



\* Okay. So let's start. So the three of us are here. Here is a German World War II bunker underneath the gardens at the back of Arsenale in Venice. Let's start out just by introducing ourselves very briefly, names and what we do. So I'll go first. Sam Thorne. I'm a writer and a curator and I'm the director of Nottingham Contemporary in the UK.

**Michael Birchall**

□

**Helga**

/

**Christoffersen****Sam Thorne**

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/ Helga Christoffersen. I'm a curator. Recently a director of a new institution in Copenhagen, Art Hub Copenhagen.

□ Michael Birchall. I'm an academic and a curator. I work at Tate Liverpool, around curator public practice and I work at Liverpool School of Art where I'm an academic.

\* So we were talking before about how best to start and there are several ways into this. I think one would be for us to reflect slightly on the context of where we are and how that might overlap with education, or we could talk a little bit briefly for five minutes or so about the role of education in our work. Whichever you think.

/ I think that would be nice to start off. I think also we might define, when we say education, how each even think about that or define that differently, which could be a nice starting point.

\* So let's start there and I would encourage us to talk about it not only in terms of professional experience but also probably like personal histories with education as well. Do you want to go first, Helga?

/ Sure, sure, sure. Maybe to start off, my way into this field was let's say very much an educational pursuit coming from a city, Copenhagen, that felt very remote in terms of an educational opportunity minded a contemporary field. Meaning my way into the art world was also really through pursuing education elsewhere.

Structurally doing that, of course, financially doing that geographically, et cetera. So that brought me to many different places. First Berlin, then New York, which then also ended up defining my own path and my work. But that was really an educational pursuit to start with or at least the desire to be part of a certain conversation that wasn't present where I was and that I didn't really even know what really was. But surely a sense that an educational context was both a way to surely sort that out, and also to figure out how I fit it in.

\* So yeah. Your personal experience of formal education is completely bound up with leaving Denmark and going into other cities of another continent?

/ Yeah, for sure. Then of course, later on then stepping into a professional work life. Then comes education in the sense of being the author of thoughts or of exhibitions, then asking who comes in and who is interested, and how do they look at something.

\* And what did you study when you were in Berlin?

/ Berlin. Art history and philosophy, cultural studies, cultural science and in New York specifically, curatorial studies.

\* Michael, maybe if you talk a little bit about your own history of education before we move on to how it functions for us.

□ I loved education, I must say even from a young age, I was really a big fan of going to school and I think learning and being interested in learning new things is something that I've always kept in my... So even now I'm learning a language as an example, on the side as a extra-curricular activity. But I think my formal education in university was really important to give me a broad breadth of knowledge, but I would say that it wasn't until when I started working in what I do now with the museums and galleries is that that only provided sort of a basic entry level. I think I learned a lot on the job like most people do.

And then when I did a PhD just a few years ago, that really felt like a selfish moment in my career and in my life because it allowed me to spend three and a half years researching a topic that I was interested in, looking at different models and not being restrained really in any other way. So I always encouraged people now to do PhDs for very selfish reasons, because I think that's what you should do, really. And having that formal environment to do that can be really, really good in your career or in your life.

But when you were talking, I just jotted down lifelong learning, which is this New Labour, British notion of how we learn continually in the course of our lives. And I just wondered if you'd had any position on that in terms of how your own learning experiences continued out of the formal education model?

/ For sure. Step out of an educational context, learning became something much more systemic and structural, than sort of pure subject driven inquiry. I feel a lot of what I do or have done is to navigate an idea or an ambition within a set of circumstances.

And then at some point I also longed to get back into a more academic environment and started a PhD, in this case a practice based PhD, which is a very privilege opportunity to think about day to day work within a more theoretical framework.

And then, when you say lifelong learning, I recently stepped into a situation where I'm really learning on the job.

□ What about your story, Sam?

\* So yeah, just listening to you both talk, I realize I've reflected very little on my own experiences of education. But for me, so my mother was, until she retired a year or two ago, a high school teacher. She taught geography for many years, and my father was, until he retired a couple of years ago, a scientist of sorts. He was working in telecommunications, but he did a PhD just before I was born. He was an astrophysicist working in the field of astronomy, and his PhD was on the dark side of the moon.

And he started his research literally the year that the Pink Floyd album of the same name came out. And the epigraph for his dissertation, which I've read and is extremely boring, is taken from a song from that album.

And so my dad was part of this, I guess generation of British prog rock- influenced scientists who were kind of taking that run of cosmic albums like prog and krautrock and ambient from the mid seventies and the actually forging a career, a research career out of it. So I suppose when I think of my own education, it's partly, I was definitely aware of school and schooling from an early age because my mother who was then quite young and was quite good friends with lots of the six form students, like 17, 18 year olds. So they would come over to our house for lunch or whatever. And at the same time, my dad's research colleagues would also kind of be around. So I suppose a few things: there is having an awareness of proximity to schools, to research centers, but sitting outside of it. And then also, I think through my dad's work, having this idea that a field like popular music could intersect with thinking about space. I remember being extremely scared on my first day of school because what little I knew about school at that point was through my mom teaching 17 and 18 year olds geography. And so all I knew was that it involved textbooks. I had no idea what textbooks were. But I guess I'd seen them before and they looked really off putting. And I remember just being like four or five and just thinking like, shit, I've got to go and read textbooks. And I got to my first day of primary school and it was just obviously kids pouring water and sand through funnels, and I just remember thinking, this is school? This I can do. And yeah, and then we moved around a lot when I was a kid because of my dad's work. And so for me, education was from an early age, very connected with moving and moving context, moving from countryside to cities and back and making new friends and losing touch with people. So that's my schooling and I guess I did enjoy it. And then at university I studied literature and I did a BA, I didn't do an MA or a PhD, and that was at Cambridge, which is an extremely conservative institution. And it's one of the oldest literature programmes in the world and literature is still largely taught there as it would have been taught in the 1840s or 50s when the program was first emerged. That is to say you're literally taught the kind of history of English literature chronologically. So starting from about the eighth century with some of the early middle English poetry, marching through medieval Renaissance dah, dah, dah, all the way to the post-colonial, which they were very ill equipped to deal with. After about a year I became aware of art history, I suppose, which I hadn't previously been particularly aware of as a field and tried to switch and then realized quickly that the way that art history was taught at Cambridge finished in about 1910 really, and I already knew that I was primarily interested in postwar and contemporary. So I was advised just to stay with my program and to work on papers and essays that worked a little away or on the margins of what you would think of as literature, in that forum. So I was able to work on that Frankfurt school and through to I suppose to *October*-ish bunch of critics and theorists. And so I suppose for me, my experience of education was always tending away from what it was that I was purportedly there to do. I felt like I could somehow reroute the course for my own purposes, which were largely, although I didn't yet know it, starting to think about curating, certainly started with art history.

□ But when you say that's kind of an old fashioned notion of an art education, that one is exposed to literature, visual art, film design, that at the core that is the nature of those degrees that one is exposed to the topics and then writing a dissertation on that or takes that in a different direction. I mean, I certainly felt that my education was like that. Even though you were doing art history, you had to be quite well read. You have to know your classic texts and if you didn't, you were left behind.

\* The peculiarity at Cambridge is really to do with this system that emerged there called practical criticism, right? And there's the idea, which I suppose started to emerge in the 20s, being that all you needed was the text. You didn't need the date, you didn't need the author, you did not need any historical context whatsoever. Everything that you needed to glean from a poem was there and through a series of close readings you could get to the truth of the text. That remains a hundred years later, how literature is largely taught at undergrad level there. And so any of the challenges that structuralist or post-structuralist thinking posed to that mode of reading was dismissed, really. Infamously, Derrida was offered an honorary doctorate from Cambridge and there was uproar among a number of professors there and it was turned down because I remember Derrida died in 2004, it's when it was when studying. And I remember reading about him being barely aware of who he was because continental philosophy, critical theory was not really there, even among younger academics. I think for me, when I then finished that moving into, I then became a critic. The art world broadly defined, felt tremendously exciting precisely because it was so promiscuous in its thinking and so absorptive of other fields, that here was a place where you could read this stuff and anything else.

/ Thinking about a more general point of departure or from within another discipline, I started in history as well.

□ Me too.

/ And found myself doing a full year on the history of Nazism, specifically studying the cultural policies of the Third Reich.

\* Is that something you chose to do or that was a fixed module?

/ I think there weren't so many options, and think I also wanted to know more about my own family history, having grandparents who lived through the occupation and went to Germany right after the war to help rebuild the the country.

\* Sure. And then you did curatorial studies...

/ Yes.

\* Which is a really young field, right, of they only-

□ Is it young though nowadays? Isn't it kind of-

\* It's only... I mean, the Bard was one of the first, right?

/ Yeah.

\* And that was like late eighties, early nineties.

□ I would say it's quite an established discipline now even though it's, yes, it's young within other areas.

\* Compared to art history it's extremely young.

□ But it's very much established as a sort of... There's a certain set of prescribed texts. There's a certain...

\* Did it feel that way when you were there?

□ ... historiography to it?

/ I have to say no. That did feel very exploratory. The questions that were asked depended on which course you're in, the teaching capacity really defines that and it can be very different personalities with very different experiences. Of course, there is a history of exhibitions, and shifts in exhibition practices, that is also very much looked to, but my experience was that it was such an open field of study, and that is what was exciting.

I didn't come in and then it's like, bam, this is the textbook of it. Read it through and then you get it. But that was certainly my experience of art history.

□ Mm-hmm (affirmative). I teach it now basically, and I've taught it for a number of years and I think what keeps me still interested in it as a field is that the interdisciplinary aspect that you can really explore a multitude of concepts, ideas, texts, but it requires the teaching staff to have that broad knowledge. Or if they don't, then you have to pass them on to a person who might.

But I think when I meant the historiography of curatorial studies is the texts that explore the field of the curatorial

/ You mean in the history of exhibitions, for example.

□ Yeah, exactly.

/ You sit down and you go through that cannon.

□ Yeah. I think that's quite interesting as well and how that intersects with art history in some cases.

/ I ended up teaching there and I felt maybe that was what I brought. I taught a course on collection shows and worked with the students and really stewarded them through making separate collection shows themselves. But that was very different than the historical exercise of that. That was the very real structural framework that you need to think about building in the sense of getting beyond the text, getting into something where you were actually dealing with the material in your hand.

\* Michael, did you study curating?

□ I did. It was kind of art gallery, museums studies trying to be curating, and that basically untangled all the things that I learned from my very conservative first degree, but it was quite useful. It was very practical and...

\* As in practical in the sense that it was trying to train museum curators?

□ Yeah, it was a bit like there were some training elements in it, but it was also very much... It was taught by people who had worked as curators, so they weren't trying to sugar coat this art industry, I think, and that certainly informed my own teaching now because I hold this funny job where I'm in both worlds and I am very much a realist that this is not actually a great industry to work in and not everybody will become a curator.

I think one of the things that I was trying to debate and discuss is that within the art system, there's a multitude of options available that may extend into the curatorial or the educational, but they're all ultimately about delivering education to audiences maybe or sharing different kinds of practices. And I think you can do that in many different ways now within a museum system.

\* So yeah, I didn't study curating, but I wanted to. And I had this very convoluted idea about how I would go about, I don't know, doing that, which I won't go into, but after I graduated, I quite soon after got a job working at *frieze* magazine, initially writing more about music and then gradually writing about art. And throughout that time, I suppose in my early twenties I was thinking I want to go back to school to do some version of a curating MA and I just kind of didn't and didn't, didn't. After some time I realized that essentially just what was being provided for me by then, this very close-knit, very good bunch of friends who were all of the editors. That was enough. That's what I was looking for, and among them at the time, one was finishing a much delayed PhD about conceptual art and pop music. Someone was just writing her first novel. One was running a record label and playing in bands. One was curating shows, though the others weren't at that point. But among them, that was a version of the curatorial as a field, right? It just happened to be people who were also putting out a magazine eight times a year. And at this time, it was very de-professionalized. There was very little scrutiny about what the magazine could be. It was also at a moment, I suppose in the late 2000s, when the publishing industry was collapsing. And so just throwing into question what a magazine was actually, could it be an event series? Could it be music? Could it be video, whatever.

And that felt tremendously exciting. And I think in retrospect, I was somehow able to frame that as an educational experience because we would just sit down and have long lunches every day and I would ask them lots of questions, and it was my first time living in London. So I think for me, like that was an alternative to an MA and it felt, not that it was structured in any kind of sense, but he were sharing books and sharing all of those kinds of things.

□ I just want to say that's a really nice way that you talk about this magazine being in this place where all these open possibilities can happen and that you were able to navigate around this discourse with your peers. And I guess they became mentors, really.

★ I think so. Absolutely. Now when occasionally I teach on writing programmes like the one at the Royal College, when we talk about magazines, it's just that kind of definition of what a magazine is in the military sense of it being a place to hold explosive material. And I certainly don't think there are many magazines that do that now, particularly in the contemporary art magazines. But I still hold onto that dream of what magazines can be and the way in which they can bring together a range of different voices. So yeah, that was important for me and it was what I, if I hadn't been doing that for sure, I would have been doing an MA. So I tend to think of them as somehow related. Yeah.

/ That makes me really think about the importance of institutions or structures that they can often stand in place of actual educational and educational experience.

★ Because my sense of not having studied curating and of what I always saw quite enviously of colleagues at that time as having gained was partly that grounding that you're describing of a history of exhibitions or a history of the changing role of the curator, let's say. But it also furnishes you with a network, right? Of both mentors and peers and I remember being in my mid twenties and just like, "How's everyone know everyone?" And then taking a while to realize that actually this is kind of one of the things that the MA programmes at our schools anywhere, what it does. Right?

□ I also did something a bit weird in that I did this programme in Canada at the Banff center, it was called the curatorial work study, which is quite common in the States, but it's basically a training programme. So I worked for the gallery as an assistant curator for four days a week, and on the fifth day was my research day, but I had all these amazing mentors that were people that worked there.

So back then it was Kitty Scott was the director, but then Banff has this amazing place in the mountains where every six to eight weeks there'd be this turnover of artists, curators, critics, writers that would come into town. I have to say it's still a network that I still live off in the sense that I still get things from that time. And that was a long time ago now, but it was really life changing and that kind of opportunity to train in a way in an institution such as that is really, really rare.

★ So you both had experiences in quite rural or remote places?



/ Yeah.

□ Yeah we did, yeah.

/ But there's really something to say about a group of people coming together with an intention. That was a big change for me rather than sitting in those art history programmes where you... I don't even know. People don't really flag their intention or their ambition or their passions maybe because it's a place where you didn't really discover that yet, but for sure coming to a place where even remotely, everybody was there with a mission.

\* But that idea of a shared intention. Is that quite rare or, I'm just thinking if you compare it to going to med school or lawyer, whatever lawyers study. Lawyer academy where actually it's a kind of series of very regulated examinations that you're going to do, whereas obviously curatorial studies are vastly different, but it's vocational in some sense. Right?

/ Yeah. It is a ladder you step into, but maybe more in the sense of building arguments and ways of qualifying your ideas.

\* There's a track that you literally have to do to qualify.

/ I realized is that part of it was about turning those different experiences that were genuinely driving me into a defined set of interests. You were sitting around a table and people are asking you: what are you interested in? And if you don't have an answer, then you are...

\* Out in the cold.

/ I also figured out that it was a really positive energy. And a driving force. As soon as you had that... It's not about power but you had something with fire in it that you could take somewhere.

\* Yeah, sure. I think I missed that because working at a magazine, you're a generalist almost by definition, right? You have to be interested in the stuff that's happening in a very broad way. It's like you're covering these exhibitions because these exhibitions are happening at these institutions or these biennials or whatever. Probably what started to frustrate me after some years was you have a very, very broad remit, but one that's also maybe relatively shallow in terms of the amount it penetrates given subjects or areas. Whereas I think I was never forced to articulate clearly, certainly at that point what my research focus was or interests were.

□ Yeah. I think that's what formal education does really well and it positions learners to position their research or their interests and it's a useful exercise to be precise, but also, coming from a university perspective, it's also a place where you're given freedom, but you're also given the intellectual space to explore a topic that interests you, that doesn't have to be linked to any, any threads actually. It just exist on its own.

\* Can we turn a little to... I mean, Helga, you're still doing a PhD, so in a sense you are still undergoing, if we can use that word. Phrases of formal education but when-

□ But wait, that doesn't mean that you and I are done.

\* Sorry?

□ Obviously you and I aren't like done with our education, surely.

\* Well, what do you think?

□ I don't know. I mean, I might want to learn something else in the future. You might want to go and do, I don't know. I don't think it stops at a certain point.

\* If we're talking about definitions, wouldn't one working definition here be the difference between education? You can't help but learn. Right? Like we all learnt today that there's a bunker here and we kind of had to and we were led down here and now we know about it. You can't really resist learning in that sense. I can resist education. I'm not going to go and do an MA or PhD now. I'm pretty sure about that, but I don't know. What do you think is... I think for me, education has to do with some form of structure or some form of institution.

□ Maybe that's a topic that we can discuss later on because I think we mentioned that over lunch but maybe we can come back to that. Even we were talking about institutions and the trend to be called a learning department or an education department where we can unpack that as well.

\* Yeah, I mean I'd like to go to that, what is an education without institutions? I'm not really sure. Something I am interested in, but I do think that learning... I mean my personal definition, and I don't really think I've had to articulate it before, but one definition or distinction between learning and education is that learning is lifelong almost by definition and continuous and daily and informal. And those are all things that education can be but isn't necessarily, I would say.

/ I think there's also a separate discussion on what an educational system gives you in terms of a certain validation and also what that has meant at different moments in time, maybe what it means today. I am thinking about that being in a PhD programme. On the one hand that gave me the opportunity to just think and focus. It gave me some space, some resources, a way of thinking that was not otherwise possible where I was, but of course part of that is also that it is a system of validation that I can use or that fits within a larger structure. That also goes for artists, or increasingly so. Artists PhDs. And also how that entered the language we use to talk about what artists do. Research as opposed to simply works.

□ Could I ask just really briefly, what is that history of artists with PhDs? When did it start and where? Because it's not a long, there's no long history here, right?

/ No, maybe a few decades back. I not able to say what the first programme was, but of course artists also entered art history programmes. More recently it has a relationship with European regulation and a push for standardization, for example teaching positions demanding a certain merit.

□ Can I just ask, do you not think there's still a sort of apprehension or tension around the artist PhD as being like it's still, I feel it's still having an identity crisis, it still struggles with itself and when an artist does a practice based PhD or practice led PhD, they sort of have to justify their existence in the Academy, which is based on this more conventional or historical notions of scholarship. Not only just that, but other forms as well. There's always still a bit of tension there. It's always like-

/ But I think it's also, it's still very structural in the sense that it's very regulated along the lines of art history programmes. Or I know the Danish context better, and there a practice based PhD is still administered and approved by the university and structured through the same regulation as an art history PhD.

\* What's your experience of that Michael? Being somewhat positioned within the Academy.

□ I think it's, I agree with most of what you're saying and in terms of the regulations and the requirements of the PhD. Yes, it's very structured, but it's still based around the written component that seems to carry much more prominence in the eyes of the university and the practice is almost referenced within that document as this is what I've been doing and I'm going to justify it through this methodology I've developed in this PhD and I almost feel that you need to have an opportunity to see that practice element. However, that may be articulated and it shouldn't only be through a written output to use a horrible term like output, but I've known, I have a few friends that did practice based PhDs and all of them found it really helpful for their own practice, but they also struggled with the limitations of it as a sort of a mini PhD in terms of the written components.

I'm yet to supervise one. I've just taken on a new student that wanted to do a PhD and I convinced them to do a normal route PhD and not do practice based. So, maybe it's my own bias. I don't know, but I'm curious.

\* I'm not sure if this is related, but just something that I've noticed before is if you look back at major exhibitions in the '50s and '60s, virtually no artists had MAs. I found that a lot of artists that hadn't gone to art school, but I think it was big New York '50s and '60s artists, lots of them did art history programmes, right? And then were making work on the side. What's striking now is that in any given, we're at Venice, take a given Venice Biennial, most artists on that list will have an MA, probably very few of them in this one anyway would have a PhD, but an MA has become standard. Yeah. Just the terminal degree of it and when you were talking earlier about how do these things validate us or practitioners?

It made me think back to that 2013 biennale that we were talking about earlier and just I remember really, I think it was very definitely navigated the biographies of the practitioners in that show, but obviously part of the provocation was there was this combining of the self-taught with the highly credentialed and it was extremely glaring even in sensitively written texts. The way in which the personal lives and narratives and educational histories of these makers was drawn out that on the one side of the aisle you had those with MAs and the others, the other side was those with experiences of psychiatric institutions, incarceration. I mean, they were on both sides. They were institutionally defined, but what was striking for me was the one side had MAs. You know what I mean? I mean, almost more so... It made that more glaring for me by it brought it into sharp relief I suppose by having self-taught makers showing alongside a professionalized art world. I don't really have a point to make on that, but I suppose it was just for me, it was a moment where I started to notice, oh right, yeah, the MA is the-

□ Just to add to it though, it's a very recent history and even you float around the term art world, we can all disagree dates when one might say that began, but certainly-

\* We can say when the term began.

□ Yeah, we can say when the term began, but the ways in which the artists have positioned themselves in a sort of competitive game of being professional, being taken seriously, having certain exhibition histories and being part of a system, the sort of postgraduate art education is sort of implicit in that model of this global roving artist needs to have this validation from a good art school in order to be useful as an artist almost and I just think there was a text I wrote many years ago and I remember it, the title was the MFA is the new MBA and it was published by Harvard Business Review.

\* I've read that piece-

□ Read it as well and that shift as well towards professional practice, but also through a sort of near liberal business model. It's also quite relatively recent.

\* In which that idea of lifelong learning is also a piece of, right? It creates the flexible, adaptable works of tomorrow. Yeah. What I was going to ask you is, I'm keeping this deliberately extremely broad, so go wherever you want with it, but how does education, what is education for you on a day to day basis as a curator, as a curator academic? How does it enter into your life, your professional life or otherwise?

/ I can start. I think on my end recently relocating from New York where I worked at the New Museum and being part of a big institution, education was a more remote aspect of exhibition making. Once a show is open and once the material is ready, the educators take over from there. It's a little bit of a disconnect, which both has to do with procedure and time.

\* And I think that disconnect is entirely typical of museums in the west.

/ Yeah.

\* I mean, my own observation is partly it's a question of education of the people in those departments too. Just in the places I've worked at and I wonder if this is the same at new museum, the curatorial department is typically international, has been educated internationally to an MA level or PhD and the educational learning teams are typically more local in terms of where they've grown up. Certainly the truth of where I work now, they're from Nottingham and they went to art school or teacher training college and will not have studied curating.

/ Speaking specifically to the New Museum, the educational department has a history of changing curatorial profiles. Eungie Joo was the curator of education for many years. After that Johanna Burton took over. They both developed incredible programs.

□ Anne Barlow.

\* Yeah, but many years ago.

□ Sorry. Even before that.

I think that term that you use that it had its own curatorial profile is really interesting because I'm sort of assuming a hierarchy that the exhibition programme is more superior to the educational programme and that were articulating as having its own profile, which in anyway is independent of that model.

/ For sure.

□ I'd love to talk about that for hours actually.

/ I totally get what you're saying, but yeah, when looking broadly at institutions, it's maybe an exception.

□ Yes. Of course. Yeah, sure.

/ Maybe.

\* And the histories get written in different ways, right? The education team, of course they produce publications, but it's certainly not for every programme or every event in a way that one would expect exhibitions to leave some record. So, I'm often struck by how little we know about an education programme at any given moment because it is either temporary or what surrounds it is much more ephemeral materials. I see this myself in my own institution. The exhibition histories are easy to track, but other parts of it much less so.

□ Yeah. I don't know how many institutions keep files on their education programme from within. They don't, do they? There is the archive in Leeds, in the UK. It's the National Education-

\* Arts Education-

□ Yeah, there you go.

\* Yeah. We have loans from there in our current exhibition. It's a very strange place. It's in a really forgotten former university campus in Yorkshire Sculpture Park. I literally stumbled on it about three years ago. It's the first time I went to Yorkshire Sculpture Park. I saw a sign saying, "National Arts Education Archive." What's that? And it's completely volunteer run. They've got the papers of a number of significant artists educators, Richard Hamilton, Victor Pasmore. So, the main figures. It's a super intriguing resource and one that's been under-explored, but yeah, it's not. It's focused on artists. It's not focused on museums.

/ The comparison I was making before when bringing up the New Museum was that I am now building up a new institution where education is suddenly a whole other kind of work for me in the sense that every day actually feels like part of what the core mission of an educational programme can be. I am thinking about an institutional structure as an educational machine of sorts, and a programme as people coming together at a moment in time with an intention and that actually becoming a learning environment.

\* And you're starting from zero pretty much, right?

/ Yeah. Working from a sense of what is really needed in the context I am working in.

\* Yeah. I mean, partly I think what we are all grappling with is the built legacy of earlier forms of thinking and of structuring. When I think of our own building in Nottingham, you have the top lit galleries up at the top, street facing and so on. That's the public view of what the institution does. Hidden underground is a series of education spaces with no natural light with no public access and then enter through the offices and so on and so, this is a building that was designed in the early 2000s and to me it feels like a relic of a very different form of institution building.

□ Yeah, because I mean we have the same at Tate Liverpool. We were designed in '88. We have the most gorgeous education space called the Clore Studio, which has views of the river and you can get to it from one of the galleries, but you have to go through two doors with a swipe and obviously that is a relic of the late '80s. So, it's astonishing that you still have that space...

\* Yeah. So, it enforces that division that you were describing at the new museum somehow I think where you have the exhibitions is still somehow primary and then everything else feels peripheral because the building makes it so.

□ It's architectural. Yeah.

/ Yeah. I guess that also brings us to something else than that. I think we had a conversation not too long ago, which was also about a shift in how we think about and use exhibition spaces. What are they? Where are they? How are those square meters used? How are they used as institutions develop? How do new institutions prioritize them? What is the spatial division? I'm asking myself all these things, looking ahead to establishing a new space. How does ones mission reflect in how space is divided and put to use?

\* Yeah and what's your thinking at the moment about how that might manifest?

/ For now I am working with a scenario where exhibitions fit in as one of four or five priorities with equal weight. They're an engine for production and collaboration and a really important part of creating an institutional engine. As much as I am really thinking about other modes of working, not necessarily prioritizing the material output of artistic practice, and looking at the range of different practices and outcomes, a space that gathers people, and sets up unexpected meetings, that remains very central.

We are here, meeting within the framework of the Venice Biennale, even if we should think a lot about this kind of centralization, and what it does, I was walking through the exhibition yesterday and thinking, my God, the amount of people here on a rainy day in November! And then coming here, or what we are doing now, it is also still about collegial network or an investment in critical discussion.

\* Yeah, the exhibitions are bound up with forms of power and visibility in a way that I think I would say the education programme, it would be rare for education programmes to have that weight, let's say.

□ But I think it's right what you said. It's about how you give things equal weighting and it also really depends on artists that you choose to work with or collectives or whatever that the invitation is there and also expectations about how that's delivered and also that both teams don't feel that they can ask artists to, I don't know, do a workshop on building a castle and also I was thinking then that there's a source within education teams in museums that there's an intrinsic notion of a duty of care for audiences, constituents, groups that those teams work with and they sort of nurture certain relationships over a period of time and it might not always be the right place to expose those practices inside of a highly visible white cube. It might be safer to do this in a space, which is not perhaps as accessible as you might like.

\* Yeah. Before when I moved to Tate, which was six years ago or something, prior to that I'd never worked in a museum before. I never really worked in an institution before and so, these dynamics that we're discussing of these interactions between exhibitions and education teams are completely new to me and I was like, "What the fuck?"

Seems so crazy and contested and so on and the best way that I think I could navigate it or the way that I initially understood it anyway to play out at Tate was that they were two differences and one was that curators in a museum like that, they're still primarily thinking about and working with objects and images and educators are primarily thinking about people and so, with all of the different duties of care that go along with those two different division and then as someone put it to me, it might have been someone from the learning team at Tate to be really reductive, exhibitions curators are trying to create a singularity from a multiplicity, which we can, whether or not you think that's the case and educators are trying to do the opposite. They're trying to create a multiplicity or a myriad from a singularity. They're trying to unpick or dismantle the exhibition and it's not to say that I particularly agree with that view at all, but I do think there is, I sometimes feel like they're moving in different directions, these two as practices, as kinds of visions and when we all sit down with the team that we have at Nottingham, it sometimes feels like they're talking different languages. The jargon is very different. The planning time is very different, right? So, there's this temporal divergence and the exhibition teams would be working two, three years out. Education teams, two or three months or even weeks out. There's a spatial distinction that we've already talked about. It's actually difficult to forge these overlaps in ways that I would never have predicted before I started to work within a museum. I was like, "What? This is crazy." Why is this so difficult?

/ Yeah, its paradoxical. You spend such a long time thinking something out, you work with artists on mining a whole range of things that just takes you honestly just a long time, and you also ask yourself at which point you can't ask the same of everybody around you, right? And you also can't just stay in your bubble, which is to say that at some point you have to be able to communicate or put things in language or talk. What you're also pointing to is time investment, right?

From your own time investment to the time investment of the educators or the educational team and then to the time investment of a visitor or anybody walking into the door, right? So, that's from three years to three months to-

\* Three minutes or three hours-

/ Three hours to just three minutes. I don't like to call it reduction, but how you think about something will eventually go through that cycle, whether you want to think about it or not, you can also not think about it. But eventually, as we collaborate on so many levels, others will take over and think about it differently, maybe compress it, maybe expand it.

\* Within that span that you're describing as almost it goes through in very undirected. I mean, perhaps in what I'm hearing you say, it's quite an exploratory practice, right? Early on of working with an artist or an exhibition, it could go in so many different directions. By the time that reaches an educator, it's become more unidirectional, right?



Or it's like we're doing this, these are set up and this is often how it works to the point and then where that experience is then defined within the institution for the visitor participant, it feels like I'm imagining something that starts out very wide and takes a lot of time to something that becomes much more pointed.

/ Yeah and I even feel within that mode of operation, there's all these points where either you can be stubborn and stick with what everybody else might not necessarily understand yet because it's somewhat of a new proposition, or at least feels like it in your mind, but at some point you can also choose to say like, "Fuck it. I'll jump ahead on this one." You can fall back on established normative institutional language or frame of reference. I feel we know how that looks.

\* I first encountered this work at the Sharjah Biennial. I was an entry point. It was like, "No, that's not." That's validation from the start of your senses.

/ Exactly, you can fall back on systems of validation. Its maybe not that its either or, but I am often trying to determine which institutions are actually consciously putting a voice in a programme and an intention forward that is conscious of the fact that it's at risk of falling in line, rather than moving forward. I think there are quite powerful forces driving a mechanized way of operating, a sense that a fantasy of increasing reach globally demands it.

Or that reach is seemingly infinite, and should be. A fantasy that being formally very strict in language, or maybe conventional in the right way at a given moment in time, that generates a force. If you can be anywhere, but just speak the language.

\* Yeah, sure and it's exactly that "fill in the blanks" interpretation panel that you're describing: the largest exhibition to date in XYZ, explores XYZ. Yeah, but these things are like, they're so... These different dynamics where ideologies are of course so embedded in the languages that museums continue to use, right? The fact, the very fact that what we're talking about is called interpretation, right? Often or the outreach is still, there's this idea of a in a sense the museum occupying the center and having to explicate its contents is still so often there and even more forward thinking museums now. Don't you think?

□ Yeah. I think so, but there's also a bit of tension. I mean, some museums websites now when you Google what they have in their collection, it links to a Wikipedia page.

\* Tate's does that.

□ Oh yeah? And then you have, so you have this almost co-editing of more of these texts and I think that it's a gray area of contention in most museums when you're writing those wall texts because in large scale institutions, which is most of my experience, there needs to be continuity between all texts and I think in my position at Tate, Liverpool, there's certain things that I'm not allowed to say in public media.

So, writing things that you've just mentioned probably wouldn't be an okay thing for Tate to say because that's not the sort of voice that Tate wants and then there's obviously also questions about decolonizing museums now where certain terms are being removed from text, but then not explained as to why they've been removed or what these terms might refer to.

★ The new MoMA is a version of this, right? That they've decided not to include the names of art movements in any of the texts. So, abstract expressionism becomes, I think they call it action painting, but the data gets removed, but suddenly I mean it reinforces actually an insistence on existing bodies of knowledge because you need to know also. If you don't know-

□ But that's really annoying though, isn't it? It's like if I'm watching a nature program with David Attenborough, I want to know the names of the species and the plants even when I'm not a biologist and even all the Earth's geographical periods. I have no clue about geology, but I want to know the terminology. So, I'm a little bit afraid that things are redacted in large scale institutions in that we'll lose something along the way, but maybe the public will revolt and say-

★ No. I think we need to hold onto the specificity of these terms. I still remember writing a text about Hélio Oiticica when I was at Tate and using the term "neo-concrete" and it getting returned from the, whatever the team is who does that stuff, with this like this stricken and re-described. That was the name. We can define what that movement was and when it was and so one, but I think it's important still too.

□ Yeah. I mean, I try and see it now as more of a negotiation with that team rather than I'm right, you're wrong and there's certain terms that I'm willing to negotiate, but I think there's still... But can I go back to your original question? Is that okay? I think-

★ Wait, what was my original question?

□ Your original question was how we see education, educational models inside the gallery. I think something like that-

★ Yeah. In your own life, your own work.

□ I sit literally in between the office on the left learning team, the education team on the right, the exhibitions team. And I just moved recently to this new place, physically in the middle of both teams, because all my curatorial work has kind of been, you could call it related to pedagogical models, or respectively the educational turn, and I just see it as integrated practice. But, within Tate, I'm an anomaly in that I don't sit in one team or the other. And then I kind of negotiate this language across both departments, and I see a great deal of expertise that's actually not always shared across both teams.

So unlike your example, most of our learning team have MAs, some have PhDs, and everybody has an undergraduate degree in art history. But that knowledge is often, not dismissed, but discouraged within the curatorial team based on the internationalism or their own ability to see contemporary art, which I think isn't always the case for the learning curators. I think they just have limited time, or means, and they're not able to go and see as much as the other teams can. And I also think that there's also a way of producing exhibitions that can often exclude the voice of the educator, and that when it is presented to the educational team, it's like, there you go. This is my concept as a curator, and now you have to programme around this.

And I think there is often a way of introducing that conversation much earlier on, in the planning of the exhibition, to allow for new voices, which is what you were mentioning earlier, that this doesn't have to be one particular person's vision of how this artist wants to articulate their work inside the museum.

\* But you work, in effect, as both a university and a museum? Is what the job is?

□ Yeah. So in my university job, which is half my job, it's very formalized teaching. I run a couple of courses, I have PhD supervision, and I also get research time. That's quite luxurious really, because it means I can run away to the university and do some research, or-

\* Does the idea of education differ in the museum to the university, in this kind of split job you have? Are you doing the same thing?

□ I think it's very much informed by my curatorial practice. All of the teaching I do involves some form of practical exploration of a concept or an idea. And I do that very European model of project-based teaching, where I put the students to task on specific projects, rather than the British model of constantly delivering classes that depend on you instilling knowledge on them. I like them to take on part of the ownership of the work.

\* You draw that distinction between a British model and a European model, in that sense?

□ Yeah. Because my first teaching job was in Switzerland, and there I was employed by an art school to teach, and I was given a few courses, but it was very free. And some hours of teaching, and then you kind of do what you want. In that model, it's based around project-based learning. Let me think, what am I doing next semester? So I booked a space in Tate for five days, which is called Tate Exchange, which is our kind of experimental learning platform. And I'll basically get the students to produce a curatorial project in that space. It might be a symposium for performance, a lecture series. They might commission artists. But, I want them to deliver that as part of their module outcomes rather than me giving them all the knowledge that they want.

It makes it more interesting for me when I'm teaching, as well, because it's not this constant delivery of ideas. And I have to say that I quite enjoy teaching, and I think I definitely, if I'm working on a project or if I'm thinking through an idea, I'll test it out on the students. They're amazing. And all of all these recent debates around equality, diversity, post-colonialism, I am lumping all that together as otherness, but all of the students are just totally equipped to talk about that, than any of us are. I think that they're just aware of this, and I think it's really exciting to see what kind of creative workers they will become in five years from now, because they're just immersed in these other areas.

And of course, it's coming from the content that they're being exposed to on-line, but they're also attending things, and then also being quite critical of museums as well. They're not positioning institutions as having all the answers. And I think obviously you could say historically, yes, artists have been critical of institutions, but it's really good to experience that, and to be part of their dialogues as well.

\* What are their critiques?

□ A lot of it's about diversity, and that institutions are not inclusive enough. And I think we can all say that there's obviously a massive problem in the cultural industries, that there aren't enough career opportunities anyway. And then if you are coming from a diverse background, then your entry point is also challenged, as well, because of your education, or your class, or your gender, all these terms. And that's a key issue. And then of course, how is then that reflected in the programme that happens in those institutions as well?

I've had students completely tear apart collection displays within museums because of all those kind of equality indexes. And when I was at university, I don't think we were that critical. I think we saw the museum, and our history, as being completely right, and having all the answers, and that it was a path that we were just embedded in, but we weren't too critical. I mean, of course, we had conversations about institutional critique, but it was-

\* It was more as a historical phenomenon, right?

□ Yeah. It was like Andrea Fraser did this, and that's the end of your art education in 1998.

\* Okay, that feels very familiar to me as someone who didn't study art history. I think I was so eager to, in a kind of self-directed way, I was very eagerly imbibing histories of institution without just thinking all of this needs to be completely overturned, or dismantled, or expanded, or whatever. But yeah, I've noticed the same thing from students today, of just a very strong position of, if I don't see myself represented in this institution, I'm not coming to your institution.

□ Exactly.

\* And that goes for programmes, it goes for workforce, and it goes for visitors. And I don't remember that happening. I might not have been hearing it, but I don't remember that happening when I was a student.

/ I think it's quite interesting, in the past weeks, I have been spending time at the Royal Academy in Copenhagen because the students invited me to curate their degree show next year. It's of curious to me to get the sense, that there's a student body who is in fact very critical of institutions. Very different from students I met in the US that come from prestigious programmes such as Bard, Columbia, or Yale, or Princeton, or whatever.

My sense in those places was a commitment to a myth of what you are supposed to do. You're supposed to have a smashing degree work. Some gallerist come from New York, picks you up, and there we go. Right? Then the institutions follow. In Copenhagen there is a different level of criticality towards institutions of any kind, to the degree that I feel even my position is questioned. I have to make an extra effort to really try and bridge that and say, "Hey, I'm not a bad guy." You know, I actually am also here, just trying to push you forward and help you do more.

But the sort of criticism there is extremely strong, which on the one hand is a sense that there is a big art market out there, and that's something very removed from what it means to be finished as a student. And then also that there's a number of institutions whose work is very much oriented towards those global systems of validation, and have lost touch with generations of younger people coming out not having anything to their name yet. At least as an effect of how institutions operate in more regional contexts, that institutions, and institutional curators, if they simply only try to be part of a bigger discussion, they lose sight of the local and really significant smaller discussion.

□ Yeah, I would agree with that. I think that there has to be, even though you're based in a big institution that has a global reach, you still have to have a local outlook, actually. And excluding that is not useful to your practice, because if you're also trying to produce projects and exhibitions that bring in audiences, you need to know who who they are. Who are your publics that you're there to serve? And I think, obviously, there are stories of young people that we're working with is challenging our own expectations, which is exactly what they're supposed to do.

/ Yeah.

\* How do you both define your publics? What I mean, in a very literal sense of do you think of them as visitors, or publics, or audiences? They're all tricky towns for different reasons, right? This is something I think about a lot. Do you have a go to? Tate is audiences, right? Is that what Tate says?

□ I don't know about that. I say comrades. No, I don't say that.

/ Fellow warriors.

\* Conspirators.

□ Kind of oscillate between community, constituents, publics, it depends. I don't know. I think I still haven't quite figured it out, but I use a couple of terms.

\* How about you, Helga?

/ I think I tend to say public, or publics, but it's also because I think a lot about voice, how the personal become public voice do you have yourself? What can institutions do to add to and affect public opinion? A mission is of course to speak to a public, and soon have a space, and there's a door, and you walk in through the door and there's a real attempt to make people aware of that, and bring them in.

And I feel another level of that is to have a public voice, have an identity in the mind of a public. And be present in a public sphere, which is to say, a public debate, a public forum, as an opinionated entity. Which is to say not indifferent, which goes beyond the goal of having as many people walk through the door as possible. I think a lot about that balance. I think institutions are under a lot of pressure to show metrics like number of audiences, that's such a powerful justification, whether towards funders or politicians.

\* And the segmentation of those audiences in terms of diversity.

/ Exactly. That there's a lot of metrics to what a public is, and then still I do feel that there's a balance to strike, not to lose sight of your public voice, or your public mission, or your public identity in the sense of daring to take a position as an institution, which puts you at risk of losing publics. Having a voice beyond the voice that says, "Oh, we just would love for you to come." On a larger scale in our society, there's a real need for that. It's something that artists can't do individually. But who is the advocate? Who advocates for those practices, and those ways of working? I feel that's us, on a public level.

□ Yeah, because we sort of champion those practices, don't we?

/ Yeah. Yeah. And I feel that kind of responsibility. What is our responsibility? And to argue for something that doesn't even exist yet.

□ What about yours?

\* What about mine? I think I tend to use public or publics, and for some of the reasons that Helga's outlined. Though I think the way that you articulated it hadn't somehow occurred to me before. But I think I agree with a lot of what you say. I don't say audiences, even though the way that we report to funders is often about precisely audiences. But I think that's just, that in the UK we are an organization like a theater, like a whatever, that's in receipt of public funding. And so theaters talk about audiences, so museums and galleries have to as well. But then within the organization, depending on what people are doing, they will talk very differently.

My head of marketing talks about customers, but he used to work at an independent cinema, and he'll often catch himself, say, "No, sorry, not customers. I mean visitors." And then our learning team would probably talk more in terms of communities. I think our exhibitions team would probably talk more in terms of constituents. Participants would probably be used elsewhere, so it's like, I'm very happy with that. I think for me, publics feels like a useful catch-all, and I think it kind of gets to exactly what you're saying, Helga, of what does it mean to be a public body today? Not to say ... the tension in the UK is that we're increasingly not a publicly-funded institution. Just at a point we're becoming pressured to somehow engage with this mythical public, or community, more than ever before. That's a tension that's there, for sure. But yeah, I think what I'm primarily interested in is exactly this question of the public, working with alongside. Yeah. We were talking about it recently, just being a good neighbor in the city, very simply put. I think, in a way that's not like this is our civic mission. It's just like, actually, what does it mean to be here at the moment? I think the question of constituents, which obviously has kind of emerged in the last however many years, I am interested in those kinds of conversations, and about how they're being articulated by museums like the Van Abbemuseum, or now the Whitworth. But it feels to me like those have a more interesting dimension to it when they're being articulated by collecting institutions. I'm not quite sure why that is, but I think there's something about the ways in which museums can think about their collections as a resource, as a public resource, in a way that obviously the Van Abbe has been exploring for many years, and the way in which they could think about decolonizing those collections, or working with constituencies or constituents to do that. I think that offers a way of working that isn't open to us, as a non-collecting institution, in quite the same way. Sometimes when I look at some of the projects that are happening among that group of museums, I think, well that's, yeah, I can't quite see how we would echo or replicate that.

□ Why do you think it has to pertain to having a collection or not?

\* Because, this is the kind of permanent record of a museum, right? If you're assuming that a collection is going to stay in situ, and you're preserving this for posterity, I think this is where you are making the future in a museum. For us, we don't have that, we have a different relationship to time, I think. We also just have much more limited space. So I was talking to Alastair Hudson, who's the director of the Whitworth in Manchester, and he's moving his office into the galleries to become more publicly accessible as the director for the museum. And he's turning his old office into a prayer room, so that the museum can perform other roles.

And whatever you think about that, as a move, when we were talking through it I was like, I couldn't do that because we have such limited exhibition space. I want to keep some, you know? That actually to turn some space over as a canteen, as a whatever, as a whatever, I think when you're a larger scale museum, I think that becomes more interesting.

□ Yeah, it is interesting. I think, in my institution, there's certain ... I think actually we do quite a lot of this sort of practice quite well, but we're very shy about it. And also the way we talk about working with constituents is, it's gone through various shapes and forms. Over the last five years, every year Tate Liverpool has commissioned a socially-engaged art project in the top floor space, which is the most prestigious part of the institution, in the spring.

★ What kinds of projects have they included?

□ So we had OPAVIVARÁ, the Brazilian collective, that do ... they repurpose wheelchairs, and add on to them all kinds of attachments, like a place to cook, or to make a print workshop. With not just wheelchairs, but other sort of wagons and things. And in the gallery they created a large scale hammock. They had a tattoo transfer studio, and they had a tea area where you could contemplate and reflect. So that's an example of installations inside the gallery. And then there's a project that I co-curated, it's an ongoing work by an artist called Christopher Kline that's called O.K. – The Musical. And it's a musical that now he's performed in, I think, five institutions, including one in Denmark. And so we took an iteration of that.

Now, you can articulate that in two ways. One is as an installation in the gallery, and then people understand it as visual art, and it's an immersive world, as an installation, or you can understand it through its process-driven, participatory nature, where as a visitor to the museum, which is usually about static dry goods, as in artworks, you see people in the gallery rehearsing, building a stage, building props, rehearsing their songs. And so the outputs were a couple of musical performances. But actually, I found the process much more interesting, and more connected to what the institution has been doing for a longer period of time.

Now of course, we struggle with that a lot, because we're not designed to have people in the gallery for a long period of time. Things like hot water, toilets, warm rooms, human comforts, it's a gallery. It's not designed for people to spend days in, it's cold, it has bad lighting, it's all these kind of problems. So when we were doing that project, it was kind of like, well, what are we turning the gallery into, and why don't we just use the theater? Why don't we use a community space? And it's a question of architecture, again, and space.

But my point was that there's a sort of legacy of that in the institution. And this even, I think even goes beyond that into the 90s. And there have also been various collection-based iterations. There's one right now where an education curator, learning curator, and exhibitions curator, co-curated with three primary schools, a display. And the children and their teachers selected artworks, and then the works were on rotation every couple of months, works get swapped around. And it's seen as a teaching resource in the gallery for those local primary school children.

But there's also that point of agency in that we are saying, as Tate Liverpool, we've co-produced this with this audience. But, we're not good at talking about that.



I think we have a problem with articulating that we're open to those dialogues, and it's like what you said earlier, it's about choosing the right artist and having the right kind of practice, but we don't perhaps commemorate it as we would with other first exhibitions of prominent artists. And that might be because of the constituent-led nature of it, that somehow it's slightly less.

Of course, I'm contradicting myself because I don't believe in that, but that is an inherent problem. And I think that's also one of the dangers of that, as well, is that you have an expectation, then, because you have an audience, a public, that expects an invitation to collaborate with in some capacity, and there's currently a work now that's being produced with Mikhail Karikas, and that'll happen in the spring. And so this is ongoing, but I don't think the entire institution and the institutional memory is conscious of it, that this is happening inside our museum, and I think also museums aren't equipped for longterm projects.

\* That's true. Yeah. Yeah. I've always been very aware that, quite often when museums tend to set up schools or academies, or whatever, they're temporary. There was when the New Museum hosted a-

/ Night school.

\* ... night school. Yeah, it was however long it was, a year or something. Or around that same time, the Hayward did an exhibition called Wide Open, school, academy, I can't remember what it was.

□ Wide Open Academy, I think.

\* Yeah. They often end up either occupying, well, a kind of exhibition slot, or they end up taking over for an academic year, but my impression of these might be wrong, is that they then tend to leave very little trace. That often, because they are organized by education departments, and as we've discussed there is that kind of divide. Possibly it's a question of documentation. Possibly it's a question of funding. I don't know what it is, but I would be interested to see how museums are learning from either those students who you're talking about, and their critiques, or the programmes like this to actually shift.

□ We need to adapt.

/ I also think that it's part of the identity, or at least the story that institutions tell themselves, and tell their publics, that though you have a collecting institution, there's a narrative there. You might bring in artists to interpret the collection, right? But when you have those kinds of odd-outs, they sort of don't fit as smoothly within a larger trajectory or larger history, or a more fundamental identity. At least when you have a collection, and you have collection galleries et cetera. Where there's an institution like yours, to a much larger degree you built your identity around a connection between those projects, from artist to artist, from work to work.

Also, there's a writing of story there, where I feel sometimes institutions, it's difficult for them to write those things into their core story, and then they tend to slip out of it when, two years down the line, the story is being told. And it's funny because it also comes down to those kind of inconveniences, like the number of performers at work. I initiated that in the New Museum. Every time it was like, where does the performers change clothes? There's nowhere, they are just an inconvenience for how the institution operates, thereby not said that there's an unwillingness to accommodate them. They're sort of just a problem, in the sense that it's not made for it. But I really feel that there's something to say about also the narrative that you write as an institution, as a director of an institution, where those things fall on the line. Are they center stage, or are they actually kind of out here in the periphery?

★ It feels to me like ... what's permissible is when these changes of direction are framed as essentially performative, so it's permissible for the Hayward Gallery to transform itself into an academy for two months. It would be inconceivable for it to say, we're going to be an art school for the next 10 years. Just like I saw a project, maybe a Rob Pruitt project in Zurich late last year, where he turned the Kunsthalle into a functioning church. So the duration of the, fine, might have been more, like, what happens if it just decides to be a church for five years? They're not going to do that for a whole bunch of really obvious reasons, but these things are permitted so long as it's understood to be a gesture, or a temporary gesture. I was saying something super obvious in a way, but.

□ Yeah, I suppose you've got peripatetic projects like Ahmet Ögüt's Silent University, which is dependent on the hospitality of multiple institutions to host that as it sees fit. But that longitudinal project, I think museums can't do that, I think museums just cannot do long term projects. Which is a real shame actually. But I think obviously-

★ The collection, I suppose that's when I come back to collection-building. Collection-building is a longterm project. That's the core of what museums do, still, isn't it?

□ Yeah. I suppose it depends on how they view their identity, though. Right now, a museum almost to me seems like a Kunsthalle with a collection. I suppose it's quite small scale, so it can make rapid changes than perhaps a large transition. I don't know. But I think there's also that point of museums having different identities, and also different audiences. Your examples from the New Museum earlier on, where you trace these trajectories or this curatorial profile that the education team had with the work that they produced, that sort of stayed in the institutional memory, and we're aware of these projects occurring at that time that have left their mark on the teams.

/ I also feel it comes back to space, very much. Those kinds of experimental models, you have two months, and then you turn the whole thing on its head, and then you go back again, right? That, in a way, it becomes of a narrative of saying, today artists really question the exhibition space, meaning we question it and go back to the exhibition space again.

\* I think that's it. For me it's very much imbricated with the ideology of the white cube, and the way in which that pertains beyond the parameters of the exhibition spaces per se. Meaning, just to echo what you're saying, that everything goes back to zero, or back to the fiction of the neutral zero. And so yeah, with education programmes you start over, just like with exhibitions. Occasionally we almost have to remember that from one show to the next, in changeover, we can keep elements, that you don't have to strip everything back and paint it white. That fiction of neutrality, or kind of a baseline. I think institutions behave like that in a whole range of different ways. That we have a seasonal cycle, like a lot of museums do, and that's the learning team and so on. They don't have to do that, but they also think in that kind of way. That yeah, it is somehow they are resistant to long term projects, as you say. Would it be desirable if they weren't? What would be gained by being able to embark on-

□ I was just thinking of, as an example, the really small scale institution called Praxis in Berlin that was there for a number of years. They worked with a number of artists over the period of, was it one year or two years?

/ Six months, I think.

□ Six months, yeah. And they had a change of exhibition. It wasn't longterm. It was medium term, but it's very rare that you'd get the opportunity to work with an artist over a six month period, and for them to change their exhibition.

\* A model I think of is, what Anthony Huberman did at the Artists Institute in New York, and now at CCA Wattis in San Francisco, of, as I understood it, I only went a couple of times in New York, but they would show essentially one artwork in this shop-front basement space for six months. You'd have a Rosemarie Trockel work there, and the programming just became around that, and spending time with it and talking with it... and spending time with it and talking with it. And they don't quite do that at the Wattis now. But something that I've just noticed and feel quite drawn to is they just have this thing on their website where they say, "Such and such is on our mind". So I think that right now it's like Joan Jonas is on our mind. And it might feel a bit kitschy, but I suppose this is like longer... You wouldn't go as far as calling this a commitment, but it starts to... I'm thinking back to what you were saying Helga, about the voice of, well how do we break out of just the prescribed narrativising of the institution in that, I think these kinds of things, where you're talking in terms of affinities and personal...

□ But if we have long-term collections and we have long-term loans that we have on show, which might be on for years or in civic museums across the UK have paintings that have been on show for 50 years or longer.

\* Well, the National Gallery, 90% of its collection is on display.

□ But then there's the collections are longitudinal, as you said before. But then all the developments of programmes are not.

/ To answer your question from before, I guess I also wonder if you were to embark on a kind of institutional programme or even a way of thinking about yourself as an institution and having a goal of shifting over time. I guess what would be the consequence of doing such kinds of shows and then really taking the consequence and saying that over a period of time, you even shift how you operate or how you function, how you divide space.

I mean that also seems like a very fragile thing to do, because then your own authority in question along the way and that authority, you actually need to stand firm in order to even survive or expand and be able to do what you do. But yeah, that's sort of a counterforce there. Where the one-month temporary school, it's serves your argument very well. You know, well-meaning. Then you jump back and continue-

\* It performs flexibility or it gives the guise of something else while actually just staying utterly the same.

/ I guess that would be one way of it, yeah.

\* This is a definition of institutions. Is it Mary Douglas's definition of institutions? It's like, institution is something that does the same thing over and over again. Everything else is window dressing, right? I mean, I think about this, thinking about my own institution, it's like, I think a lot of what we do is pretty good. But when I look around at other places, they're doing more or less the same thing. It's just more or less like the container is the same. The content might be a little bit different, but actually, the rhythms, most things are widespread. I didn't see that many places behaving totally differently. I might not be looking far enough.

/ And that's also something that I ask myself, what pressures are institutions under at different moments in time? How to act within the freedom you have, the freedom of inquiry in all of these things.

Institutions are also accommodating a great many things and far from only audiences. If institutions were only accommodating audiences, I think they would look very different.

□ I wonder, what about biennials then, or perennial exhibitions? Because I sort of see them as temporary institutions, obviously not in all cases, but whenever you see a new announcement of a new biennale or training or whatever, you're given this new mission statements, that articulate the biennial's specific vision that's making it, avant garde against all the other biennales in the world. And obviously, it's because you have a temporary assemblage of curators, theorists, artists that come together and then, I don't know it's reinventing the wheel, but it's articulated in a specific way.

\* Yeah, I think there's been shifts. I'd say that if you look back in the early 2000s there's really, in some quarters, there's deeply felt belief that biennials are the places that can do exhibitions in large-scale ways, experimental ways, that museums simply can't.

Like Francesco Bonami, writing about his Venice Biennale in 2003 literally says that. This is the format of the future. And then I think by the end of that decade, the way I see it, is suddenly, weirdly biennials start to want to adopt the modes of the museum again. I remembered seeing the Istanbul biennial that Adriano Pedrosa and Jens Hoffmann did. It was specifically laid out like a museum. It was like they built museum spaces in warehouses. And so suddenly, that kind of earlier two thousands idea of wanting to infiltrate the fabric of the urban, etc. was like, "Actually we're going back to white cube and we're going to..." I think, to a degree, the 2013 Venice Biennale did that, I mean, in a very different way. But it was trying to think about itself as a neo-ethnographic museum, perhaps. And I don't really know what's going on now. I mean, I don't know if there is a particular... It feels like it's just so atomised. But I guess the idea of temporary institutions? Yeah, it's there. Right? I mean, with Documenta, if you go back to say, Catherine David's, this idea of a hundred guests, or like a congregation, a constellation - that's there in so many biennials, right? Over the last 20-25 years.

□ But in order for them to be sustainable, they have to articulate what they're doing in a innovative way or has to at least be perceived in that manner. If we think of the previous documenter had a... What was it called? The Parliament of Bodies.

\* That was the public programme.

□ The public programme, yeah. Which was perceived as a kind of thinking machine that would then inform the rest of the exhibition. But again, how are those conversations or those things documented or actually drawn into the white cube?

\* And I guess Documenta feels like the special case, in a way, right? Because it's five years and the budget is so off the scale compared to others. Fairness is another bit of a special case, I would say, just because of the particularity of where it is and its long, long history. And also that it kind of... Go on.

/ I would say maybe also the financial structures around it. Right? That might be the opposite end of Documenta.

\* For sure, yeah. And I think with the last Documenta, the team were pretty explicit, like, "We're not showing gallery artists here." I mean, they kind of did, but not many. Versus, I remember coming to be an artist here in the past, and there just being dealers standing by their artists' work. Like it's an art fair. And so yeah, I guess there is, I mean that's the obvious economic distinction between them. But back to your question, Michael, how do you see biennials as engaging with education?

□ Well, there's been a recent trend in the last five years where biennials have return to a model of mediation, actually. So Liverpool Biennial, Sao Paulo Biennial, and I think the last Bergen Assembly all had teams of mediators or... No, sorry, the last Documenta they call that a chorus of mediators, which is an interesting shift.

So it's gone from this model of delegated knowledge production through conversations, workshops, external influences to hovering like a team of onsite mediators that will not only develop public programme but will lead towards and guide the public through that experience.

\* In the sense there what, that this actually is pretty close to the kind of older idea for museum docents.

□ Absolutely. You're absolutely right. It is that model that's being used again. And I experienced it when I listed those examples I mentioned that you could go on a tour by one of those mediating team members, you could. And then you could attend part of their own programming. But then, as a visitor, I guess I'm not really the best person to judge because I usually know what I'm looking at.

\* That may be Helga. Neither of us have worked on a biennial before and you have. How did education enter into it? The roles that you were doing.

/ I think that that did function very much like what we were talking about earlier in an institutional setting where it comes in at the end. And you provide a point of entry for all of those mediators. And then that becomes what they build on. It's specifically textual, actually. You produce the texts. And that's the texts. It's also a logistical concern, the time pressure is immense, a lot is new, and the priority first to even open the show in time.

□ But I think obviously beyond Venice there are ones in Liverpool, Istanbul, et cetera, even Berlin, there's a kind of expectation on the venues as well to produce their own education programme. That wherever that's been hosted by, for the duration of their biennale, that they also have to ensure that their publics are comfortable in that dialogue of the guest-curated exhibition that's sort of in transit. And I know that the upcoming Berlin Biennial is trying to do a long-term programme of engagement, quote unquote, by occupying a space in Wedding, in Berlin, and having a series of iterations of their programme alongside a hefty public programme of talks and debates, which is also interesting. So it's not just about the finished product.

\* The things.

□ Which I actually quite like. Because it's long-term.

/ In terms of thinking about mediation of biennials, there's quite a large task there, where the international or the global is translated into the local. I feel like internationally operating, moving curators who roam around and speak a language of discourse that's... Those exhibitions, they are often made as a position or in a very specific landscape and relates to other of those large-scale shows elsewhere around the globe.

Obviously a local audience has no clue. They haven't just seen the last three whatever large-scale exhibitions that exhibitions build on.

How I've experienced it is that the main task is really to translate something quite far reaching into something that's locally relevant or that's even locally understood. But of course, you also have to do that on the level of the exhibition itself, or that is where it should start.

★ And often, it will be that first week or even a few days before the local audiences or any kind of public is even... The professional audience is there for three days. Like someone said, "The vernissage is the finissage." It's that first few days and then there's, you're right, there's this shift to then... I mean, as we've seen here today, the Arsenale is absolutely packed. And I would guess that for a lot of people coming outside of those opening weeks, they're not typically going to see contemporary art.

□ Really?

★ That would be my guess. I'm basing that on just having come here two weeks after the opening and just in terms of the received behaviors through to any other number of things that just felt like it's a Venice event, as tourists. And this is a cultural spectator sport, like any number of other things in Venice.

/ It's like when we talk about whether we say audiences or publics, right? Once you start to subdivide that and then say, "Who are all those people who just go to New York and they go to the Statue of Liberty and then they go to MoMA?" And whatever's on at MoMA, who the hell knows? That's what you're talking about?

□ I think there's a term in the UK that's used, like an unexpected guest or something like that, really, that they're just coming in to have a look. But I suppose in major museums and collections, especially the UK with the free, that must be a massive amount of visitors that have no clue or little interest in art, or maybe vast interest in art. And then enter this institution, which then has to speak this international language because you're not assuming their identity or where they're coming from.

/ I think it's quite an important question also, because I feel that you can't sit on the institutional end or even, let's say, the curatorial end and then not have that level of awareness and generosity towards all of those people. Because ultimately, when you are here and you're in the Arsenale and you can't even see the work just because there's this forest of people. And you can be professionally annoyed. Think to yourself that biennales and mega museums are turning into fun parks. But it's also true that there is a massive amount of people who are curious and interested. Who get up in the morning and move their body to that venue for whatever reason. And that is important. Because you can do something with that, and think of that as a big responsibility. Meaning it's also not entirely negative, but by now, you do go to major institutions around the world and it's a serious crowd issue...

★ That's what MoMA redesign was trying to deal with, right? There's flow and congestion and these kinds of terms that we're more used to applying to department stores or airports. Like transitional spaces.

□ Customers.

\* Customers. Back to customers.

/ I still gravitate... I went to the Tate last weekend and it was like, "Oh my God." Yes. And a few weekends ago in Paris, the Pompidou. You know, the kind of hellish experience that you also negotiate while in it.

□ I know. I just had a friend in Berlin telling me that he'd gone to Tate Modern. He was like, "What a terrible place. Escalators. Thousands of people everywhere. In the way of all the art. It was awful." I was like, "No, it's great." It's accessible. People come in, it's millions of visitors and there's a different attitude, as well, in it and how you look at it. And in response to your point about people arriving in Venice, or people visiting a place and going straight to a museum. Just to see whatever's on. I think mine is, I always visit a botanical gardens wherever I am, if there is one in that place, because they're just incredible.

\* I've started to do that too. And aquariums as well.

□ Oh, I haven't done that.

/ Go see the one in Copenhagen. Oh my God.

\* Oh yeah? It's good? The best aquarium I've been to is the one in Monterey, in California. It's just south of San Francisco.

□ I've been there.

\* And it's actually done a little like a museum, but I don't know how they can do this in terms of... But the hang is essentially the fish are laid out according to color and form. It's like an old fashion museum. It's nothing to do with species or geography. And so you've just got all of the blue ones or the triangular ones. It's really extraordinary.

/ But, as much as you look at those things and you also feel like a sense of... ultimately, I feel it's important to have a humbleness towards this. Not to say, "Oh my God, those crowds. Get away from me."

Just the fact that they show up is incredible. And then, to that end, when we get into crowd control. Museum expansions, how do you deal with crowds? Museums obviously growing bigger and bigger because there's more and more. And then on the other end of the spectrum, There, thinking about crowds, there is almost an argument to be made for what practices those institutions then house and hold?

Certain things function very well within those kinds of mega structures. There's also a demand on what can attract those kinds of crowds.



\* Depending on where these institutions, which cities they occupy. And beyond New York, LA, London, Paris, and probably a handful of others, yeah. Almost by definition, if you're outside of those, you're doing something different. I don't know if this relates, but I was in Los Angeles a year or so ago and just on... You have the Broad Museum there, as of three years ago, which is free, opposite MOCA on our grant. And though there's a line around the block for the Broad Museum and the collection there is terrible. And MOCA is completely empty. And I have no broader point there other than these are museums built at entirely different moments. One designed and built in the mid-eighties and one designed about five, eight years ago. And the ways in which they were engaging with social media, most broadly. It was really fascinating and a friend of mine went to LA and came back and he's like, "The Broad's incredible." And I'd sent him a list of things to do and he said, "I don't know why he told me to go to MOCA. That place is miserable. The collection's so boring." It's like, "Oh my God." I'm not saying anything at all interesting. Sounding like a grumpy old guy. But-

□ It's back to your window dressing point you made earlier. Is it the window dressing versus...

\* Is it the window... Yeah, that feels like the building, the Broad building, which is a Diller Scofidio + Renfro building, feels like it's almost a hyperactive... It's trying to suck in attention. Like it's got a kind of shtick. It's not theme park-ish. It's not as far down the line as that. But there is a kind of theatricality to what that building does and you start in this kind of caverns below and you get spat out. And top lit galleries at the top. And it's an experience that you'd get on an escalator and the escalator is not just about moving people. It's a part of the passage through the building.

□ But I think it's because people like experiences. That is a fact. I took my students to a show on Tuesday in a white cube, a really lovely photography exhibition. And then I said on the way back, I wanted to look at the maritime museum, which is all about Liverpool's maritime heritage, but it has this incredible exhibition about the Titanic, which I take everyone to the visits because there are various objects from the wreckage and about its history. But the whole narrative of that display exhibition is that it takes you on a journey. It uses music to guide you emotionally through, and it's phenomenal.

We were talking about exhibition display and then it was important that we kind of posited the white cube with something immersive like that. And I think historical museums and museums aren't always art-based, like aquariums even, just do it in an interesting manner.

\* Mm-hmm (affirmative) I would guess their education spaces look almost exactly the same.

□ Yes.

\* Because there's a look right to these spaces of education in museums. The furniture is often the same, you know the... No?

□ Plastic floor covering. Certain smell.

\* Which might be a UK thing.

/ When you bring up the Broad, I feel that there is this question of to what extent is it desirable or to what extent do you bother your audiences with scholarship?

I think there are many answers to what's the educational mission of a museum is? I mean, it's a new institution, so it's not like they have a lineage and then they started and then they decided to deviate.

It's an important question for new institutions. With what educational missions are they founded?

\* I like that phrase, not bothering them with scholarship. Yeah, that feels really what's going on there. What was very noticeable at the Broad was that the logic of display is closest to an art fair. It's a series of booths that are more or less the same dimensions as art fair booths. The works all seem to have been bought at art fairs in the last decade. And so you get a shift from the early years of MoMA-type institutions from the '30s, '40s, '50s which are, in terms of display techniques, borrowing from department stores, would have been arcades before that, and all the rest. I can't think of other examples. But with the Broad actually aping the logic of the place of sales of the work that you are seeing, there's a seamlessness of transit between the space of commerce and the space of display. And what the space of education is there, I don't know. Cynically, one might wonder if that is the reason that people seem to love the Broad, is because education has been evacuated from its mission.

□ I went to the new Bauhaus Museum in September in Dessau and was just horrified by this experience. This beautiful, glass, shiny, new museum in the middle of the town. But you have to buy a ticket with an entry time, like you visiting a major exhibition, but it's just a lot of the Bauhaus collection on show.

And so I queued up like I was going into a theme park, was let into the galleries, and then literally, I was in there for exactly 59 minutes, we would told on the timer that we all have to leave. And literally everybody was thrown out. We came out the other side and then the next lot came in. So everyone just had literally one hour slot to experience an entire history of the Bauhaus and a really bad selection of exhibition displays. It was just unbelievable.

\* But that's a crowd control gesture.

□ Yeah, it's a crowd control gesture taken to an extreme, where you're told on a timer that you must leave the gallery. And it felt very forced, in and out and there's just no time to ponder. And aside from a few of the other issues with terrible interpretation, inaccessible vitrines it was, yeah. Awful.

\* Somehow makes me think back to the conversation we were having around the earlier years of the National Gallery and people having picnics in there. And I think what feels so unlikely or comical about that, from our perspective today, is not only that you're having food alongside Rembrandts or whatever, it's that you can actually bring your own food to the gallery and then spend a really long time there. It's a counter model to what you're describing of an experience economy, timed kind of thing where...

□ And it's also the article that we read about museum seating with the level of comfort in the museum and how that's evolved through time. And how, if you're going to watch a video installation, you have to lie on the floor for an hour in severe discomfort just to watch a film.

\* And then the kinds of bodies that are supported in these institutions now are assumed.

□ I went to a performance a few weeks ago during Frieze Week and had to sit on the floor for two hours, cross-legged, and I could barely get up when the performance ended because my legs would just numb. But I'm able-bodied so I'm able to experience that. But that's not for everybody. And it's almost like performance now in museum is for young people, as well. It's kind of a Instagram-ready piece that one experiences and then you can capture it on your device or endure it.

\* We've somehow been talking for almost two and a half hours. Do you have any final remarks?

/ I feel, where we just ended up, is with more of an open question? Do institutions hold onto their educational mission as they grow and expand and think more intensely about experience and visitors' experience and crowd control and flow and all of these things. Where does scholarship sit within that? Where does an educational mission sit within that? I guess that's sort of the spectrum between asking somebody, "What do you want?" And then telling them, "This is what I think you should get."

I guess if you say that it's simply about asking, "What do you want?" and then providing that. There is for sure a spectrum there. And the possibility to slide adrift within it. Which is not to say that crowds only want content-less concept shows.

□ I think you're right. I think there is that sliding approach. That different audiences demand different activities, experiences, encounters inside art spaces. And I think some want a more actively engaged process through a formal education programme. Others just want to receive it as a passive visitor. I think that's fine. I think it doesn't have to be prescribed in the way it was in the past, but what I am concerned about is that it becomes invisible. I think that's a key issue.

/ I guess also the question, as an institution, is your job to give people what they want?

\* What they need or they don't yet know that they want.

/ Or the thing that they don't know that they want.

\* I think not knowing is probably as good a point as any to finish this. Thank you.

□ Thank you.

/ Thank you.