

the casual school collective

Care = Methodology
 Connection = Purpose

an introduction and an invitation

- Curiosity
- Entanglement
- Non-linear time (temporal plurality)
- Reciprocity
- Co-authorship, co-teaching

If you could learn anything, what would it be?

If you could learn anything, what would it be?
 Where there are no barriers stopping you from learning this thing.

The Casual School Collective has only just begun. We are three - R.R., MijT and Zora but we hope to grow a little. We are an ongoing project originating in Canberra, Australia, exploring a range of intimate public/artistic interventions which foster meaningful interactions and modes of learning. These 'research-creation events' take place primarily in institutional contexts and, as such, are a kind of counter-institution: an alternative pedagogic structure which hopes to formulate a more accessible, social and care-infused mode of co-learning/teaching.

Using multiple live research events allows us to elude the idea of a finished piece or static end point. Rather, we think of the project as constantly evolving and entangled.

We aim to find ways to create affect and to thicken the conditions for experiences that seep through the boundaries of how we relate to the unknown and therefore disrupt the binaries, polarities and risk-containment practices fostered by neoliberalism. What follows is a sample of some of our interventions so far.

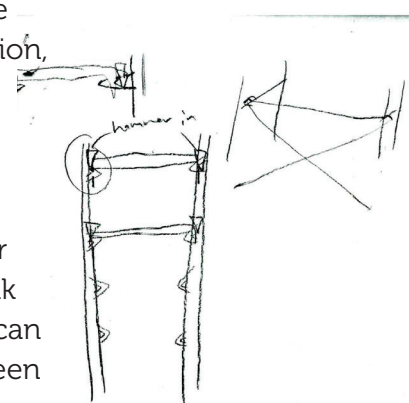
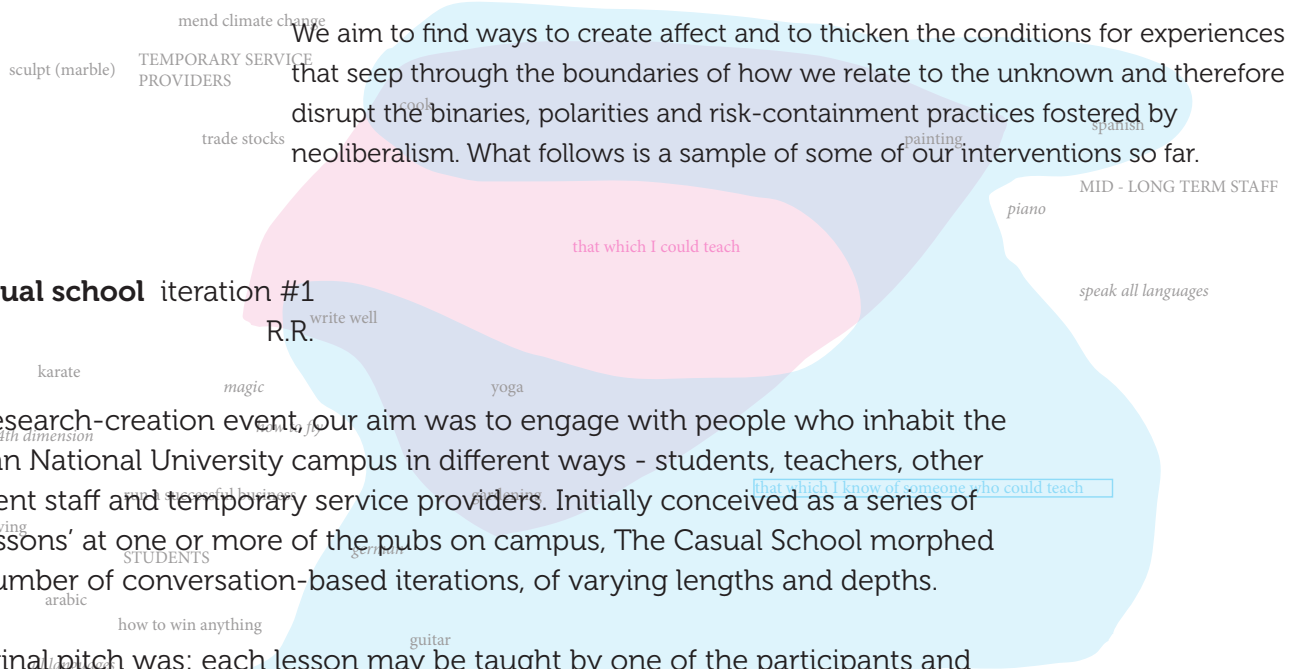
the casual school iteration #1

R.R.

In this research-creation event, our aim was to engage with people who inhabit the Australian National University campus in different ways - students, teachers, other permanent staff and temporary service providers. Initially conceived as a series of short 'lessons' at one or more of the pubs on campus, The Casual School morphed into a number of conversation-based iterations, of varying lengths and depths.

The original pitch was: each lesson may be taught by one of the participants and should take no longer than the duration of a schooner of beer. There may be more than one lesson (more than one beer) per event. A technique for provoking these learning situations is to approach strangers with a simple and open-ended question, such as: "if you could learn anything, what would it be?" Several conversations resulted. Teachings and learnings were recorded in diagrams. Only one lead to a 'lesson' over a beer. Two are presented here.

The constraint of doing it over a beer is relatively arbitrary, but it acts as a familiar social apparatus which hosts discussions well. It is symbolically and literally a break from work or study and requires little commitment of time, energy or money. It can be replaced with a number of similar actions, eg: a coffee, a cigarette (and has been in some of the initial experimental conversations).



if you could learn anything over a beer, what would it be?

- car mechanics
- advanced woodworking
- "I already know everything else"

practical life skills

if you could learn anything over a beer, what would it be?

- how to wrought the tax system
- where to go on my overseas trip

specific to this moment in life

- get to know the person who I am speaking to

what does that mean?

- their history
- what they like
- someone's kinks like a confessional

its about similarities and connection

the decision of what to lean or teach must be collaborative

make the question more specific (to connection/context?): limit variables

what could you teach over a beer?

- how to skull a beer with no hands
- what do you want to learn?

wait, I have something in my eye

(make this a collaborative process)

close your eyes block your nose and pop your ears to flush your eyes

firstly figure out the need, secondly work out what can be learnt

context based

rephrase: what would you like to teach over a beer?

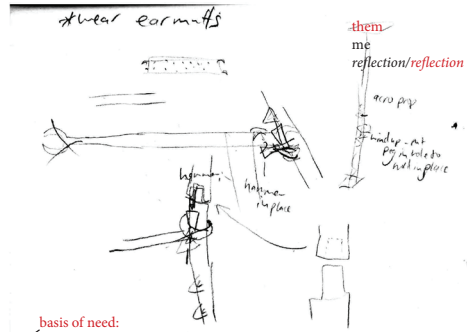
how to assemble scaffolding (see attached resulting diagram)

impromptu, context based teaching/learning situations are some of the most successful - the pre-conversation is merely the vehicle or environment for this to occur

personal connection

* turning point in the conversation where pace and involvement picks up dramatically

** realisation: he was trying to make a move on me



There's something about reciprocity
MijT

What are the conditions where a moment of deep connection and kindness occurs between strangers?

Are these conditions able to be translated into an inclusive and accessible learning environment?

These questions are my launching pad into understanding the effects of the current socio-political systems and structures of neoliberalism upon my personal life and my art making - in particular, how I am enmeshed in reciprocal relationships of self-interest and desire within its institutions.

We retreat if we feel we are not good at something or are not going to be good at something at first, and, in this neoliberal world, acceptable levels of risk have shifted from theoretical suppositions to affective realities. So, how am I going to get people I don't know to open up their soft, gooey insides in order to co-author or collaborate on this project with me?

I'm using the practice of connecting over simple object/image making activities to ground and occupy social anxieties while talking about the ways the institutions we live with affect our lives. In using a mediating object and activity as material to facilitate pedagogy and communication, it creates an affective experience by allowing the creative, curious and empathetic parts of ourselves to breathe. This, in turn, airs our social confidence. It also allows agency and co-authorship status for both the participator and the made object/image.

What is collaboration, though, if your voice is not heard or accepted? My recent experience in a psych ward raised the issue of illegibility where your voice or the language you use in any format is not recognised by the institutions in your environment, practice, culture, etc. If you are not recognised, or heard, it leads to invisibility and further insecurity. "Who are we seeing and hearing? Who is deciding who we are seeing and hearing? How do we decide what we want to see or hear?" Knowledge sharing within and between institutions and participants becomes scarce and expensive and mis-valued.

By offering resources and the time-space to come up with ideas and try them out, the timeline of the project deviates from chronological linearity and succession. If there is room for improvisation, new knowledge and learnings can arise and be shared. Not knowing what will happen in any iteration of the project means I can expand the idea of reciprocity to focus on the process as much as the end.

institutional confines neoliberal navigations me



There's something about reciprocity Iteration #1

There is an immediate solidarity formed when you are with others who are experiencing hard circumstances.

I was recently admitted to a psych ward for PTSD treatment. While I was there, I withdrew into studying for uni - but I had to do this in public space as there were no power points for my laptop in my room. I was reading Alana Jelinek's "This is Not Art" about neoliberalism, activism and the art world. I wasn't really across how much neoliberalism affected everything - so reading this book was a good way of delving into that. People - nurses and patients alike - started asking me what I was reading. We began having group conversations about the systems that affect us, hold us, and strive to control and constrain us over art activities like colouring-in or origami, over walking and over impromptu dancing in the hallways - which was so liberating! It became a system of self-medication for us and a little bit of counter-institutional activism and consciousness raising arose. I thought this is a good process for me and it ended up being a good process for everybody.

We began talking about the history of psychiatry and the role of gender and race and queerness within that whole history. A few people who were struggling with their relationships with the hospital and their psychiatrist started having better sessions, being heard and getting what they wanted - rather than being told how to be. I found that was quite an interesting release point - emotional release point - for everyone on the ward - group cheering evolved into a sense of solidarity.

There was autonomy and confidence - we didn't feel alone. Some people could begin sharing previously individualised experiences and see that there is a pattern, that it's not an individual fault but a pattern of treatment by the institution

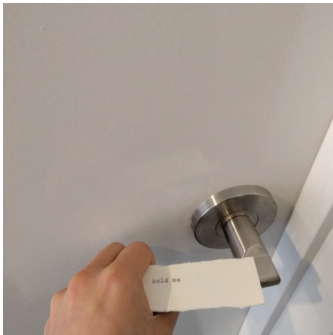
And the best thing..these conversations continued on the ward after I left.

linking consciousness raising to history and institutionalism



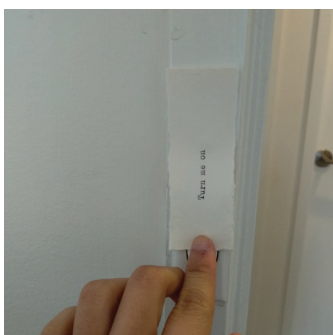
Rediscovering Home

Zora



"The more interesting art practices today may bring us closer to this paradox: to mobilise the other as an extension of yourself and mobilise yourself as an extension of the other - where alterity (the state of being other or different) is mutually reinforced and where me and you are continuously replaced by a larger and external contact area. What can we do but live outside of ourselves?"

— Ricardo Basbaum, Post-Participatory Participation, P101



'Re-discovering home' is a little show that happened at home around July to September 2019 to re-discover my relationship with the space I inhabit every day. This is an excerpt from my website.

It happens throughout the house, with the main exhibiting site being a spare room in the southeast corner. During the experiment, I made lots of tags using torn prints from my previous works, typed with my second-hand typewriter from the Greenshed. These tags were either distributed or stuck onto some unexpected spots at home using bluetac.

One series of the tags reflects my individual desire expressed through space, for example, 'turn me on' on a light switch, 'dust me' in the corner of the bottom window frame, 'life me up' on a washing machine lid.

The show was set up before I had several dinner parties, including some tools and my typewriter with which new tags could have been made. Some people adventured out, creating new tags and reacting to the existed ones, like 'fold me', 'take me away'.

It was initiated as an experiment to reflect on my curatorial practice. What is curating? Why this space? How to interact with space and the context? What works should be selected to express what ideas? What is 'meaning'? Does a curator create, interpret, analyse or invalidate meaning? What is the relationship between text and artworks? How to engage your audience and what is actual engagement? How to make works and exhibitions that do not rely on money?

However, with time, I started to realise that the project reveals a difference between the concepts of "house" and "home". A house is an objective notion, an instrumental vessel with a function, a purpose. It exists whether there is a person or not. A home is a subjective notion which does not exist without a "me", and it is sometimes a virtual or internal space. My home reflects my own desire once the connection or belongingness is realized, but such understanding of self can also be broken through reflecting on my own desire and having others to interact with it.

This is a space that I share with my family. The intervention of little pieces of paper with words in such communal space created a new and unusual connection between me and the family members who interacted with it. I was in a constant battle with my dad who keeps the world clean and organised. He kept throwing away any tag he found that was not on a collective spot, i.e. a paper, a canvas, a box. While I have disassembled all the works, I left the scattered tags in the house so family and visitors can interact with them, move them, throw them away, ignore them. There is still a tag that no one has found yet - it reads 'leave me alone'.

protocol for [making meaningful connections with] / [learning from] strangers and the unfamiliar

Given the elusive and intangible nature of our research focus, it is no wonder that the outcome slips away from a finite, concise resolution. While the research nature and multiple iterations of our work so far fits in with the themes we are exploring, at times the possibilities have seemed too endless.

We believe, however, that it is important the project continues to grow, morph and take new paths. This is the reason for the formation of a 'protocol' document - it allows the core ideas and framework of the project to be disseminated and utilised by any number of many people.

A fixed idea about how exchange could happen is limiting. Try not to set out with fixed goals.

What is a speculative question or learning process? Conversations are speculative: they exist simultaneously in the past, present and future.

Use what you have/know to lift others up.

In asking someone a question, consider how you can ask it in a way that gives something to the person you are asking. Maybe its just that, in posing that question, you give them a moment to step outside of the day-to-day routine thoughts.

Be generous: with your attention, knowledge, time.

Invite reciprocity, but don't expect it.

Be inspired by two of Don Miguel Ruiz's Four Agreements:

- Be impeccable with your word: be clear and honest, use your word with kindness and thoughtfulness.
- Don't make assumptions: about what other people mean, or are thinking, or any other unknown. Instead, be curious and seek to understand.

In combining these two ideas: Let dialogue be the material of reciprocity. Speak with clarity and listen with curiosity.

If there is room for improvisation, new knowledge and learnings can arise and be shared.

Remember, inclusion in conversation is entangled with many socio-political factors.

Consider: "Who are we seeing and hearing? Who is deciding who we are seeing and hearing? How do we decide what we want to see or hear?"

taking it forward

We have a few ways and a few communities we want to engage with using the protocol established for the casual school collective.

- a series of experiments with the notion of a reading group at Tributary Projects in Fyshwick, Canberra

- an expanded roll out of **there's something about reciprocity** in the fire affected communities around Braidwood, NSW

- a colouring-in sheet design, production and distro by and for people staying or living in psych wards, jails, detention centres etc

- establishing a multi-disciplinary borderless reading group using existing social media platforms where members float a topic of enquiry, a suggested reading resource list and an 8 week timeline in which to produce a response in any artform. Results will go into an archive of sorts which the community can dip into to create and curate events and documents with.

If we have time this year, we may also play with the following ideas...

the keep Inspired by Temporary Service's Designated Drivers project we are providing an annotated bibliography of the sources for our project on USB as the beginnings of a collective archive, or anti-archive as Jakob Jakobsen prefers to call it in his Hospital Prison University project. We are still exploring what that means and how to navigate authorship and collectivity - so our USB will be open for people to not only download, but to add to, edit and interact with as they will...

brutally soft a call and response volley of conversation, performance and artwork between several artists on how we live with anxiety (practice led research, documented online)

10 seconds of joy care methodologies in practice (a co-learning situation)

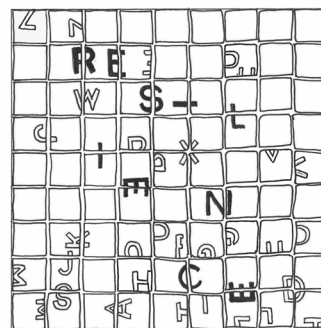
4 seconds too long conversations about awkward silences (research creation)

the art of falling a physical and metaphorical jam sharing ways of falling safely (research creation)

a body reading group on ableism and activism, trauma and the body and self-medication

play = vulnerability
approach with caution

open sourced-ness =
disrupting the chrononormativity
of reciprocity



talk to us about everything

the casual school collective headquarters
ANU School of Art and Design
Sculpture Workshop
Canberra, AUSTRALIA

thecasualschool@gmail.com
#thecasualschoolcollective