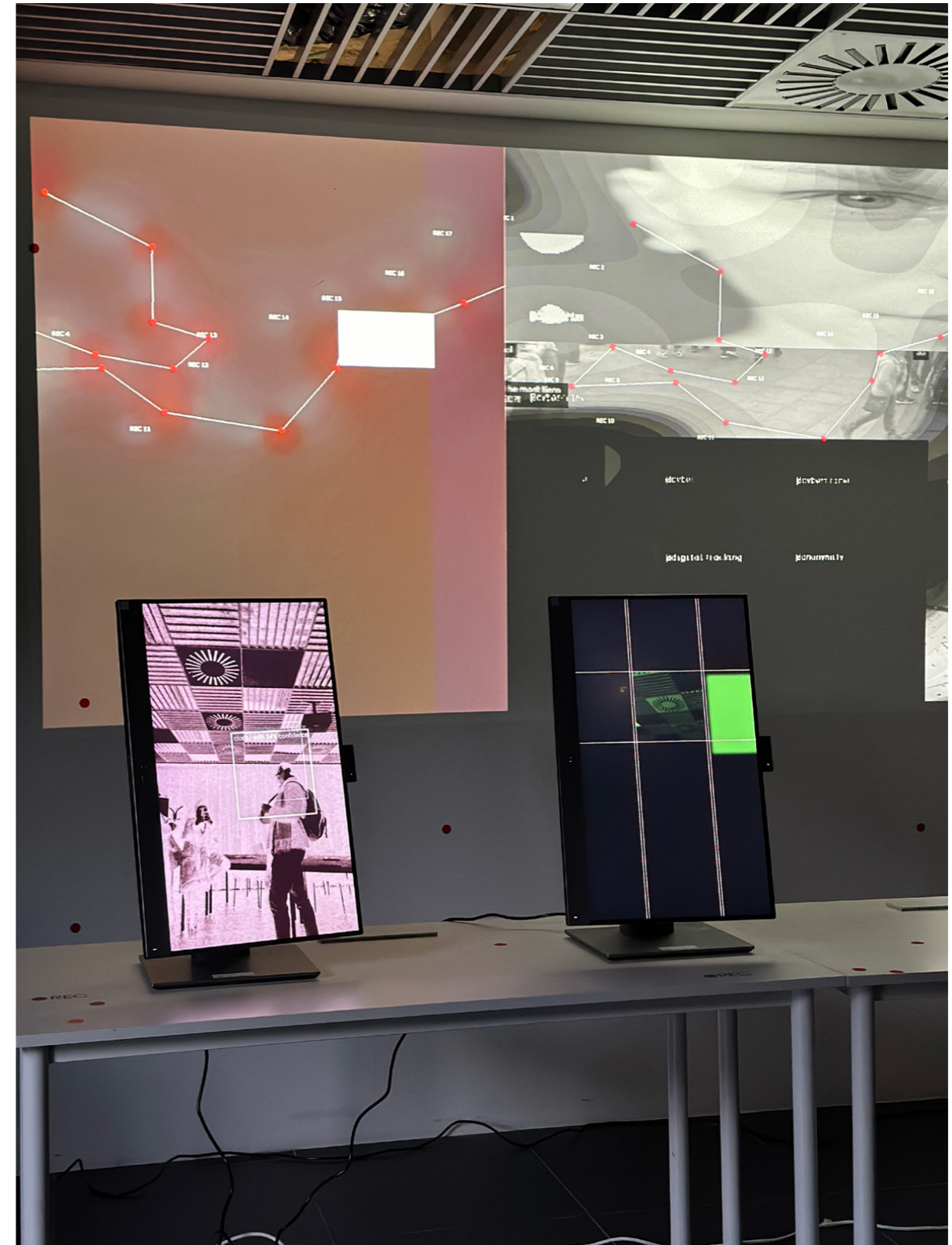


Figure 5.



**Figures 4–6.** *Panopticon – Come Closer*. Exhibition at ELIA Biennial Conference 2024 by Sefa Sagir, Anna Klimczak, Tomasz Miśkiewicz, and Damian Ziółkowski. Photos: Anna Klimczak.

## FORM AND USER EXPERIENCE

Although the full technical details are not publicly disclosed, certain aspects of the form are known:

- The user stands on a specially marked location (a highlighted point) in the exhibition space. Then they are offered to choose which location they want to observe.
- At the same time the user is also observed – ‘being observed’ becomes part of the experience.
- The installation likely uses streaming, webcams, and an interactive entry point, which underscores the project’s intention to operate in networked and global realities.

Thus, the form acts as a tool of critique—by participating, the user becomes part of the system whose functions are being examined.

## TECHNICAL DOCUMENTATION (AVAILABLE DATA)

Based on the exhibition materials from the ELIA Biennial, we can establish the following:

- The installation is listed as *Installation @ NABA: T0.4* in the conference programme.
- Detailed equipment specifications (number of cameras, streaming resolution, interaction code, exact protocol) are not publicly available in the published materials.
- We may infer the likely use of a set of cameras with live feed, a user interaction station (possibly a touch terminal or selection interface), a display/projection in the exhibition space, and a network to connect to multiple global locations.
- No publicly available list of the global locations available for selection by participants is provided—presumably these were pre-selected by the creators.

The conclusion is that while the project is conceptually well documented, many of its technical specifics remain internal to the project or institution.

## CONCLUSIONS AND OPEN QUESTIONS

*Panopticon – Come Closer* is a project that does not provide ready-made answers—rather, it poses questions and invites reflection. Some of the central issues include:

- Has the digital age transformed classic panopticon theory? Are we now more than ever in a ‘prison of visibility’, even if unconsciously?
- What is our role in surveillance mechanisms—as watchers, as watched, as users of technology?
- In what ways can arts education and interactive projects like this one help in raising awareness of power, technology, and observation mechanisms?
- How can installations using network technologies and global reach turn exhibition space into a laboratory of social awareness?

The project demonstrates that contemporary art is not just about aesthetic experience—it becomes an active field for exploring contemporaneity, technology, and society.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.



**Figures 7–9.** *Panopticon – Come Closer.*; Exhibition at ELIA Biennial Conference 2024 by Sefa Sagir, Anna Klimczak, Tomasz Miśkiewicz, and Damian Ziółkowski. Photo: Anna Klimczak.

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# Arts Plural

ELIA Biennial Conference 2024



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